

## Proper 22, Year C

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Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4

Psalm 37:1-10

2 Timothy 1:1-14

Luke 17:5-10

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

"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'? Would you not rather 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'? Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded? So 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!'"

Luke 17:5-10

Today we hear a most peculiar teaching from Jesus, which deserves a most peculiar sermon. Be forewarned: as we wrestle with the words of Jesus today, I am going to ask you to *do* something. Rather than sitting and listening like the "frozen chosen," I am going to ask you to get up, move around, interact, and experience the grace of God firsthand. If you'll trust me and play along, I think we'll have a little fun and learn something good along the way.

First, though, I want to ask our friend Tom Coogle, chairman of this year's Stewardship Committee, to come forward and say a few words.

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Good morning. Lately I've been thinking about how much time I spend on the things that really matter: on my church, on my family, on our God. To be honest, I've been spending most of my time on work (and some fun) but very little time on the *good* stuff . . . the stuff that really matters. Actually, I think God has been trying to tell me it's time I learned to *let go* a little.

It wasn't too long ago that I called a stewardship meeting, and I got so busy that day that I forgot to *attend* that meeting! As you can imagine, it was embarrassing and bothered me, but then I continued on as I had been . . . very busy, never attempting to slow down. I guess you could say I'm a touch hard headed. So the way I see it, God came after me recently with a series of illnesses *forcing* me to lay around for nearly two weeks. I soon had no choice but to *stop*, and *rest*, and *let go* of all of the things I needed or wanted to do. And wouldn't you know it . . . most

of that stuff I thought was so urgent didn't turn out to be all that urgent after all. All I really wanted during that time was my wife, my kids, my church, and my God.

Fall is here, and that means stewardship season is here. We're busy with our lives: our families, our businesses, our harvests, and all the good things that come with this time of year. But let's not forget that as we reap God's blessings, we must also give back to him from whom all blessings flow.

This week you will receive your pledge card in the mail, and I hope you'll take time to slow down, count your blessings, and decide how you will continue to support the good work that God is doing here at St. Anne's. Just remember: it is in giving of ourselves—in *letting go*—that we discover what matters most and receive God's greatest blessings. Thank you.

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Thank you, Tom. I want to honor Tom for what he just said and how he just said it because I imagine nearly everyone in this room can identify. I doubt there's a soul here today who doesn't understand what it's like to be over-worried, over-anxious, over-busy, over-burdened, over-committed, over-taxed, and overwhelmed. We know what it's like to get caught up in that cycle, and all of a sudden all the things that matter most just start whizzing by. Before we know it, it feels like there's just not enough: not enough money, not enough help, not enough time. That's the toxic soup *everyone's* swimming in these days, and it does not feel good.

I said earlier that today's Gospel lesson is peculiar, but the truth is it only feels that way because Jesus is hitting us right where we live. Like the rest of us, those apostles thought they didn't have enough. They looked at Jesus and cried out, "More! Lord, give us more! We need more faith! We don't know what we're doing! *We don't have enough!*" Jesus turns, looks at them, and says, "You idiots. Don't you know? You *have* it. You have everything you need. You have *more* than enough! In the words of the Hebrew poet Shia LeBeouf, 'Just *do* it!'"

From there it's easy to get tangled up in the other stuff he says about living like a "worthless slave," but his point is simple and clear. He is saying that when you are a Christian, you do not give of yourself because you expect something in return. You give of yourself because the Lord is your God, and with him there is *always* enough.

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Now, I told you at the beginning that I was going to ask you to do something today, and here it is. I want us to see what it's like when we actually *give* more than we receive; when we decide to *let go* of what we have; when we act as though we believe *there is enough*.<sup>1</sup>

I have in my hands a set of bookmarks, printed with the blessing I say at the end of every service. They don't look like much, but today these bookmarks represent great riches, and I assure you there are "enough." Think of them as hundred dollar bills. Or maybe they're human

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<sup>1</sup> The exercise used here comes from Law, Eric H. F. *Holy Currencies: Six Blessings for Sustainable Missional Ministries*. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2013. 16-17.

resources, volunteers, or people-power. Or perhaps they represent time, faith, or the other fleeting intangibles we always worry we don't have enough of.

Right now I'm going to give these precious riches to two or three people here in the congregation. They now have them all. If we were to stick to our worldly way of thinking—if, like the apostles, we were to believe there isn't enough—then these two or three people would be smart to hoard these bookmarks and keep all the riches for themselves. But today, we're going to trust in the way of Jesus. We're going to live differently. We're going to *let go*.

To you who have received these bookmarks—these riches—I want you to trust that there *is* enough, and I want you to *give them away*. As for the rest of you, if you receive any portion from these three people, I want *you* to turn around and give them away, too. For all of us in this room, there is one simple rule:

Give them away, until you have less.

Go.

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*Quickly, the bookmarks begin to be given away, and the process inevitably turns into a game. As one person receives a bookmark, he or she gives it away to another, who also gives it away. People laugh as they try in vain to stay empty handed, always receiving from someone else. Typically, the bookmarks end up fairly evenly distributed throughout the congregation. Because the exercise has no natural ending point, the leader calls it to a close.*

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How was that? What did you notice? It was *fun*, right? See, when we trust there is enough—when we decide to *let go* instead of holding tight—it becomes a joy to give. And it never ends, does it? In God's economy, there is no stagnation, only circulation. The power is all in the giving, not the receiving.

Perhaps this will give you something to think about as you make your plans for stewardship season here at St. Anne's. More than that, I hope it helps you with the stewardship of your whole life.

If you are worried you don't have enough . . .  
If you are worried your family doesn't have enough . . .  
If you are worried our church doesn't have enough . . .

. . . try letting go. And see what happens.

Tom is right. Jesus is right. This life of ours—this faith of ours—is about learning to let go. When it comes to the Lord our God and all the things that really matter, there's always enough.

Amen.