

Gospel reflections for Sunday 6th October

[Luke 17:5-10](#)

Oh dear! Every so often a really difficult lectionary reading comes up that poses an enormous challenge to be able to sift through and work out what it is saying, both to the people then and to us now. We have one of those readings next Sunday!

To put this in context, a very quick dot point content summary of the passage itself:

- V5 Apostles request to Jesus to **increase their faith**
- V6 Jesus replies, if you had faith even as small as a mustard seed you could command a mulberry tree to uproot and replant itself in the sea!
(We may be more familiar with the parallel version from [Matthew's Gospel](#): "Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you")
- V7-9 Jesus tells a parable loaded with questions about how you would treat a servant
- V 10 Jesus makes a confusing conclusion: We are unworthy servants (we have only done our duty).

What do we make of all that?

My honest first reaction ... how can that passage be seriously put forward by the lectionary designers as a reading in the lectionary line up? Where is the Gospel in this story? Nevertheless, we acknowledge that here lies the value of having the discipline to rigidly stick with the allocated reading for the week and wrestle with it. This does two things:

1. It forces us out of our comfort zone to be challenged by the difficult and confusing sayings of Jesus.
2. The lectionary commitment reminds us of our connection to church, not just our church, LCA, but to Christian churches right across the world. Next Sunday this reading will be read in many different countries, languages, congregations and denominations, declaring our world-wide one-ness in the Gospel.

What makes this reading even more challenging is that the introduction to the chapter has been left out. Many critics feel that [verses 1-4](#) should have also been included.

When verses 1-10 are all bundled together, it is easy to think that this is indeed a real mish-mash, with lots of seemingly unrelated little segments. A few commentators have proposed that Luke, in writing his Gospel, had a whole lot of sticky notes listing things that he wanted to include. Then when he got to the end, he had quite a few left over with nowhere to put them, so he collected them together and shoved them into a couple of thinnish spots in chapter 16 and 17. I quite like the sense of humour in that line of thinking, but we must be disciplined and stay with what we have been dealt!

Out of all this, I want to leave you with just one thread of thinking to take with you ...

Jesus appears to give a rather harsh and blunt response to his disciples for making what seems like quite a fair and reasonable request ... **to increase their faith**.

Is it possible that Jesus is chastising them (and us) for even thinking that faith is quantifiable or comes in different sizes?

We have a tendency to try to turn faith into something complex, or something that we need to become an expert in, to strive for better and better levels, or to get more, more, more faith. (A bit like the western world's flawed economic growth obsessions?)

Jesus the master teacher uses outlandish extremes, even sarcasm to make his point. (It would be great if we could hear the tones and inflections and observe the body language in his comments. Maybe it was something like ...

'faith? -come on you blokes - you only need a tiny bit to move mountains!'

Perhaps Jesus is trying to prevent us from being obsessed with a measurable faith instead of having a dynamic faith in action. (*"How about genuinely looking out for others instead of being so obsessed with yourself!"*)

Support for this line of thinking comes from the fact that Eugene Peterson in *'The Message'* version of this passage, translates verse 6 as follows:

6 But the Master said, "You don't need more faith. There is no 'more' or 'less' in faith."

Perhaps we are also being prepared for the climax of what happens from the very next verse in chapter 16 – *The healing of the ten lepers*, which is arguably the most profound story in the whole of the New Testament!

... but you will have to wait for next week's edition to see how that unfolds and links in!

So for us in our schools ... strong encouragement once more to keep it simple. Let's celebrate that our simple faith has already set us free!

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