

There is so much to be thankful for in this life. This evening as we take a break from our preparations for the big day tomorrow, I want to give us something to think about as regards our relationship with God, the one to whom we give thanks for everything.

## OPENING PRAYER

### READ Luke 17:1-10

Jesus said to his disciples, “Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come! <sup>2</sup> It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin. <sup>3</sup> Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, <sup>4</sup> and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive him.” <sup>5</sup> The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!” <sup>6</sup> And the Lord said, “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.” <sup>7</sup> “Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come at once and recline at table’? <sup>8</sup> Will he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink’? <sup>9</sup> Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? <sup>10</sup> So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.’”

In this passage there are three metaphors or images which help us to understand our relationship with God. I want to talk about these things and how they apply to our day to day walk with God.

The first metaphor Jesus gave us was the “**millstone.**” Listen again to what he said: **Luke 17:1-3a: “Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come! <sup>2</sup> It would be better for him if a MILLSTONE were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin. Pay attention to yourselves!”**

When Jesus said, “**Temptations to sin are sure to come,**” he was not talking about the usual things, things like drunkenness, stealing, and adultery. Rather, he was talking about the more allusive sin of hypocrisy.

Hypocrisy is to say one thing but do another, as if I were to say something like, “You all should be kind to your family members tomorrow, even those you find irritating,” and then go home and pick a fight with my dad.

In the context of faith, hypocrisy can lead those who are weak in faith astray. Jesus said it would be better if a person who did this, tied a millstone around his neck and went swimming!

Jesus said, **“Pay attention to yourselves!”** In the Greek, **“pay attention”** is also translated, **“Take heed!”** **“Be careful!”** or **“Watch out!”** Jesus wants us to understand that we need to treat this matter of our brother’s and sister’s relationship to God very seriously.

Jesus said earlier, **Luke 6:41-42, “Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye.”**

Jesus called it a **“log”** is because we usually need outside assistance to remove it. It’s that big! So what’s your log? I was reminded of a log I had in my own eye awhile back by a brother in the faith, and I had to confess I hadn’t seen it. Indeed, sometimes we need another person’s objectivity and willingness to say, **“Hey, you’re screwing up. ‘Pay attention to yourself.’”**

Of course, it’s all very painful to receive help from another person in removing a log from one’s eye. But we cannot see anything otherwise! And if we cannot see, then we cannot recognize the path the Lord is trying to lead us down. And, alas, we just might go the wrong way.

This is probably the most important teaching about how we can avoid hypocrisy: That we would see our own sin and get after it. If we’re busy taking care of our own problems we won’t have time to judge others.

Jesus’ second metaphor is the **“mustard seed.”** He said, **Luke 17:3b-6, “If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him,<sup>4</sup> and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him.”<sup>5</sup> The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!”<sup>6</sup> And the Lord said, “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."**

We've probably heard about "**mustard seed**" faith countless times. Unfortunately, it is rarely applied to Jesus' teaching about forgiveness, which is the context of this passage. Again, Jesus said, "**If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him.**" And then the 12 said, "**Increase our faith!**" For they knew they did not have it in their hearts to rebuke and forgive as the Lord had instructed them, that it would take more than will power to do this.

It's not easy to rebuke a brother or sister in Christ. We can hurt them if we're not careful. But I think it's helpful that this instruction follows the Lord's teaching about hypocrisy, for we don't want to be hypocrites, but we don't want to be silent either. To rebuke a fellow believer requires wisdom, love, and faith, faith like a mustard seed.

The mustard seed is a great image concerning faith, for it is the tiniest of seeds, and yet it grows into a great bush. So too our faith begins very small, even as small as a baptized child's heart. But as that faith is nourished with the proclamation of Jesus' death and resurrection, as it's strengthened with the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper, it becomes a force, a power that changes the world!

Jesus said, "**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,**" Just to be clear, it was not Christ's intention that we fill up the sea with mulberry trees! But He's using picture language to describe how powerful our faith can be, so powerful we will even be able to forgive each other for our sins. Indeed, a world filled with people who have been forgiven would be far more interesting than an ocean full of mulberry trees!

Our first image was the **millstone**, which was the Lord's admonition to avoid hypocrisy.

Our second image was the **mustard seed**, which means we should pray for faith, even a little faith, a mustard seed faith, that we might walk with the Lord and have the courage to hold our fellow Christians accountable.

Jesus' third metaphor was a "**servant.**" He said, **Luke 17:7-10, "Will any one of you who has a SERVANT plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and recline at table'?<sup>8</sup> Will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and SERVE me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink'?**<sup>9</sup> Does he thank the SERVANT because he did what was

**commanded? <sup>10</sup> So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy SERVANTS; we have only done what was our duty.'"**

Jesus was saying that his message was for everyone, great and small, that we are all servants of God. This doesn't come naturally for us. Even our first parents, Adam and Eve, rejected the idea they served God.

But I like the idea of being God's servant for a couple of reasons. For one thing, it means I don't have to figure everything out. God does all the heavy lifting, and I just follow his orders. And it also means God has personally taken responsibility for taking care of me. That's what masters do.

I'm so thankful to God for all his gifts. He's given us homes and families, work and school, friends and teachers, cars, bikes, shopping malls, amusement parks, and ice cream. And He's given us a great country.

And God has given us Jesus to remove our shame and renew our hearts.

Let us consider our lives in Christ according to the **MILLSTONE**, which represents our lives lived without hypocrisy. Let us think about our lives according to the **MUSTARD SEED**, a faith that grows every day in the power of forgiveness. And let us think about ourselves as **SERVANTS**, servants of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, building up the Kingdom of God day by day, by the grace of God.

This week may our hearts be filled with thankfulness for all the gifts God has given us, our families and friends and our country.

This week may we take to heart Christ's teachings about a millstone, a mustard seed, and about servanthood for the sake of our walk with God and one another.

And this week may you have the opportunity to share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.