

Luke 17:1-10

Pentecost 17; October 5 & 6, 2025

A couple of questions for everyone today:

- Do bulls hate red. True or false? False: They hate movement. The red color stands out more for us.
- Ben Franklin wanted the turkey to be the national bird. True or false? Somewhat both. Origin of the myth stems from a private letter Benjamin Franklin wrote to his daughter, Sarah. Content of the Letter was the Franklin contrasted the bald eagle with the turkey. He called the bald eagle a "bird of bad moral character," "too lazy to fish for himself," and one who "doesn't earn his living honestly". Franklin considered the turkey a "much more respectable bird" and a "true original Native of America". He described it as a bird of courage that would defend its territory, but also noted it was "a little vain & silly".
- If you dropped a penny from the top of the Empire State Building, it would it kill someone on the street below. True or False? False. You might cut someone on their skin if it hit directly. It wouldn't kill you.

How about the spiritual questions in our text today.

- Sin is so serious that it would be better for them to die instead of leading others into sin. True or False? True. **"It would be better for them to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around their neck than to cause one of these little ones to stumble."**
- Even if someone sins against us many times, we should forgive the sorrowful sinner many times. True or false? **"If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying 'I repent,' you must forgive them."**
- We are all servants of God by faith. **"So, you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'"**

Why does Jesus ask these three questions of his disciples? On his way to Jerusalem to die on the cross, Jesus had just confronted the Pharisees about their sin of loving money (Luke 16:14). Now he turns to his disciples to address some of the dangers he knows they will face—the temptation to look down on those society deems insignificant. He warns them that their words and actions may cause people to sin; even worse they may cause children to sin. He knows that it will be hard for them to forgive repeatedly. Finally, they are to do all of this because it is what followers of Jesus do. Therefore, let's take a closer look at those warnings this morning.

"Jesus said to his disciples: **"Things that cause people to stumble are bound to come, but woe to anyone through whom they come. It would be better for them to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around their neck than to cause one of these little ones to stumble. So, watch yourselves."** We can't escape temptation—sin will happen. But we must not be the cause of someone else's sin or falling away from the Lord. God takes that seriously. **"Little ones"** includes both children and new believers, and many things can cause them to stumble. One child gets angry, another responds in anger—*"He started it!"* Adults do the same. One person's sin leads another into sin, and the cycle repeats. It's easy to see how one sinful action can have a lasting, harmful impact on others.

So, what does Jesus want us to do with sin? What does he want us to do when we are hurt by someone else's sin? **"If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying 'I repent,' you must forgive them."** Those words aren't easy: *rebuke, repent, forgive*. There has to be a limit, right? It wears us down. Think of the exhausted mom running on just a few hours of sleep, the worker who works hard but never gets recognized, or the runner struggling to finish a marathon. We all reach that point where we wonder, *"Where will I find the strength? I just can't do it."* Seven times in the day? Are you serious, Jesus? This is even worse than what He said in Matthew 18:22 when He told Peter to forgive his brother seventy-seven times. At least then we could imagine the seventy-seven times spread out over a lifetime, but here it is in a single day. Can you imagine forgiving a brother seven times in one day for the same sin?

Why would one do that? A simple answer is that's what believers in Jesus do. In our text Jesus paints a picture for us with a short illustration. **"Suppose one of you has a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Will he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? Won't he rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'? Will he thank the servant**

because he did what he was told to do? So, you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'" In Christ, God has made us his servants. We are no longer on our own. We are no longer in charge of our lives. But he is a gracious Master. He forgives us, brings us into his household, welcomes us under his care, gives us meaningful work to do, and offers us a seat at his table. It is a privilege to be called one of his servants.

It's no surprise how the disciples respond: **"The apostles said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith!'"** Notice what they didn't ask for. They didn't ask Jesus to help them forgive or to keep them from causing others to stumble. Instead, they asked for faith. Whether they realized it or not, their request shows the close connection between faith and action. Unfaithful living can stem from weak faith. The solution to their request is to feed their faith with Jesus. There is a story about someone you once asked, *"If both temptation and Christ live within us, how do we know which one will win?"* The person answered, *"It's like having two dogs living in your heart—one represents temptation, the other Christ. They're both strong."* Then he asked the question: *"So which one wins?"* The answer: *"The one I feed the most."*

Where do we get the strength to do that? He replied, **"If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you."** Look at what Jesus is saying to them. It looks like he is saying to them that even if they had small faith, they could move a tree from land to the sea. If that were the case, I would have been thinking if I were a disciple, I must not have even a little faith. Jesus is pointing them not to their own faith, but to the object in which they have faith in – Jesus. Nothing is impossible for God.

So, if God had made a promise that you could yell at trees to relocate themselves into the heart of a body of water, and you believed that promise even just a little bit, you could order the trees and they would obey. Because in that example, the power is coming from God's promises—you're just trusting that the promise is true and reliable. Of course, God hasn't made that promise—Jesus is using a hypothetical example. So, I would not recommend yelling at the trees the rest of the morning here to see if they'll move. Trust the promises that Jesus have made.

Servants of Jesus trusts his promises. We serve because he served us. May these words of Jesus spoken to his disciples be spoken to us as well: **"So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'" May God grant it. Amen.**