

October 2, 2022  
Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost  
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH  
Pastor Joel Sutton

Luke 17:1–10 (Habakkuk 1:1–4; 2:1–4; 2 Timothy 1:1–14)

THE MASTER SERVES HIS UNWORTHY SERVANTS.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

Our text for meditation today comes from the Gospel according to St Luke, the 17th chapter, which you heard read earlier.

In our text this morning Jesus teaches His disciples of those days – and disciples of all times about the challenges and responsibilities of living our lives together as members of the body of Christ. You did not choose to be a member of the body of Christ but God chose you and appointed you to bear fruits of repentance and faith. (cf: John 15:16) By virtue of your Baptism **you** are a disciple of Christ and member of His body. At the font, you were baptized into His death, uniting you into His death and resurrection, making you an heir with Him in everything He possesses. (cf: Romans 6:3-5; 8:17) You have been taught and continue to be taught our Lord's commands. He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion on the last day. (cf: Philippians 1:6)

Until that day, the devil, the world, and your own sinful flesh will do their worst in attempt to steal your faith and salvation. And as repetitive as it sometimes sounds, the Christian needs to be regularly reminded of the sinful human condition of the old Adam who lives within each of us. You and I are by nature enemies of God and despise Him. (cf: Romans 3:10–12) Your old Adam wants you to believe that because you are a Christian, you are better than others, even your own brothers and sisters in Christ. You believe that since you are a Christian, your life should get easier, with fewer trials and tribulations. You believe that God does not desire your good works and deeds and your neighbor does not need them. You believe that since Jesus died for all your sins you no longer must battle against temptation but just give in and Jesus will take care of the debt.

Because of this sinful human condition, Jesus teaches you and me and all members of the body some challenges and responsibilities to destroy our pride and to encourage us to follow Him in His humility. He begins by saying:

***“Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come!”*** (Luke 17:1)

In the original language this word translated as **temptation** refers to **trap** of sorts which is baited so that, when the bait is touched, the stick holding the bait springs the trap. (TDNT, 339) It is a trap in order to draw you away from faith and plunder your trust in Christ, a trap which

ultimately leads to spiritual death and eternal damnation. The devil is active and relentless working through the evil actions of others, setting *traps* for those of faith and weak faith hoping to seal their salvation.

But if that is not bad enough, *woe* to those individuals who *set* those traps and *create* temptations. A violent and horrific death would be better than to face God's wrath against setting a trap before others. Yet how many people claiming to be Christian live scandalous and unrepentant lives which are traps to believers, especially to those weaker in the faith, tempting them to sin and lead them away from Christ.

In the second teaching in our text, Jesus says:

***“If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him.”*** (Luke 17:3)

Because we all daily sin much, you will inevitably become aware of a fellow Christian who is sinning. But, rather than getting angry at them or gossiping behind their back about their transgression, Jesus says to rebuke the sinner. The word rebuke does not mean to beat your fellow brother or sister in Christ over the head with a Bible. It means to first, take the log out of your own eye, repenting of your own sins (cf: Luke 6:42) – then – gently speak the truth in love showing compassionate care for your brother or sister and genuine concern for true doctrine. (cf: Ephesians 4:15)

Unfortunately, due to the sinful old Adam, when one Christian is sinned against by a brother or sister in Christ, instead of pointing out the sin, the one who was sinned against – disappears. They were offended so they quit coming to worship. They stop receiving Christ's gifts in Word and Sacrament and at the same time, the brother or sister who sinned against them quite possibly does not even know what they have done. And if they do know, they need to be called to repentance so they can repent and know not to commit the same offense against another member of the body.

If your rebuke leads to repentance, Jesus says you *must* forgive them. Just like in the Lord's Prayer, we pray:

***“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”*** (cf: Matthew 6:12)

Ask yourself: *“How often do I want Jesus to forgive me?”* I am sure it is more than seven times. I pray that you sincerely want forgiveness every time *you* repent – and that is precisely how often *you must* forgive those who sincerely ask for *your* forgiveness.

Jesus third teaching is about faith. After hearing Jesus' first two teachings on this occasion, the apostles believe that they will need greater faith if they are beware of traps to sin and to rebuke and forgive others. So:

***“The apostles said to the Lord, ‘Increase our faith!’ And the Lord said, “If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.”*** (Luke 17:5-6)

Jesus is saying that even with a mustard seed sized faith, great things can be done, provided it is within the will of God. So use the little faith you have while praying for greater faith. New Testament commentator Richard Lenski writes:

***“For faith is a vessel; its power lies, not in being a vessel, but in what it contains as a vessel. Faith embraces the divine promises, and when it makes use of these promises, its greatness and its power appear, and it can do all that Jesus asks... and far more because divine grace and help are contained in the promises that are held by faith.”*** (Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Luke’s Gospel, 867–868)

Jesus’ fourth and final teaching in our text is a really hard teaching. He says:

***“... when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.’”*** (Luke 17:10)

After you have worked and slaved all day long, battling all your challenges in faith and life, how you are to live before God and neighbor as a member of the body of Christ, dodging the snares and traps of temptation, bearing fruits of faith and repentance, knowing that you got through the day only by the grace of God – know this. You are not a hero. You do not deserve a special pat on the back or commendation. You are an unworthy servant of God. Unworthy does not mean useless. It means the Master owes you nothing. You have only done your duty. No one expects anything less.

It is a frustrating teaching. In our Old Testament lesson, Habakkuk felt your frustration. He, too, was battling challenges in life and in faith as God’s prophet, proclaiming how would God use the wicked nation Babylon for His divine judgement of the nations. He impatiently cries out:

***“O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear... Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise.”*** (Habakkuk 1:2-3)

Yet, like others of great faith, Habakkuk did his duty, trusting in God’s promises and waited for Him to answer saying:

***“I will take my stand at my watchpost and station myself on the tower, and look out to see what he will say to me, and what I will answer concerning my complaint.”*** (Habakkuk 2:1)

And the Lord God did answer saying:

***“... the righteous shall live by his faith.”*** (Habakkuk 2:4)

This is also what St Paul was writing about to Timothy in our epistle text where he tells Timothy to not be ashamed of the testimony of Jesus – but share in suffering for the Gospel. (cf: 2 Timothy 1:8-9) Paul was sitting in prison as he wrote this letter. Unbelievers had to be mocking him for serving a God who allowed him to languish in jail. Yet Paul had faith in Jesus’ promise of salvation that nothing could separate him from the love of God for the sake of Jesus. (cf: Romans 8:37–39)

Life in this sinful world is often a random collection of challenges to your faith, with traps and trials and tribulation between and within family, friends, career, and every other thing that goes wrong in life. So, where does that leave you? Right where our text ends: ***unworthy***. You and I are ***unworthy***. It is frustrating to the old Adam. You want to throw up your hands in the air and say: *“That’s not fair!”* or *“That doesn’t make sense!”* or *“There has to be another way!”* And those times should be a reminder that you and I are unworthy servants and incapable of doing

our duty before God. You see, if you get what you deserve, you receive eternal damnation. If you get what you deserve, then God is not your heavenly Father, but simply an employer or master.

In His rich love and mercy, our Lord God provides everything to unworthy servants such as you and I. The Master sent His Suffering Servant into the world to serve you:

- Suffering all the temptations and traps you will ever face.
- Forgiving you every time you repent.
- Creating and perfecting your faith so that you can do great things.
- He came to do His duty – for you. It was:  
“...*for the joy that was set before him* [that He] *endured the cross, despising the shame...*” (Hebrews 12:2)

... for you His unworthy servant.

Jesus came not to be served but to serve – even though He knew you would fail to do your duty. That is why you are here this morning. You came to this place after a hard week of failing to do good, provoking others, failing to forgive, after a week of pride and selfishness, and even if you have not hurt others, then at least you have failed to help as much as you should. You and I are unworthy servants.

But in Baptism, God created faith within you. This morning, you came to gather with all these other unworthy servants, to repent of your sins and receive Jesus Word of forgiveness. You have come to hear the preached Gospel and to recline before the Lord’s altar. This is where your Savior serves you – His unworthy servants. He removes your sinful rags, washes you clean from your transgressions, clothes you with His righteousness, and makes you worthy before the Father. He comes to you in the remembrance of your Baptism, through His Word of Absolution, and gives you His Body and Blood – given and shed for you to create and sustain faith – much greater than the size of a grain of mustard seed.

Faith in Christ fights the good fight of faith. (cf: 1 Timothy 6:12; 2 Timothy 4:7) The Holy Spirit empowers you. By faith in Christ the Christian resists the devil using the shield of faith extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one. (cf: Ephesians 6:16) Genuine faith in Christ fights against causing others to sin. Genuine faith is concerned about fellow believer’s repentance and forgiveness. Genuine faith gives thanks and praise to God for His bountiful gifts, rather than expecting anything in return. He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion on the last day as you receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love Him. (cf: James 1:12)

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,  
Amen.