

Sermon 2007 Pentecost 19 (Proper 22) Commitment Sunday
Text: Luke 17: 5-6
Theme: "I'll Have Mustard with That!"

Well, if you were here last week, you heard Bishop Pittelko suggest that if we are living sacrifices to God, then maybe we ought to have the ushers grab a real live person and carry him forward during the offering and place him on the altar. Gary Buhre volunteered me, but Warren nixed it because apparently our liability insurance doesn't cover the ushers' backs. Can you imagine what that would feel like if that were not a joke? To be physically lifted up and carried to the altar? I think of all kinds of emotions that might run through a person: shock, fear, anger, embarrassment.

I think that might have been what the Apostles were feeling in our Gospel for today. Jesus is speaking directly to them now. Earlier he had addressed the Pharisees in the parable of "the rich man and Lazarus" but now he has turned his attention specifically on the 12 Apostles.

Jesus said to his disciples: "Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin. So watch yourselves."

"If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him."

I think it seemed to them like too much to bear. Woe to people through whom comes sin. Forgive the same person seven times a day. And then later on he says that if you have done all of this you are just servants doing your duty and you don't get a merit badge! So the Apostles looked at Jesus and said,

"Increase our faith!"

Christianity is not for wimps and among Christians, Lutherans are the Marines. The responsibilities of being a faithful Lutheran Christian can be overwhelming. How do you eek out 28 hours in a 24 hour day to accomplish all that needs to be done in our homes, and in our church and still make enough money to put food on the table? How do we generate an extra \$15,000 for a new computer system and \$8,000 for a new phone system and still keep up our \$20,000 pledge to our English District, our \$12,000 pledge to the Seminaries and then begin to participate in the Synod wide plan to fund the Ablaze movement with Fan into Flame? When do we get to put our feet up and relax a little in all this? You know how the Apostles felt.

LORD! INCREASE OUR FAITH!

“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.”

How big is your faith? It doesn't really matter because Jesus says that the tiniest faith in the world can do utterly amazing things. He used the example of the mustard seed because that tiny little seed grew into a huge bush that birds could nest in. So whatever faith you have, God will use to accomplish far more than you suppose. One of our members once told me that she knew that her little \$20 a week didn't make any real difference. I reminded her that \$20 a week is over \$1000 a year and a \$1000 is huge! God can reach hundreds of children through Sunday School material with a thousand dollars! A thousand dollars buys new choir music for a whole year! A thousand dollars pays tuition for our seminarian for more than two weeks of classes. God can take what we deem as insignificant and grow it into amazing proportions, just like that tiny little mustard seed.

Today is Commitment Sunday – the day we place our sealed promises to God into that box as a sign of our faith in him and as

a symbol of our desire for him to grow us into powerful witnesses for him.

Today we pray that he would increase our faith that we may have the faith to set aside a faithful portion first, before we distribute any other money, time or talents that he gives us.

Today we pray that he would increase our faith so that we may have the will to sacrifice our own wants for the good of the Church and for ministry to our community and world.

Today we pray that he would increase our faith so that he may not see ourselves as entitled heirs but rather as cheerful servants who find our greatest joy in doing everything to serve our God and our fellow human beings.

But today we do more than **pray** that he would increase our faith. We receive all that we need for our faith to literally explode in all directions because the Baptismal waters have washed us clean of greed and gluttony. When those waters flowed over us, we received that which the Apostles only sought. They did not have the power of Baptism as we do. They prayed, "increase our

faith," and we have the faith for which they asked. The seed took root at our Baptism and now the plant is growing.

But not only that, they didn't have the Lord's Supper yet. Now we feast sumptuously like the rich man, receiving the very body and blood of our Lord. The Apostles could see him and hear him but they could not have him become physically and spiritually a literal part of them. We can and we do and we will in just a few moments.

It can seem overwhelming to follow Jesus, to walk on his difficult path, to strive for his seemingly impossible goals. We cry to him on this day that we are called to promise our faithfulness to him in our giving of time, talent and tithe. INCREASE OUR FAITH! He answers. Take. Eat. This is my body. Take. Drink. This is my blood. And now we are able to do ALL that he asks of us. AMEN.