

✝ I preach in God's name for God's people. Let my words be from God and for God's people. **Amen**

Good morning.

TWO WEEKS AGO, we heard the parable of the unjust steward. The parable is strange — the man who was fired squanders his master's riches further by marking down the debt of those who owed his master, winning friends for himself in this life. Jesus makes the meaning clear: "You cannot serve God and money."

This warning is meant to get to the depths of our souls. It's a warning meant to keep us away from the kinds of pursuits and desires that will lead us away from Jesus forever. It's a warning to keep our souls out of hell; and it's an encouragement to think and live instead in terms of eternal riches and eternal friends.

When we put this parable alongside the Lord's Prayer and focus on "debt" and "owe," we see right away the connection of debt and debtors, of trespasses and forgiveness. The bad steward marks down the debt of those who owe his master, but he does this as a thief. Our Lord Jesus — the good steward — takes all of our debt — our sin — upon himself on the cross. It's through the cross, through the outpouring of his life, that Jesus makes us his friends through forgiveness. He makes friends for himself through his *righteous* wealth.

And so, like our Lord Jesus, we forgive the trespasses of those who have sinned against us; we give to the needy what we ourselves have been given; and we share the good gift of the news of the resurrection — that perhaps some may turn and live — but at the least, that we should continue in faith.

We want to be good stewards of not only the things we have received in this life — our money, time, possessions, and our lives! — but also we want to be good stewards of things we have been promised in the life to come. We do not want to keep any of our earthly or eternal riches just for ourselves.

LAST WEEK, we heard the parable of the rich man and Lazarus.

Daily, the rich man was arrayed in purple and linens — dressed like a king! Daily, the rich man feasted. Daily, "at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table." Then both died; and the rich man went to a place of torment, and Lazarus went to the bosom of Abraham.

This parable shows us that riches in this life may mean hell in the life to come. This warning, like the parable of the unjust steward, is meant to get under our skin and into our souls.

These parables, these warnings passages, are good for us to hear, because our culture loves money and possessions. It is part of the air we breathe. We need God to speak to us, through our poisoned air, to hear how differently we need to think and live and act with regard to money, to possessions, to our lives — to everything we have been given.

The rich man, like many of us, may think his gifts were his riches. But the real gift the rich man was given was laid at his gate, and the rich man never bothered to be a good steward of that gift — the poor man. The real gift, of course, was Lazarus, with whom he could have shared his riches, a seat at his table, clothes, and ointment for his sores. So hear this. The real riches is the one with whom we can share, lift up, or elevate through our use of money. The real gift is not the riches we have been given, but the person with whom we share our riches.

It is the same with our Lord Jesus. He gave up all of his riches — his whole creation — to become incarnate, to be born of the virgin Mary, to walk among us, to be lifted up in death on the cross. He gave up all things that he might win some of us — so that we have a share in his eternal riches. Let none of us squander these eternal riches which he has set aside for us, but instead, give him thanks and praise, as we continue in faith, offering ourselves back to Jesus *who offered himself for us*.

THIS MORNING, we heard the disciples ask Jesus to increase their faith. We heard how Jesus responded: “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.”

The disciples, like us, believed: “If only we had enough faith! If only we had enough faith, then we could _____.” How often have we thought or believed the same? We just need more faith.

Jesus, in return, tells the disciples — and us — in this passage: “You only need the tiniest amount of faith to do a miraculous thing.” If the disciples only need faith the size of a mustard seed, are they really lacking in faith? Do they really need to have their faith increased?

It’s worth reminding ourselves that these disciples have already done miracles when Jesus sent out the twelve into the towns ahead of him:

[1] And he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, [2] and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. (Luke 9:1–2, ESV)

And so, the twelve went out:

[6] And they departed and went through the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere...[10] On their return the apostles told him all that they had done. Luke 9:6, 10a, ESV)

You see, the disciples have already accomplished the miraculous; they have already healed and cast out demons. They have performed miracles that some of us may dream of or very much desire we could do. Why then do they ask for more faith? You may be surprised that they have asked for more faith, not because they have just seen Jesus do something miraculous, but because he gave them a commandment:

[1] And he said to his disciples...[3] Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, [4] and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive him.” (Luke 17:1–4, ESV)

Indeed, Jesus gives two commands: (1) “if your brother sins, rebuke him” and (2) “if he repents, forgive him.” After performing miracles in the name of Jesus, isn’t it curious that the disciples found these commandments too difficult and sought more faith? But we cannot be too hard on the disciples, for these are hard for us, too.

(1) “If your brother sins, rebuke him.” This may be a surprise to some among us, especially to those who think we do not have a right to “judge” another. We have no right to view ourselves *better* than one another, or more worthy than one another, and so on. But we absolutely have the duty to judge when someone has wronged us, and so we rebuke them, that they may seek repentance, and when they repent, that we may forgive them.

(2) It is no good to rebuke that person, to chastise that person, and then to withhold forgiveness when that person repents. That makes us, in effect, worse than the person who has wronged us. It is also no good when someone has wronged us, and we avoid or hide from giving that person the opportunity for repentance.

When we begin to reflect on those who have wronged us — or, on those against whom we hold grudges — we find ourselves, like the disciples, asking Jesus to “increase our faith.” How could we forgive *that* person?!

It is to this thinking that Jesus replies: “if you have the faith of a mustard seed, you could ask the mulberry tree to move into the sea, and it would obey you.” We need only the smallest faith, but our faith has to be rooted in the Lord Jesus. It does us no good to place our faith in anything or anyone else.

Jesus uses the example of a mustard seed intentionally; it is not random. Do you remember how else Jesus has used the example of a mustard seed? He uses it much earlier to describe the kingdom of God, how like a tiny mustard seed, it grows up into a large, flourishing tree in the garden.

And so, we are reminded that this *faith* is not primarily about doing the miraculous, but about bringing about the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is the place where sins are forgiven, where glory is given to God, and where disciples are obedient to the Lord Jesus.

The disciples wanted more faith, not because they needed more faith, but because they found it too difficult to obey their Lord's commands to forgive. In contrast, our Lord Jesus was humble and willing to obey his father's commands, and so he willingly suffered, died, was buried. And on the third day, he rose, and forty days later, he ascended into heaven, taking his place at the right hand of God. Jesus did this in order to bring about repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus died and rose, that we might be reconciled to God and be raised to life eternal.

The disciples did not remain disobedient. The apostles, with their small, mustard seed amount of faith, proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus. They are how we know that Jesus was raised from the dead. It's this message of the resurrection that has been passed down through the ages, faithfully, and that we have received.

This is the deposit of faith that Paul asks Timothy to guard and to have courage to proclaim. Though Paul is imprisoned, the good news is not. And so Paul encourages Timothy: "Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, in the power of God."

Like the disciples, we may cry out for more faith: Increase our faith! We may be presented with some suffering or some task that we find simply too difficult. We may think that there is no way we can remain faithful or obey Jesus without more faith. But as we have heard this morning, the tiniest amount of faith is plenty.

Likely none of us will miraculously move a mulberry tree into the sea. Not even the disciples bothered to ask for this, even after Jesus told them it was possible. But in this lesson about faith, remember that miracles are very easy for God.

Because we believe that God created the heavens and the earth, that the Son of God became incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and that God raised Jesus from the dead, then believing that he can move a mulberry tree into the sea is really a rather unsurprising thing. Of course God can do that sort of a thing!

Indeed, in our Acts lesson from this past week, we saw that God sent an angel to break out the apostles from prison in the middle of the night. The locks remained locked; the guards were oblivious. The apostles went right back into the temple to preach the resurrection. It is an astonishing, nearly unbelievable thing to us, and yet, it is also a very easy, unsurprising thing for God. *Of course God can do that!*

God has the power to make our bodies and minds and hearts right. At any moment, he may miraculously do so. But remember that the miracles of the Bible — and any ones he may do in our lives or in the life of someone we know — are to bring about faith in the name of Jesus. For all of these miracles reveal the power of Jesus, who was raised from the dead, and who will raise all who have faith in him from the dead. The resurrection of the dead is the promise of the gospel.

Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

That is the powerful news we carry — news of Jesus raised from the dead, news that he will forgive those who repent, news that he will likewise raise us from the dead.

Just a tiny amount of faith is incredibly powerful. Just a tiny amount of faith is enough to follow our Lord. Just a tiny amount of faith is all that is needed to forgive those who have sinned against us. Just a tiny amount of faith is enough to share the life-giving news of Christ's resurrection.

Whatever the Lord has called you to accomplish for him in this life, whatever suffering he has called you to for the sake of the gospel, the tiniest amount of faith is plenty.

✠ **All Glory be to God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, now and forever, Amen.**