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Our gospel reading from Luke for today finds Jesus spending a rather intimate time with his disciples, because he is teaching them some very important ways to live with each other. He's explaining what it means to live in Christ's love.

He says, "Be on your guard", he says "pay attention to yourselves so that you won't cause another to stumble", so that you won't cause others to sin, so that you won't cause others to doubt. Be on your guard so that you will not offend anyone, causing others to fear or experience anger or shock because of what you have said.

If you know of any one like that, don't be anything like them, and don't let them be examples or leaders in anything you do.

And then for emphasis of how vitally important this is Jesus said, "It would be better if a millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea than for you to cause another to stumble." I've always thought that was a pretty powerful statement, but it emphasizes how important it is for us to understand the implications of our actions. What we do and say matters, and besides, our children are watching us.

Then right after that lesson, Jesus taught the disciples the other side of the story, that if someone sins against you, you should forgive them. And he says imagine if that person sin against you again and again, as many as seven times. Think about that. What if someone sinned against you seven times in the same day, and then asked for forgiveness. Could you forgive them again and again and again?

Well, after hearing these words of instruction the disciples said, "Jesus, increase our faith!" They were saying, Jesus, that forgiveness thing is just too hard for us. How could I continue to forgive someone over and over. Maybe if I had more faith, maybe if I had the faith that you have, I could do it. But at the present time, I'm just not able. We want to be obedient to you, but we just can't. Increase our faith, give us more of what you've got.

And Jesus replies with an illustration. He says if you had the faith of a mustard seed, you could tell that tree to uproot itself and plant itself in the sea and it would. Now there is no reason to want a tree to be planted in the middle of the sea, but Jesus gives this outrageous example to tell us that nothing is impossible through faith in God.

And the mustard seed is a tiny, tiny little seed. In comparison to other seeds, some might even say that it's the smallest of all. So it's clear that Jesus is saying that it doesn't take a lot of faith to do incredible things. It's not a matter of how much faith. But he's also saying much more than that.....

There is a story about a man named John. John was a faithful Christian but he had one problem, one vice in his character, and try as he might, he could not seem to get rid of. He prayed fervently and daily, asking God that his vice might be taken away from him, so that he may be holy as God is holy.

One day, Jesus appeared to John in a vision. He told John of a huge boulder lying in a forest where John stayed. Jesus told John to go to the boulder and push it with all his might. When the vision ended, John did exactly as he was told. He went into the forest, and found the boulder just as he was shown. And John leaned all his weight against it and pushed with all his might. But nothing happened. The boulder didn't even budge. And John was disappointed. It was late, so he decided to go home and try the next day.

The next day, he went to the boulder again and pushed, and he pushed, and he pushed, and he pushed. But still nothing happened. After many days of pushing the boulder and not moving it, John brought his concerns to prayer. "Why Lord?" he asked, "Why can't I move the boulder?"

Jesus appeared to John again in another vision and the Lord said, "I never asked you to move the boulder. All I asked of you, is to push it with all your might."

And John finally understood. It was not so important for John to be rid of his vice, but it was more important that John made efforts to renounce this vice. Whether he succeeded or not was not as important. What was important was that he tried.

Our tendency is to be like the disciples and say "Lord, give us more faith!" Or perhaps when we pray we say Lord God, give me more money, or more health, or more peace, or more strength, or more courage. Lord if you give me more, then I'll be able to do your will in the world, then I'll be able to move mountains. I know I've tried to negotiate with God like that before. Perhaps you have too.

But Jesus knows us. And he knows that we already have what we need. We don't need a super-sized faith we need a mustard seed sized faith. We don't need more. We don't need more of us, we need more of God. We need more of God flowing through us.

There is a critical difference here, and I want to make sure we understand that difference. The apostle Paul talks of this as the difference between living in the flesh and living in the Spirit. You see when we try to do things out of our own will, because of our sinful nature, we will always mess things up. But if we allow the Spirit of God to work through us, God will do more than what we could ever imagine. God can make all things new. God can make water flow in the desert. God makes the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk. God performs miracles.

Now when it comes to us, we can't completely curb our tongues from offending others by ourselves, and we can't forgive another person seven times by ourselves, but we can when we abide in God. For God is able. Only God is able to do that through us. And

God will forgive us for all our sins, and we can forgive as God does when we abide in him.

Our mission is not to move the boulder. Our mission is to push on that boulder. Our mission is to simply practice the faith we profess, daily submitting ourselves to God's will in our lives.

Jesus concludes his teaching to his disciples with a story of a slave who comes into his master's house after a day working in the field. And Jesus asks, "Will the master immediately reward the slave with a place at the dinner table for all his hard work, or would he be more likely to say, 'Prepare supper for me and serve me...later you may eat and drink'." Well the disciples know that the slave is not going to rest until his work is done both outside and inside the house, and that the slave certainly isn't going to be thanked simply for doing what is expected.

And Jesus says, the same is true for you and for me. The work we do, whether it's raising money for refugees, assisting in worship, making quilts for Lutheran World Relief, or collecting food for the food pantries, it isn't going to make the lead story on CNN, earn special praise from Jesus, or guarantee us a special place in heaven. When we've done all that Christ has required of us, our response should be, "we are just worthless slaves, we have only done what we ought to have done."

But unlike the Master who wants his meal before the slave can eat. God stops us here at the beginning of a new week and invites us to his table, even when we should continue to work by serving our master dinner, God says stop and enjoy this meal with me.

Receive this free gift, the gift of the real presence of God to refresh and renew our lives. Like faith, it is a gift to us for us to open and use and cherish, and we all get faith in the same measure. You have enough faith already. If we along with all Christians around the world would just use and practice the faith we profess, we could move mountains, and with God's help we could change the world. Amen.