

The Masons - "A spirit of power and of love
and of self-discipline."

I am 7 - my grandmother has let me borrow my favourite VHS from her - "Ray Steven's Greatest Hits." One of the music videos is "The Mississippi Squirrel Revival."

Now in this song, the singer remembers visiting his grandmother in Mississippi every summer. One summer he caught a squirrel and snuck the creature into The First "Self-Righteous" Church.

Well, the squirrel escapes. It goes up a parishioner's pant leg and makes him jump, scream, and shout. Some people think the man has a demon in him - the pastor claims it is the Holy Spirit. When the man kneels and prays for help - the squirrel escapes his pants and goes on to its next victim.

"Watchin' all the commotion with sadistic glee" is "Sister Bertha Better-Than-You." The squirrel goes up her dress and she, too, began to repent her sins - very shameful ones - and then who in the church she's had affairs with.

Eventually the squirrel escapes the church - and only the boys who released it know what happened. Everyone else knows a revival miracle - for "seven deacons and the pastor got saved, 25,000 dollars was raised" people volunteered for service trips overseas, rededications, and baptisms.

This song reminds me of today's scripture. Jesus tells his followers that we're to forgive, and repent - turn away from wrong - constantly. Even if it means repenting and forgiving seven times in one day.

The disciples reply, "Oh you better give us more faith."

Jesus tells them, "Faith the size of a mustard seed is enough to tell this mulberry tree to uproot itself and jump in the sea. And it would obey."

So you can infer 1) the disciples' faith is smaller than a mustard seed and 2) faith is very powerful and 3) maybe the size of the faith isn't the important part, but rather... the kind of faith. Put a pin in that, I'll come back.

Then Jesus tells a story. A troubling story that doesn't challenge his world where slavery is the norm.

"Who of you would flip the script with your slave? And when he comes in from working the field, you'd invite him to dinner and serve him? Won't you demand him to make you dinner, and clean up after dinner, before he eats? Would you thank him?" He assumes we'll all say not I. "So, when you have done all you've been commanded, say 'we're worthless slaves and only did what we should have done.'"

If we imagine the slave owner is God, then we're slaves who should work and work without a reward of mulberry commanding miracles. We're just doing what we're supposed to do.

If we imagine we're the slave owners, Jesus is asking "Who would give up your power and change places with your slaves? No one? If you don't want treated as you treat your slaves, why do you treat them that way?"

But remember these stories came in response to Jesus saying we need to forgive and repent. In reply, the disciples asked for more faith.

Maybe we're assuming we're the ones with power - the ones who must choose to forgive or not. We're assuming we are the slave owner. We're the party who is owed. Or, in the words of Ray Stevens - we're the First Self-Righteous Church and Sister Better-Than-You.

What if we're the ones called to repent? The ones called to be better? What if the size of the faith doesn't matter, but the quality does?

So what you've got 100% more faith than the person beside you? - so did Bertha. But it was the squirrel that moved mountains and brought the entire congregation to a revival.

So what you're already a slave owner and set in life and able to boss others around? It is the servant who reflects God's love, who models Jesus' way, and who has a solid inheritance.

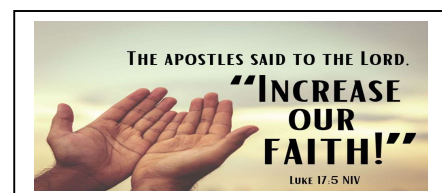
As the Masons told us today, they're looking to make good men better. And Jesus wants the same for all of us - Jesus wants good Christians to be better. And it isn't a matter of miraculously having more faith gifted to you - it is a matter of setting aside self-righteousness and giving up looking down your nose at people and thinking yourself Holier-Than-Thou... and getting into the mess, into the work, into the labour of repenting, forgiving, and loving.

In our second reading, Paul writes Timothy to encourage him in his faith. He reminds him – your grandmother Lois had sincere faith, and then your mother Eunice did, and now I am certain you do too. Revive this faith! Remember it isn't the amount – we have no stories of Lois moving mountains or Eunice ordering about trees – it is about the quality. The quality that lives such a life that inspires generations to keep the faith and keep loving and forgiving, repenting and learning. The quality of our faith – faith that doesn't preach fear – but embraces the Holy Spirit's power of love and self-discipline. A faith that isn't known by the spirit of cowardice, but the powerful Holy Spirit who is strong enough to repent, to admit wrongs, to desire change; and powerful enough to forgive, to see others want to change, and to embrace imperfect people. The Spirit of Love is far more powerful than any spirit of fear.

In a world that often is scary, it is important to remind ourselves we are gifted a different Spirit.

May we be the people with little faith quantity, but high faith quality. May we be the people with few miracles to our names, but who live our whole lives following the Good Shepherd repenting, forgiving, and loving. May we be good Christians getting better.

Amen!



Scripture Readings..... October 5, 2025 - for Little Current UCPC

Luke 17: 5 – 10 NRSV

⁵The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!” ⁶The Lord replied, “If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.

⁷“Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field, ‘Come here at once and take your place at the table’? ⁸Would you not rather say to him, ‘Prepare supper for me; put on your apron and serve me while I eat and drink; later you may eat and drink’? ⁹Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded? ¹⁰So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, ‘We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!’ ”

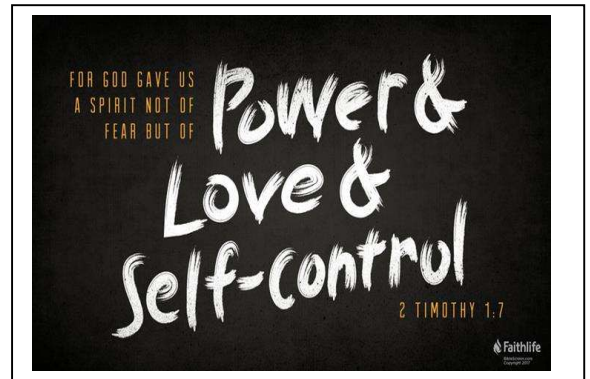
2 Timothy 1: 1 – 14

Salutation

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, for the sake of the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus,

² To Timothy, my beloved child:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.



Thanksgiving and Encouragement

³ I am grateful to God—whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did—when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. ⁴ Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy. ⁵ I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you. ⁶ For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands, ⁷ for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather a *spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline*.

⁸ 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, ⁹ who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace, and this grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, ¹⁰ but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. ¹¹ For this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher, ¹² and for this reason I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day the deposit I have entrusted to him. ¹³ Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁴ Guard the good deposit entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.

May God's spirit shape our understanding of these words.

And may they awaken in our hearts.