



Oct 6, 2019 Luke 17:5-10 & Hab. 1: 2-3, 2: 2-4

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Fr. Robert Beck ([subscription](#))

Stone, Naomi [In the Light of Faith](#)

Rolheiser, Fr. Ron. [Thinking Small](#)

[Monastery Sunday Homilies](#) 10/2/16

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ENTERING THE SCENE:

In the ancient Middle-Eastern world every family, even relatively poor ones, had at least one servant. The very poorest families gave some of their children to other families as servants to ensure that they would be fed. The master in this parable apparently has only one servant who both tends the fields and does the cooking. The thrust of the story is clear and straightforward. Good servants do what they are told. A master never has to thank a servant for doing what was expected.

Pilch, John J. [The Cultural World of Jesus-Cycle C](#). Collegeville, MN. The Liturgical Press. 1997. . [Page 146](#).

Luke 17:5-10

5 The apostles said to the Lord, "**Increase our faith!**"

6 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. 7 Suppose one of you had a **servant plowing or looking after the sheep**. Would he say to the **servant** when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and **sit down to eat**'? 8 Would he not rather say, '**Prepare my supper**, get yourself ready and **wait on me** while I **eat and drink**; after that you may **eat and drink**'? 9 Would he **thank the servant** because **he did what he was told to do**? 10 So you also, when you have **done everything you were told to do**, should say, 'We are **unworthy servants**; we have **only done our duty**.'"

DISCUSSION QUESTION: The disciples were staggering under what seems like an impossible task. They pleaded to have their faith increased. When was the last time you also pleaded for more faith?

PRAYER: Brother Jesus, you never shielded the disciples from the real cost of following you. They remembered their struggle to persevere in this story. Then you added that almost impossible requirement that they should do what they do because it is their duty and not to expect extra applause because they fulfilled their roles. No one could ever say you lead them down some garden path. Now you give me the secret of how to do the same as they did. Help me as I press on. Amen.

WORD STUDY AND QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

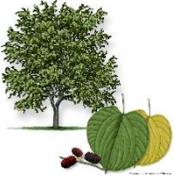
INCREASE OUR FAITH: The disciples were just challenged with forgiving seven times a day. This followed several teachings about how tough it would be to live in this world if they followed his teachings.

How do you deal with people who need forgiving over and over? Would you also plead for more faith as they did?



SMALL AS A MUSTARD SEED: In times past it was popular to imbed the very tiny mustard seed in resin and use it as a key chain or necklace ornament. It was so small that it looked like a grain of pepper that was ground very small.

Does your ability to believe and live within that belief ever feel like a speck of pepper at times? Do you then pray for more faith like the disciples in our text?



MULBERRY TREE: From this tiny seed grows a large tree that has heart shaped leaves and an extensive large root system.

How can this text help grow the faith you have now into something larger? What effect does it have on your heart? Is your faith firmly rooted?

UPROOTED: Jesus consoles the anxious disciples by teaching a tiny bit of faith can have tremendous power. *Does this give you confidence? Has there been anything lately that has had the power to uproot your growing faith?*

PLANTED: In other translations the word transplanted is used here. This is a strange teaching. How can a tree survive in the sea? Jesus does not say thrown into the sea, he says planted in the sea. *Does this challenge to forgive endlessly have the same kind of paradoxical power for you? Is there anything that has to be 'uprooted' in order for you to attempt this challenge?*

SEA: The sea was a mysterious place for people of the bible. They imagined it to harbor monsters and be a bottomless entity. If a ship went down, they thought it fell forever. *What makes the sea a good metaphor this teaching of endless forgiveness? Does it feel like a bottomless pit full of monsters when you have to deal with the need to forgive over and over again?*

SERVANT: One of the deepest-rooted beliefs in Jesus' day was the belief that God rewards the good and punishes the bad. There were precisely worked out formulas for how often a person had to be forgiven. This assumes that the person deciding had god-like wisdom in order to evaluate the situation in question. *Does accepting the fact that in comparison with God we are but servants, help you deal with this challenge? Do you welcome this designation?*

PLOWING / LOOKING AFTER THE SHEEP: This servant has had a full day of hard work. *Does this ever feel like your faith life? Does the mustard seed teaching help you to persevere?*

SIT DOWN AND EAT: Jesus engages the disciples in this hypothetical situation by asking a question. No one would expect a master to ask the servant to sit down and eat before the master was taken care of. Yet in 12:37 the returning master does just this. *Does this confuse you? What point is this teaching making that warrants this apparent contradiction?*

PREPARE MY SUPPER: The role of the servant is to serve, and preparing the supper was just part of the duties. *In what ways have you 'prepared' supper for the Lord today?*

WAIT ON ME: Jesus teaches that God only expects that we recognize our abilities to respond. *What is the spontaneous response of the person who fully recognizes this truth?*

EAT AND DRINK: Eating and drinking are features so often in Jesus' parables. *What makes this everyday reality so good for teaching?*

THANK: Keeping things straight in our faith life is often challenging. We feel like children that need a reward for behaving, or getting extra pay for making our beds. *How do you act like a child needing rewards for just doing what is needed?*

DID WHAT HE WAS TOLD TO DO: The servant was only carrying out the orders of the master.

How does this truth help you to live in right relationship with God?

DONE EVERYTHING YOU WERE TOLD TO DO: Once the orders were fulfilled no special recognition needed.

In your relationship with God, are you able to live in comfort with this truth? If so, what enables you to do this?

UNWORTHY: Doing what is expected of us does not obligate God or make us ‘worthy’.

How do you feel about this parable? How would you explain it to a child?

ONLY DONE OUR DUTY: Only an honest self-appraisal can keep us aware of who is God and who we are.

Does this honesty liberate or imprison you? Would you have to be confident of God’s unconditional love in order to appreciate this teaching?

PARALLEL TEXTS: Lk. 17:6 // Mt. 21:21; Mk. 11:23;

OTHER TEXTS OF THE WEEK: Hab. 1:2-3; 2: 2-4; [Ps. 95:1-2, 6-9](#); 2 Tim. 1:6-8, 13-14; Lk. 17: 5-10;

Revised Common Lectionary: Lam. 1:1-6; [Ps. 137](#); 2 Tim. 1:1-14; Lk. 17: 5-10;

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION:

Faith is more a breaking-through, which then allows you to hold on – precisely because now Someone is holding on to you!

Pg. 121. Richard Rohr: The Naked Now

Most people think having faith means "to believe in Jesus." But, "to share in the faith of Jesus" is a much richer concept. It is not so much an invitation as it is a cosmic declaration about the very shape of reality. By myself, I don't know how to have faith in God, but once we know that Jesus is the corporate stand in for everybody, we know we have already been taken on the ride through death and back to life. All we can do now is make what is objectively true fully conscious for us. We are all participating in Jesus' faith walk with varying degrees of resistance and consent. Richard Rohr

Faith is a state of gratefully allowing the arrival of the future to carry us, and the universe along with us, deeper into the heart of infinite being, goodness, truth, and beauty—that is, into God. John Haught Pg 10 Teilhard Studies Fa. 2015

Bruce Malina explains that in the ancient Mediterranean world “faith” primarily describes loyalty and commitment to another person.

A faithful person is a reliable person, one who manifests enduring personal loyalty or personal faithfulness “no matter what.” In other words, faith can be viewed as a social glue that binds people together in this world.

I believe that faith might be precisely that ability to trust the Big River of God's providential love, which is to trust the visible embodiment (the Son), the flow (the Holy Spirit), and the source itself (the Father). This is a divine process that we don't have to change, coerce, or improve. We just need to allow it and enjoy it. Richard Rohr

Faith is not a storm cellar to which men and women can flee for refuge from the storms of life. It is, instead, an inner force that gives them the strength to face those storms and their consequences with serenity of spirit. Sam J. Ervin, Jr

The only conclusion I have ever been able to reach is that we must pray God to increase our faith, a faith without which one cannot love or hope. 'Lord believe, help though my unbelief.'-Dorothy Day

“Tradition is the living faith of the dead; traditionalism is the dead faith of the living.” Jaroslav Pelikan

"The atheism of today is the stubborn refusal of a wounded self against calling out from the darkness of a choked-up heart for the God who is always greater than the God of popular concepts and religion." - Karl Rahner

Humble yourself and cease to care what others think. A meek person is not a human mouse afflicted with a sense of his own inferiority. Rather, he has stopped being fooled about himself. He knows well that the world will never see him as God sees him and he has stopped caring. He has obtained a place of soul rest. The old struggle to defend himself is over. A. W. Tozer

Faith is without reservation and free from self-centered reluctance. ...In all cases, faith amounts to giving one's heart, not just lending it; and this given "heart" is all that we have, and all that we are.

Laude, Patrick. *The Mustard Seed and the Mountain*. Parabola. Sp. 2007. pgs. 8-9.

Those who make a promise that they can keep only many years later, or over a whole life, have to retain their identity if they are to meet the promise. Wolfhart Pannenberg

The Gospel reading also presents the theme of faith, here compared to the proverbial mustard seed. Even a tiny amount will permit great things to happen. Such as having a mulberry tree transplanted into the sea (should that be necessary). The parable that follows is a troublesome one, however. It speaks of the master expecting the servant to serve dinner first, and eat his own meal later. We are uncomfortable with biblical endorsements of social class differences. And we do not like to have Jesus talk about bossing servants around. If, indeed, that is what is happening here. Actually, the point would seem to be that the disciple is in no position to make claims on God. Meeting the demands of discipleship is no more than one's duty. Here we have come fairly close to St. Paul's notion of faith without works. It means we cannot place God in a position of debt, owing us something. In that sense, we cannot be said to earn our salvation. It is a gift. Faith, rather than works of the law, allows our salvation. A virtuous life is more of an act of gratitude than a purchase of eternal life. Fr. Robert Beck. *Witness*. 10/7/07

Faith is not simple acquiescence to an abstract dogma or teaching. It is an experience of Christ that leads one to make this dogma or teaching one's own, to appropriate it personally. It is not something that can be imposed, however subtly, from without. It must be vital and free, something understood and interpreted in the depths of one's being according to the gifts within which one has been graced, according to one's vocation and limitations. A faith that is not rooted in a deep interior conviction is not a living faith. We may not "feel" what we want to believe; we may even have surface doubts; but there is a core conviction that gives meaning to our existence, without which all would become an obscene joke.

Ryan, Jerry. *Why I Stay Catholic: The Bonds of Belief & Friendship*. Commonweal 2/23/07 Pg. 16.

The Hindu/Catholic mystic, Raimon Panikkar tells us that "*to understand is not just to get the meaning but to stand-under the spell of the 'thing' so understood.*" The meaning of a belief becomes harmless when it doesn't hold you under its spell, so to speak. Belief here can be seen as an action or an experience that touches us at the core of our being in such a way that we have no other recourse than to resound, reverberate, live and expand.

Raimon Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being: The Unbroken Trinity*. (Orbis: 2010), p. 266

There lives more faith in honest doubt than in half the creeds. Alfred Tennyson

Only faith truly understands history. Donald Goergen, O.P.

Faith always invites us to a new place that we're not quite familiar with. Pg. 20.

Rohr, Richard. *Simplicity: the Art of Living*. NY, Crossroad. 1992.

We act in faith – and miracles occur. In consequence, we are tempted to make the miracles the ground for our faith. The cost of such weakness is that we lose the confidence of faith. Faith is, faith creates, faith carries. It is not derived from, nor created, nor carried by anything except its own reality. Hammarskjöld

The rope over the abyss is held taut by those who, faithful to a faith which is the perpetual ultimate sacrifice, give it anchorage in Heaven. Hammarskjöld

The universe doesn't tell me to believe in God, but once I believe in God, the universe tells me a lot about God – the abundance, the exuberance, the fecundity of it all. Aileen O'Donoghue (Physics professor)

We too often forget that faith is a matter of questioning and struggle before it becomes one of certitude and peace. You have to doubt and reject everything else in order to believe firmly in Christ, and after you have begun to believe, your faith itself must be tested and purified. Christianity is not merely a set of forgone conclusions. Faith tends to be defeated by the burning presence of God in mystery, and seeks refuge from him, flying to comfortable social forms and safe convictions in which purification is no longer an inner battle but a matter of outward gesture." - Thomas Merton

Today's Gospel teases us even more: "If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this sycamore tree, 'Be uprooted and transplanted into the sea,' and it would obey you" (Lk. 17:6). The statement so intimidates us that we are left wondering whether we have any faith at all. Or it might puff us up with a greater sense of faith than is real.

And then, as if to compound our confusion, the Gospel presents us with a picture of faith that makes faith plodding and servile. It describes a servant returning from a day in the fields. The servant doesn't get any medals for those efforts. Instead he has to set the master's table and serve it. The punch line seems severe: "When you have done all you have been commanded to do, say, 'We are useless servants. We have done no more than our duty'" (Lk. 17: 10). No room for complaints here, and no inertia either.

The fact is that faith takes us through turns and twists. We keep ourselves going in faith in a variety of ways. Sometimes we re-tell ourselves the vision. Sometimes we keep ourselves helpless and small. Sometimes, as in the Gospel, we prod ourselves along with the sense of grinding duty. The scenario of faith shifts in each case.

This should not be surprising or embarrassing. Divine faith mirrors the rhythms of human faith. In the latter, we have different ways to keep ourselves going. Marriages move forward with this kind of dynamic. So does education. So do businesses. They all take vision; they all demand a frank admission of where needs exist; they all call for courage and uncomplaining work. But not at the same time. The art is not to get bogged down in any one part of the total process. We may not end up saying, "Hey, how did that sycamore tree end up over there in the sea?" But we may be surprised at what the full process of faith does in our lives. GEORGE MC CAULEY, S. J.

I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen – not only because I see it, but because by it, I see everything else. C. S. Lewis

Faith begins with a recognition that there exists uncertainty of any knowledge. Deciding that something is true always involves a certain level of uncertainty. . . . Steven L. Peck

When it comes to faith, what a living, creative, active, powerful thing it is. It cannot do other than good at all times. It never waits to ask whether there is some good work to do, rather, before the question is raised, it has done the deed, and keeps on doing it.

-Martin Luther

Faith is reinterpreted not as blind belief in this or that system of knowledge, but as an intuition to be followed by a commitment to look, to investigate. Amit Goswami

The humblest person you know is not the person who lives a timid life but the person who lives a life that constantly acknowledges its limits, its vulnerability, its interconnectedness, and its radical incarnate character. Rolheiser, Ronald. The Shattered Lantern. Pg. 130.

There is a delightful story about the humility of a rabbi, a Pharisee and a synagogue janitor. On the solemn Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, the rabbi stood up in a synagogue and performed penitential services. He struck his breast and confessed three times, "*I am nothing, I am nothing, I am nothing.*" Then the Pharisee proclaimed in a solemn tone, "*I am nothing, I am nothing, I am nothing.*" A poor humble janitor, observing their penitence, also struck his breast and with downcast eyes he said, "*I am nothing, I am nothing, I* Lk 17:5–6: Saying concerning faith (Mt 17.19–21; Mk 9.28–29). 5: Faith (Gk "pistis"; Heb "emunah"). 6: Mustard seed, see 13.19. 17.7–10: Service without desire for reward. 7: Would say to your slave, see 14.11n. 10: What we ought to have done, obedience as a duty, but see 12.35–38. Compare m. Avot 1.3: "Be not like slaves that serve the master for the sake of a reward . . ." Pg. 136. [The Jewish Annotated New Testament](#)

It's Too Early To Quit

It's always too early to quit.

Edison proved that in his laboratory.

Earth, being dug, often reveals a seed ready to sprout. Hasty ending to aborted beginning. In a survival of the fittest, love is strong. Sometimes it needs a fallow period, to gain strength, to become richer, to rest, not quit, not be forgotten. Love needs to be thought, to be evaluated, and then a sorting out, a separation of parts. The pruned tree often looks dead but the life is not in the appearance, But in the hidden spark that didn't quit. Adele Allen Grana, Janice, Ed. [Images](#). Winona, MN. St. Mary's College Press. 1976. TOO EARLY TO QUIT: Page 84

SUGGESTED READINGS:

Links to all the books mentioned in this guide are on The Ark web site: www.theark1.com

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle B 2012.. Pgs. 170-17

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle B 2007.168-172.

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle B 2010. Pgs.143-146.

Mitchell, Stephen. The Enlightened Heart. NY. Harper & Row. 1989. THREE THINGS: Page 17. TRUTH: Pg. 37. LOVE OF GOD: Pg. 68

White, William R. Stories For the Telling. Minneapolis, MN. Augsburg Pub. House, 1986. THE COBBLER AND THE KING: Page 83F.

Life is made of many perspectives.

It is important to investigate as many as we can.

This is as true in the physical world
as it is in the mental and spiritual world,
in fact,
in all aspects of existence.

If we approach life with truly open eyes,
we can widen our perspective and see more
and understand more
and the more we understand,
the more we can love.

The more compassion we have
the more peace we can find.

Suddenly,
in a single touch,
we find the entire universe,
the entire universe,
exactly where it has always been.

Love,
John



Handout for week of 9/30/19 Luke 17:5-10 & Hab. 1: 2-3, 2: 2-4

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Hab, 1: **1** The burden which Habakkuk the prophet did see. **2** How long, O LORD, shall I cry, and Thou wilt not hear? I cry out unto Thee of violence, and Thou wilt not save. **3** Why dost Thou show me iniquity, and beholdest mischief? And why are spoiling and violence before me? so that there is strife, and contention ariseth. **4** Therefore the law is slacked, and right doth never go forth; for the wicked doth beset the righteous; therefore right goeth forth perverted.

2: 1 I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will look out to see what He will speak by me, and what I shall answer when I am reprov'd. **2** And the LORD answered me, and said: 'Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that a man may read it swiftly. **3** For the vision is yet for the appointed time, and it declareth of the end, and doth not lie; though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not delay.' **4** Behold, his soul is puffed up, it is not upright in him; but the righteous shall live by his faith.

COMMENTARY:

Sometimes a “hidden” reading joins the Sunday lectionary. Like an uninvited guest, an implied text looms in the background. Today is one of those days. And the surprise guest is the letter to the Romans, with its teaching on faith and law.

The book of Habakkuk (Ha-BAK-kuk) appears only once among the Sunday readings.

Nor is it quoted much in the New Testament—just three times (Romans 1:17; Gal 3:11; Hebrews 10:38). And in each case the quoted line is “The just man, because of his faith, shall live” (Hab 2:2). These citations are big, however. And for Romans this is especially true, since Paul uses the verse to state the letter’s theme. And to some degree this is true of Galatians as well—a letter that might be viewed as a first draft for Romans.

A dialogue between the prophet and God begins the book of Habakkuk. Today’s liturgical selection includes the first question and the second answer. The opening question seems standard prophetic fare, complaining about God’s willingness to put up with disorder and injustice in Israel. How long, O Lord?

God’s first answer tells Habakkuk not to worry. Things are being taken care of. The Babylonians (also known as Chaldeans) are being sent. They will clean things up rather briskly. God’s answer spells out the cruel savagery for which they were known. “See, I am raising up Chaldea, that bitter and unruly people.” Leopards, wolves, and eagles, raptors all, contribute imagery for describing their violence.

In the prophet’s opinion this is not so good. The cure would appear to be worse than the disease. So Habakkuk objects, strenuously. Commentators suggest that this may be the first time in scripture that the ways of God are so seriously questioned.

And now the second answer arrives, included in today’s reading. It is the verse that provides Paul with his quote. “The just man, because of his faith, shall live.” For Habakkuk it seems to be making the point that the virtuous will survive the coming judgment, if their faith is maintained. God will make sure they are spared the harsh reckoning that Babylon threatens.