

## Lectionary 27 C

October 5, 2025

*Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4; Psalm 37; 2 Timothy 1:1-14; Luke 17:5-10*

Grace and peace to you, from our God – Father, Son and Spirit!

When I was a girl growing up in New York, we lived in Queens, in a part of the city with row houses separated here and there by driveways. We were lucky enough to have a large tree in front of our house, giving us shade on the hottest days and providing a nesting place for any number of sparrows and jays, so tempting for our pet cat! We had a small patch of yard too, and every year my sister and I would get to choose a packet of seeds to plant against the brick wall of our neighbor's house. Turns out that 4' x 2' spot was just right for planting things, the wall protecting the growing plants from the wind and reflecting the sun and its warmth so we could start the seeds early enough to flower.

Carnations were my favorite, forget-me-nots were my sister's choice. We carefully cleared out any stones and loosened the soil with a hand trowel. We made neat little rows and sprinkled the seeds in the recommended spacing, covered them with soil, watered them, and waited anxiously. We worried about the birds nibbling and the cat digging and the rain washing them out, but our dad assured us that if we followed the directions on the packet and took care of the watering and weeding, they would grow. And year after year they did!

The disciples are getting nervous. Although they have been following Jesus for some time now, watching and listening in private and in public, the crowds of people following Jesus are growing in size and in demands. They have been fed and healed and encouraged, and they want more. The religious hierarchy is increasingly skeptical of Jesus and his popularity and dangerously unhappy with him and them. Following Jesus has been life affirming, a reminder of God's promises from of old, but those promises come with responsibilities, responsibilities that now weigh heavy on their shoulders, and they are not sure they are up to the task.

In the verses that precede the gospel passage we just read, Jesus gives a stark warning:

*Occasions for sin<sup>[b]</sup> are bound to come, but woe to anyone through whom they come! <sup>2</sup> It would be better for you if a millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea than for you to cause one of these little ones to sin.<sup>[c]</sup> <sup>3</sup> Be on your guard! If a brother or sister sins, you must rebuke the offender, and if there is repentance, you must forgive.*

*<sup>4</sup>And if the same person sins against you seven times a day and turns back to you seven times and says, 'I repent,' you must forgive.*

It's no wonder the disciples want more faith! How else will they be able to muddle through such difficult challenges? Being ever and always a model disciple? Being ever and always ready to rebuke other people for their mistakes? Being ever and always ready to forgive, not just once but over and over again? These tasks require some heavy lifting and some serious personal courage!

The puzzle continues, however, when Jesus gives them a not so specific answer. He tells them they don't need any more faith. Whatever tiny speck of faith they already have is enough to do the seemingly impossible, and although in reality they will not be moving giant trees, the task of moving people and themselves might be just as difficult. As miraculous as that might seem, it would be no big deal: they are doing only what needs to be done to share the faith. And as inadequate as they feel, Jesus tells them their faith is more than enough to do it.

Phew! A tall order, but then we know the rest of the story: they go, they suffer, they teach, they preach, and here we are today.

We know ourselves how often we need reassurance, in these times when the world and the nation seem always on the brink of violence; where family dynamics and personal struggles seem ready to overwhelm; where poverty and fear threaten so many. We know how often we need to remind each other that we are not alone, and not solely responsible for tackling it all. Popular wisdom attributes Mother Teresa with expressing it well: *I know God will not give me anything I can't handle. I just wish that He didn't trust me so much.*

And even she had a crisis of faith, even as she continued to labor among the poor.

It's good to remember just what faith is. The dictionary tells us that faith is belief and trust in something without actual, quantifiable proof. Unlike mathematics in which 2 plus 2 can be seen to be 4 by counting pebbles, or chemistry in which mixing sodium and chloride can produce salt for all to see, or those seeds that produce the flowers as pictured on the packet, faith is less easy to grab hold of.

The faith that Jesus recognizes in his disciples is not bought or borrowed. Rather it is a gift God has given them, a gift others will see in them, a gift that will grow like a seed and be passed along to others.

In his introduction to the book of Romans in the German bible of 1522, Martin Luther wrote that *faith is God's work in us, that changes us and gives new birth from God. (John 1:13). It kills the Old Adam and makes us completely different people. It changes our hearts, our spirits, our thoughts and all our powers.*

He goes on to add that *faith is a living, bold trust in God's grace, so certain of God's favor that it would risk death a thousand times trusting in it, and [b]ecause of it, you freely, willingly and joyfully do good to everyone, serve everyone, suffer all kinds of things, love and praise the God who has shown you such grace.*

Do the disciples have such faith? indeed they do, even if they don't think so.

After all, in faith they left their homes and businesses to follow Jesus.

In faith, they accompanied Jesus on his healing missions and were able to heal some people themselves acting in his name.

In faith, they delivered a few loaves of bread and a few fish and fed thousands as Jesus taught the people for hours on that outdoor plain.

In faith, they stood fast, if only on the sidelines, when the religious authorities and skeptics questioned and prodded and made not so veiled threats against Jesus.

In faith, they listened for hours on end, on hillsides, in the temple courtyard, on their boat in the sea of Galilee, in the garden at Gethsemane, and they did their best to act upon the words of Jesus that they heard.

All of these things depended on a trust in Jesus, a faith that enabled them to get past their very human -and very real – concerns, even when success was not guaranteed.

It was the faith of Jesus that allowed them to live and move and act in that faith, just as it is with us. No first-place trophies, no fifteen minutes of fame, no bonuses to sweeten the pot. Walking in faith is just what people do when faith in Christ becomes theirs. Knowing who God is and how God loves us is enough to nourish the seeds and allow them to grow.

There was a prayer making the internet rounds some years back: *O God, I don't pray for enough faith to move mountains or mulberry bushes. I can get dynamite and bull dozers and cranes to do that. What I need is enough faith to move **me**.*

And that is exactly what we need, each of us and all of us together: enough faith, enough trust, to move in the world in Jesus' footsteps, loving and caring for the people and places around us. And it is exactly what we have. When we look with the eyes of faith, we see that folks just like us who need to know God's love and remember God's promises. As we walk through life sharing that love and resting on those promises ourselves, we can trust that they will be enough.

We don't need to grow an entire field of flowers or fill a greenhouse. We just need to feed and water the human flowers that are right there in front of us.

We don't have to have a green thumb or any special skills. We just need to be available and willing to do what we can.

We don't have to look for mulberry trees to move. We just need to look for the burdens that need lifting, and together that heavy lifting becomes lighter.

Like the disciples, we have been called together by faith into a church as the people of God, to nourish that faith and share the good news. So we make quilts and create pick up choirs. We pack school kits and collect canned goods. We dig into the concepts of our faith on First Fridays, retreat with the women's group on Saturday and Worship together on Sundays. And we pray without ceasing for guidance and strength each day.

God invites us on this mission. God commissions us to go forward and flourish from that tiniest seed of faith, from that most vulnerable place of doubt and worry. And with God's help, Jesus promises that our faith will grow and our seeds will flourish. And we will be enough.

Amen.