

Pentecost 20 – October 1, 2016

“Increase our faith!”

Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4

Psalm 37:1-9

2 Timothy 1:1-14

Luke 17:5-10

Christ the King Lutheran Church, Tigard, OR

The Rev. Dorothy Cottingham

Fellow Ministers of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Gracia y paz de Dios, el Padre, el Hijo y el Espíritu Santo.

Grace to you and peace from God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen

“Oh Lord, how long shall I cry for help.

How long shall I cry to you VIOLENCE and you will not save?

Why do you make me see wrongdoing and look at trouble?”

We don't often read from the book of Habakkuk.

This text seems particularly appropriate today.

Another week of violence, unrest and killing leaves us unnerved.

Another week of political nattering and nastiness leaves us discouraged.

We may find ourselves crying out with Habakkuk

“The wicked surround the righteous – judgment comes forth perverted”.

Faced with the overwhelming desire for peace and civility in our country and

around the world we look to Jesus to increase our faith.

And Jesus has a curious answer for us.

If you had faith the size of a mustard seed,

you could uproot a huge tree and plant it in the sea.

Great!

So my faith is measured by how many trees I can move just by willing it?

My faith is measured by how many impossible feats I can perform?

Looks like I'm quite the failure in the faith department.

I don't have that kind of faith.

I don't have the courage to stand up to the powerful and the privileged.

I can't make the killing stop.

I can't make the nastiness stop.

I don't have enough faith.

And even if I do stop one killing or one nasty exchange between people,  
what difference does it make in the grand scheme of violence and nastiness?

Jesus assures us that even a little faith makes a big difference.

When we feel inadequate to the task of faithful discipleship,

Jesus tells us that we have enough faith.

He reminds us that the life of discipleship is not about how much faith we have,  
rather it is about how we use our faith, today.

He reminds us, too that we may not be patted on the back for our efforts.

Reconciling warring political parties,

exposing systemic racism or

challenging untruths seems impossible!

But, Jesus says, even a little faith is enough and it is powerful!

There is an important balance to maintain between our faith and  
our life as Christians in living out our faith.

As servants of Christ, we should never think less of ourselves than who we are.

We are God's beloved children.

Not because of any great good we have done.

Not because we have earned God's blessings.

The servant does her job because it is her job.

We do what needs to be done because it is our response to God's grace.

It is not our good deeds that saves us.

It is not even our faith that saves us.

It is Jesus the Christ.

Because of Christ, God has given us enough faith

to go into the world as ambassadors of God's love and grace.

On the other hand, as servants of Christ,

we cannot think more of ourselves than who we are either.

Our good works of love and grace will not save us,

and certainly will not exempt us from the struggles and challenges of life.

Faith does not set us above anyone.

Instead faith calls us to accompany one another along the way.

Faith calls us to do what we can to make sure

all of God's children have a place at the table.

Faith calls us to speak truth to power and to lift up the lowly.

Jesus challenges false humility

those who are proud of their great humility

Jesus also challenges false egos

those who project a big ego to protect a weak self-image.

In the end, we are compelled to acknowledge that it is not what we do or don't do,

how much or how little faith we have,

or how much we accomplish or fail at in life

that determines our worth in God's eyes.

God sees stuff differently than we do.

God sees us through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ.

We are claimed by God in the waters of baptism.

We are nourished by the body and blood of Jesus at this table.

The apostle Paul reminds us that it is God through the Holy Spirit,

who gives us the power, love and self-discipline . . .

and the gift of faith.

Jesus' response to the disciples' request for increased faith

is not a judgment on their lack of faith.

Rather, it is an affirmation of the faith they have . . .

the faith we have . . .

faith that is sufficient for the task at hand.

Jesus' response is an invitation to live out the faith that we have,

not the faith we wish we had.

Don't fret, the Psalmist says . . .

don't fret over those who seem to prosper,  
even in their unrighteous ways.

Don't fret over those who carry out evil deeds.

God's answer to Habakkuk's cry for help against the violence  
is all we need to know for today.

God tells the prophet, and us

“the righteous live by their faith. The arrogant do not endure”.

So, how much faith do we need so that we might endure these days?

We have all the faith we need for today.

God asks only that we act according to the faith that we have.

God leads us out to spread the good news in whatever way we are able.

When it feels like we're trying to move a tree,

God gives us the strength to move any tree that is  
in the way of justice and peace.

What a joy to receive the gift of faith.

What a privilege to step out in faith, able to move the barriers to justice and peace.

How astonishing that God calls each of us to tell the good news of Jesus Christ  
with power and humility.

Thanks be to God!