



Big Problems, Tiny Seeds– Touchpoint for October 1, 2025

Luke 17:5-10 (NRSVUE)

The apostles said to the Lord, “increase our faith.” ⁶The Lord replied, “If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.”

⁷ “Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field, ‘Come here at once and take your place at the table?’ ⁸Would you rather not say to him, prepare supper for me, put on your apron and serve me while I eat and drink; later you may eat and drink?’ ⁹Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded? ¹⁰So, you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, ‘We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!’”

Grace to you from the Mystery in whom we live and breathe and have our being.

“Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.”

Today, if a modern Jesus used this example of slaves and masters to make his point, there might be a consensus from “both sides” that Jesus’ ought to be canceled. Maybe even fired!

But how do you fire, cancel or silence a person who has no investment or attachment to systems created by humans? And how would you marginalize someone who already lives on the margins?

To hear Jesus speak on obedience using a hypothetical example of slaves obeying their masters is disturbing. Some might say, “well that’s just the way things were back then.”

Are you ok with that? I’m not ok with Jesus portrayed as casually giving in to the cultural norms of that time. He was after all a radical whose message transcended time. Jesus was unafraid to flip tables or flip the scripts of the political and social structures of the world.

Yet, here Jesus is, using a slave scenario as an example for his question, “what would you rather say to your slaves, drag your weary bodies in and cook us a meal or please come join us at the table for a meal?

The preference to be served first and lavishly has transcended human nature for all generations. We still struggle with the question of, “what would you rather do.”

Jesus knew what his listeners would rather do. He knows what we would rather do.

Today, I suspect Jesus would be getting it from “both sides.”

The phrase “both sides” should be removed from our dialogue. Any system that divides us according to a system of hierarchy by wealth, power or fame is not part of the kingdom of heaven, it is a kingdom of this world. Baptism is a symbol of entry into a fresh new kingdom. Yet we linger in the old. Jesus did not linger in those systems.

That is why this passage on slaves and masters bothers me. Jesus would make clear his true feelings about slavery without hypotheticals and parables.

For example, the gospel writers quote Jesus saying, "If anyone would be first, he must be last."

So why does it appear Jesus is ok with the masters choosing to be served?

What happened to the Jesus who flipped the formula for those who want greatness, success and God's favor? Here, Jesus asks the masters, "what would you rather do?"

Every system created by man creates a hierarchy they become loyal to. In religion we call them traditions. In government we call them laws. In civil religion Jesus calls it hypocrisy at best and blasphemy at worst.

Jesus asked a very real question to the masters. He said, "Would you rather have them eat with you or serve your every need after working in your fields?"

I doubt it wasn't even their frame of understanding to say, "wait Jesus are you telling us to make our slaves cook and serve a meal for us after they have worked in the field. That doesn't seem right."

To pushback on Jesus would not have even been in their periphery! But we know better. It's right in our face and in Jesus's many other words to us. What's our excuse for today's disparities?!

Our mentor Jesus did not and does not belong to any of our systems. He served only one master. He was indebted to no one. He did not claim his birth right, his healing power or his heavenly wealth for preferred seating at anyone's hierarchical table.

When Jesus did address his position and the hierarchy of the past and present cultures, he said,

"If anyone would be first, they must be last of all and servant to all." (Mark 9:35), and
"I no longer call you slaves, but friends." Mark 15:15

Jesus referenced slaves once to make an unrelated point in this story and no more. I'll consider his body of work on compassion.

Today we are hearing philosophies supporting cultural hierarchy which is directly against the teaching of Jesus.

We hear, "well there must be winners and losers. It's the way order is kept." Hmm Not familiar with that Jesus passage.

Or this one,

"we need to go back to the way things were."

First our nation would not exist. The church at that time spanned many nations and cities with only one common allegiance. It was not a flag, or political system, or status at the table among servants. It was the teachings of Jesus who was indebted to no one, not even the tribe of his origin.

I agree we do not want to contribute to the present cultural wars. The only way to do this is for people to give up their horizontal sides and let people eat with you. The table prepared for us in this desert of divisiveness where Jesus followers dine with each other and welcome all. Where there are no longer slaves and masters, Jews or Gentiles, male nor female.

Where we take the first exit off the highway of, “this is the way we’ve always done it” and find a more heavenly way.

I know these times are depressing and feel hopeless, but this is where the opening verses in today’s text come in.

The disciples want Jesus to expand their faith to live in their circumstances. They think as we do faith is a mental state. It is not. It is action taken in the face of great fear and doubt. Planting a ridiculously small seed and expecting a tree without any prior experience of trees takes an act of faith. That’s what we need now to counter the kingdoms of this world. Millions of people plant small seeds of tree growing faith.

I’m still not ok with Jesus using the slave analogy. Maybe someone will enlighten me.

Nevertheless, I will answer the question, “what would you rather say?” Come to the table that the master has set for us in the wilderness of our present distress and feelings of inadequacy or give homilies. Please join me at the table the master has set for us!

Amen

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Song

Be Still

(London Fox Taize Choir)
Be Still, know that I am God.

Create in Me

(The Concordia Choir)

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence and take not the holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation and uphold me with thy free spirit.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

In the Arms of God

(Tony Alonso, Marty Haugen, Michael Joncas)

Refrain: Come and rest in the arms of God. Leave your worry and fear. Make your home in the heart of God. God will dry every tear. For the burden you carry will fade within God's care. Come and rest in the arms of God.

1) Gentle is God's way and humble is God's heart. God's love will light the way that leads to peace. Surely you shall see God's goodness and God's grace. Rest now in God's embrace. *Refrain*

2) Do not be afraid. God heals the broken heart. Through grief and disbelief God still remains. God and God alone will be your souls true rest. Fall in the arms of God.

Refrain

3) You are not alone, for God is always near. Come place your doubt and fear within God's care. God will give you rest, and soothe your weary soul. Dwell in the heart of God.

Refrain

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer

(Robert Stone, The Cambridge Singers, John Rutter)

Benediction

A Celtic Blessing

(Margaret Rizza)

The guarding of the God of Life be on you, the guarding of loving Christ be on you,
the guarding of the Holy Spirit be on you, to aid and uphold you each day and night of your life.
The guarding of God, the guarding of Christ, the guarding of the Spirit be upon you.

AMEN