Luke 17:1-10 Early Morning

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Preacher: Rev. James Wagner

[0:00] God, give to us this morning an increase of your grace again. We may meekly hear your word, receive you with pure affection, and bear forth the fruit of your spirit, the very character of Christ, as we do seek to serve you, our neighbor in the world, with the gifts of the same spirit.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Please be seated. Welcome to all of you again this morning. If you're new here this morning, thanks for coming.
My name is James Wagner. And if you don't know the person next to you, introduce yourself. Not right now, but when the service ends.
But we started the series that we're in right now, which is called The Great Reversal. Don't forget, this is the greatest one. Lots of reversals happening in the world these days, but nothing like this one, with great news that comes forth from it.
And we started in chapter 14 with an imperative to strive to enter the kingdom. The word strive was actually agonize.
[1:21] We heard last week, though, of a contrast between Lazarus and the rich man, a kind of great reversal there. And the latter one, we were told, was in anguish.

It's kind of like agonize. Today we end, though, not with what it looks like to enter the kingdom of God by striving, but to serve in the kingdom of God.
And so before we get to that service, though, we need to come to terms with a few other things that are represented in the text here. And the first one is that of sin, and the second one is of faith.
So this morning I want us to follow a map that actually takes us through the weight of sin, the wonder of faith, before we get to the work of service.
So really, though, it's about sin, faith, and service. So first, the weight of sin. You hear the weight of sin, maybe actually your mind goes to, but wait a minute, what about the weight of glory, that great essay of C.S. Lewis's?
[2:23] But you can't get to the weight of glory without going through and knowing the weight of sin. So Jesus warns his disciples, though, about the temptation to sin.

Sin is pictured in multiple ways throughout the Bible. You know this, right? Sin is like a falling away. It's like a missing the mark. It's a rebellion against the authority of God and also the corruption of goodness.
And did you notice in our call this morning how it captured, pictured sin for us, that we may all be delivered from the bands of those sins?
Well, sin is not just about our nature, but our action arising out of our will, something that we do because we want to.
Jesus is realistic, though, about not just sin, but the temptation to sin. So temptation to sin is inevitable, according to Jesus, in verse 1, if you look down at your Bibles.
[3:26] And he said to his disciples, temptation to sin are sure to come. His warning with highlight is more about temptation through sin versus temptation to sin now.

And so he says, but woe to the one through whom they come. Sin in and of itself is something to resist.
But Jesus is saying, do all you can to guard against becoming the conduit of sin to other people.
Jesus knows this all too well because, of course, he was tempted by the evil one in the Jordan after his baptism and as his ministry was launched.
His service to his Father, but also to all of us. And that temptation, of course, we know came through the devil. So temptation of others to sin is really weighty.
It's what Jesus wants to bring across to his disciples. Sin and temptation has a consequence. The picture Jesus projects is one of weight.

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[4:36] It's heavy. The weight of sin is deadly. Even more when sin comes not just to us, but through us to little ones, as Jesus says.

And this may sound heavy and weighty, but it should. Remember, Jesus is the one who's saying then, the one who will bear the weight of sin, not just on his shoulders, not just in his hands and his feet, but in his heart, and on his mind, and with his soul, and through his body, the weight of sin.
So this is the weight of sin. Not that we can identify with maybe the impact of sin on Jesus' life. Who of us could? But maybe we can appreciate that the consequence of causing little ones, those who are vulnerable, to sin.
And Jesus says, to bring to bear this idea of weight, it's worse than a millstone hung around the neck and someone thrown into the sea to cause another one to sin. That's the weight of sin.
Now the wonder of faith. In the same breath, Jesus shifts then to faith and repentance and forgiveness. Martin Luther equated faith with this repentance and our great need for forgiveness.
[6:03] Since sin is kind of what I've already said, but also a turning away from God and a turning towards other things. But then faith must be then a turn back to God because of his grace to us.

And God knows, and we too, that there are many temptations to turn toward just about anything or anyone for salvation. So at the beginning of this section, we're calling the wonder of faith, Jesus declares, pay attention to yourself and respect to those who repent.
He says, you must forgive him or her or them. And in between, Jesus challenges the disciples to call sinners to repentance by way of rebuking.
This is no small matter since who doesn't sin. But it's especially falling on the heels of Jesus' teaching about causing little ones to sin.
And so Jesus urgently says, pay attention, forgive. And this is arresting and I think inspiring.
[7:16] So arresting and inspiring, Jesus' disciples then plead, increase our faith. I'm so grateful that his disciples made this plea, this petition to their Lord.

You know, every time I stand before you, before I begin the sermon, I pray from the Great Litany, if you don't know where it comes from, and I don't expect you to, but Almighty God, give us an increase of your grace.
Well, the disciples say, give us an increase of faith, which of course comes by grace, alone, through Scripture alone. What increases your faith then?
Jesus already shocked us enough, but an even bigger shock comes next. I don't think of the Jews, I don't know what you do, but as particularly greedy or covetous people like us in this age and day.
So Jesus' words are especially impactful when he then states, if you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, be uprooted and planted in the sea.
[8:28] And it would obey you. In other words, you don't need more faith, just faithfulness.

You don't need to think more or big. In fact, small, faithful, wonder is enough. The wonder of this faith.
And so the master teacher that Jesus is, he invokes this image of mustard seeds. I know we're not that familiar with them, but go ahead and go to your herb drawer or cabinet or whatever and just pull out a small seed or herb.
And then these mulberry trees. And this is the wonder of faith that Jesus wants to impress upon us.
And if our faith is true to its nature and the object of it, the subject, Jesus himself, and our faith is just like this little mustard seed, then the outcome will follow.
And so bigger isn't better when it comes to faith. Faith isn't heroic or courageous, but has just enough wonder to bring about the change and transformation that only can come by the grace given to us by Jesus.
[9:48] Jesus then follows this picture of mustard seed and mulberry tree with a parable. It's from faith, then, to service.

The work of service and fast. So sticking with the agricultural metaphor, Jesus then invokes the image of a farmer and a shepherd and a master. In either case, faith is like service or in the letter of James, not this James, but you know, the letter in the Bible.
James says, faith without works is dead. So the antidote to sin isn't morality or even maybe goodness because sin isn't just immorality.
Sin is the rejection of the service of the king and his realm. So faith is the antidote to sin. Jesus died on the cross to forgive us our sin and to free us for service of him and with him to his father.

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And the wonder of faith then leads us to the work of service for the glory of God. Our Lord is kind enough to share this expectation with us.
[11:03] So the farmer or the shepherd, whether in the field or the pasture or home, we take delight in this work that Jesus uses here to the duty that's actually given to us.

Jesus is showing us that as we move from sin to faith, we end with our purpose which is duty, which does delight the Lord.
And verse 10 reads this, we are unworthy servants. We have only done what is our duty. He's talking about as the servants kind of come in.
They've done their duty in the field but their duty actually isn't finished. There's more service to offer. This word duty, I don't know what it does for you. I tend to want to lead more towards delight than I do duty.
But it's a fantastic word. It comes from actually in our English language from the French language which means to do. That is not D-O but D-U-E that which is owing.
[12:10] In the Latin word it means that we have a debt. We have something that we owe so we actually give that back to the one in whom we're indebted. But in the Greek here it means actually that we are bound to do what we then actually do and have done.

It's quite a beautiful picture of this service, this work that we offer unto the Lord. So we don't work for a taskmaster or some kind of tyrannical ideologue but a gracious omnipotent creator who has prepared good works in advance for us to do.
We're saved for works already known to our ascended Lord that he has prepared. This is what Paul is on about in Ephesians chapter 2 verses 8 through 10.
You can look at that later. But these are our works of service in the name of Jesus. And that makes our service a grateful response to a gracious Savior to whom we owe our life because he gave up his for us.
So we move through this link of Jesus with sin and faith and service. There's this weight of sin this wonder of faith this work of service.
[13:37] Sin is weighty but faith is wonderful. But it doesn't stop there. It's just looking and longing for an expression to our Lord in service of him.

Grateful service. even as he commands us so we fulfill in those commands that he's given to us. So many of our colleagues in this prayer book use the word of service.
I won't go through all of them but I came across one when looking through this on Maundy Thursday which is really fitting when you think about service and the institution of communion and the great commandment and Jesus' act of service.
This is how this collect reads and will end with this. He's almighty and everlasting God by whose spirit the whole body of the church is governed and sanctified.
Receive our supplications and prayers which we offer before thee for all estates of men and women in thy holy church. that every member of the same in his and her vocation and ministry may truly and godly serve thee.
[14:58] Through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

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