

Choosing Faith

INTRODUCTION

Is faith a gift or a choice? Is it something God does in us or something we do for God? You guessed that the answer is “Yes,” no doubt. Faith is a mixture of all that and more. It is a partnership with God as we enter into relationship for our good and the good of the world around us, the community around us. We are choosing every day to live by our faith, to be shaped by our faith, and to submit all our actions and relationships to the measure of faith. In this worship series, we invite you to examine what it means to be people of faith. We are the people who are choosing faith.

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost – **Faith to Change**

October 5, 2025

[Luke 17:5-10](#)

Color – Green

WORSHIP PLANNING

“Increase our faith!” That’s why we’ve come, isn’t it? That’s what worship is about. We come to lift up the name and glory of God in praise and supplication. We come to grow closer, stronger, deeper in our faith. So, as worship is prepared for this week and the launch of a new series, the worship team should spend some time around the idea of strengthening faith. What tools can worship provide that can carry folks throughout the week in their journey of faith? Perhaps a corporate prayer shared in worship but designed to be taken home and used throughout the week, maybe throughout the series; a prayer to increase faith that becomes a signature prayer for the congregation. We are formed through our prayer lives.

We are also formed in community. When we gather for worship, we listen to and lean in toward other worshipers and those in leadership. Are there ways we can help create and foster relationships in worship? Maybe we pray together in pairs or small groups, with time to listen as well as share. Perhaps we invite prayer partners to work together beyond the worship moment. Relationships help increase faith.

We can also grow by focusing on the text. We have a text each time we gather for worship. How can we help people explore the text beyond the worship moment? Perhaps we invite reflection on the text before we come to worship. A sermon-prep Bible study can be a dynamic way to help congregation members hear the text as a living document that helps us grow our faith.

Worship is a moment in and of itself, but it connects to and feeds other moments in our lives and faith. This week – indeed, every week – focus on those connected moments. What are we sending folks out to do? What events, actions, and decisions in their past are we helping them reflect on in their lives as we worship this day? Worship connects to life, grows out of life, and feeds into life, or it isn’t true worship. Worship can and must increase our faith week by week.

PREACHING NOTES

Luke 17:5-10

What an odd request. “Increase our faith!” Maybe it seems odd because we don’t know what they meant by that. We have no background for the question, no whispered conversations, and the drawing of straws to find the lucky (unlucky?) one who would pose the inquiry. Or maybe it was a spontaneous outburst from a growing frustration of confusion or inability to do what Jesus could do.

Maybe it follows the verses the lectionary cut out of the text for this week. Jesus told them that this journey would be difficult and that they would be liable to getting it wrong, to stumbling, to sinning. He tells them that the consequences of their sinning might fall not just on them but on others, especially innocent ones. In that case, their sin is even more grave; the punishment even more severe. And though he then talks about repentance and forgiveness, they recognize their failings and cry out, “Increase our faith!”

Now, it makes sense. We know that feeling. Facing some struggle, some choice, some temptation that might knock us off the path, we, too, would cry, “Increase our faith.” We would know we weren’t strong or smart enough, and we feared that people – including ourselves – would get hurt. So, strengthen us. Increase our faith.

That’s an important and possibly heartfelt question. But it seems that Jesus tosses it aside or that his compassion escaped him that day. His response seems harsh, out of character, burdensome. Or am I missing something? We have two responses to this question or plea from the disciples. Maybe they were put together in the editing process. Maybe Luke grabbed two different stories from two different teaching occasions and plopped them together here. Or maybe we should just take it at face value and ask what Jesus was talking about here. Let’s assume both are responses to the disciples’ distress.

One of these responses we like, and we will run with it, as we have run with it before. The other, we quietly ignore or feel uncomfortable about and leave it alone. In fact, both are dangerous words from Jesus. Unsettling words, perhaps. These words, like many of Jesus’ teachings, can be misused or misinterpreted. The mustard seed, for example, has often been coopted by the prosperity gospel preachers to mean that God wants us to have more and more. The parable of the servant or slave – depending on how you translate the Greek word *doulos* – has been used to justify slavery in the past or to present something about social strata that put certain individuals into their proper place. Don’t underestimate these dangers, and don’t neglect to examine your words, preacher, to make sure you aren’t hinting in these directions.

What, then, do we do with these stories or metaphors? How do we weave them together into a whole response from Jesus to the very real request that came from the troubled disciples. No doubt you’ll agree that one consistent theme from Jesus is a warning against fear. How many times does he say, “Do not fear” or “Why are you afraid?” Could it be that he hears the plea to increase their faith as a fear response, and his answer does not dismiss the gravity of the request but shifts it to another arena? Rather than avoiding errors, he invites them to claim possibility and service. If we put the two responses side by side, we might see a spectrum of faith responses in difficult or risky situations.

Jesus might be telling his followers that the call is ever to move forward—to take that step in faith, that leap, perhaps, into something unknown, but we are sent there by his word and command. And

mountains may move. It has happened before; God's people have changed the landscape of the world in which they live. But even if it doesn't, or the change is too small to see right away, then we still move forward in service. It is what we are called to do. It is who we are called to be. The world should expect it from us. Not to put us or anyone in their "proper place," but because that is who we are. Acts of service are not for recognition but for the joy of serving the one who said he came not to be served but to serve.

That is the faith we are growing into; that is the increase we need. We don't and can't claim faith that never stumbles or makes a mistake. But we can and should grow into faith that serves and even takes on mountains that seem unmovable.

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Extend a Hand: A Meditation for World Communion Sunday

If I really had faith the size of a mustard seed,
What would I do?

Would I wave a hand to hurl Mount Kilimanjaro into Lake Victoria
Just to prove I could?

If I really had mustard-seed faith what would I do?

Would I start by extending a hand of peace
To the church across the street
Whose sign says something different from mine?

Would I by extending a hand of peace
To the *Ol' G* that terrorizes the *old people* down the street?
Or, to the grizzled homeless man that sits on the corner with a sign?

Would I start by extending my hand of peace
To those who brawl on schoolyards
And to those who brawl on battlefields
In search of a future with hope?

Maybe I could begin by just taking my hand of peace
Out of its hiding place
Long before the moment
That I cup my hands to receive communion.

O, Lord, increase our faith!

Safiyah Fosua, The Africana Worship Book for Year C, Discipleship Resources, 2008, 255.

Call to Worship

Destruction and violence are everywhere;
strife and contention are all around

**The needs of the world are so great;
O Lord, increase our faith.**

The law is slack,
and justice does not prevail.

**The needs of the world are so great;
O Lord, increase our faith.**

How many threats surround us;
warfare, homelessness, loneliness, loss.

**The needs of the world are so great,
but you, O God, are greater still –
the One in whom all things are possible.
O Lord, increase our faith in you!**

Feasting on the Word, Worship Companion, Liturgies for Year C, Vol. 2, Kimberly Bracken Long, ed. WJK Press, 2013, 193.

Prayer

For the gift of faith
which sees beyond the present moment
and looks to an eternity,
we thank you.

For the gift of faith
small as a mustard seed, which has power
within its simplicity,
we thank you.

For the gift of faith
bestowed on those who would simply come,
hearts open in humility,
we thank you. Amen

Written by John Birch, and posted on his Faith and Worship website. Reposted: <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2013/09/prayer-of-thanksqiving-for-gift-of-faith.html>

Benediction

(inspired by Luke 17: 5-6)

Imagine what a mustard seed of faith
might do this week in your life.

Not a quart,
nor a gallon,
nor a truckload.

Just a mustard seed.

Imagine.

Now go and live out that grace.

Yes! Let it be so! Amen!

Long Green Valley Church of the Brethren website. <http://rockhay.tripod.com/worship/orders/2010/10-10-03.htm>.

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost – **Whole Faith**

October 12, 2025

[Luke 17:11-19](#)

Color – Green

WORSHIP PLANNING

When Jesus asks in our text this week, “Where are the other nine?” (verse 17), he isn’t fishing for gratitude. Instead, he is declaring that gratitude that leads to praise is part of the way of the disciple. To live holistically, we need gratitude to be part of the mechanism. In secular terms, we could say our lives are better when we live thankfully. Worship, then, needs to make space for gratitude.

Our prayers this week can open that door. Our liturgy can provide the forms to help us voice our gratitude. The truth is, even a quick scan of your recent worship orders will reveal gratitude already present. But do we see it as clearly as we need to? Before we pray a prayer of gratitude this week, how about stopping the flow and asking the community to read the words before they pray them? Maybe they could talk with those around them about the words or expand on the words by asking what are we really grateful to God for this day.

Once we are in the mode of thanking God, we begin to see how God works through those around us. That enables us to be grateful to people in our lives who reveal God’s love and forgiveness in concrete ways. Maybe our intercessory prayers can be more than praying for those who are hurting, as important as that is. We could also pray for those who are in caring professions or who take caregiving roles out of love and need to know they are seen. Let’s pray for teachers in our public schools who show the face of God as they instruct and mentor our kids and youth day by day. Who else needs to hear our gratitude? What words could we be given as we worship that can be the impetus to carry gratitude into the world around us?

Cultivating gratitude that leads to praise requires that we pay attention to all who bring God’s presence and love into our lives. This would be a good week for testimony. Who can tell a story of the awareness of God’s presence in their lives? It doesn’t have to be dramatic, just real. Someone who realized that they were loved, someone who experienced reconciliation, someone who felt a presence that gave them peace—these are the stories we need to hear so that we can look at our lives in new ways. Self-examination can begin by listening to one another. Our faith is whole when driven by gratitude as we gather together and offer corporate prayer to God.

PREACHING NOTES

Luke 17:11-19

Does Jesus sound like your mom here? You know, when you were a kid, and someone did something nice for you – big or small – your mom would lean in to you and give you the “mom” look, while saying, “Now what do you say?” It wasn’t a suggestion. It was an order. If the words and the tone of voice didn’t give it away, then the steel grip on your shoulder told the story. That grip gave Mr. Spock a run for his money. What do you say? Thank you. That’s what you say. Through gritted teeth, perhaps, but you say it. Right?

Jesus had a grip on the shoulder of those ex-lepers and said, “Now what do you say?” We must observe the conventions. Did you say, “Thank you”? Were you properly grateful? Those are important questions in our world today. It excuses our reluctance to give aid or to partner in a cause that might benefit the other more than us. “Well,” we think, “They weren’t grateful enough to earn our help.” And here we have permission for that sort of attitude. Jesus himself was put out that the nine ex-lepers weren’t grateful enough to come and say, “Thank you.” So there.

Except, that might be going a bit too far. There is no indication that Jesus got his feelings hurt by the lack of response. There is no sign that he withdrew the healing and returned the former tragic state to the ungrateful nine. This doesn’t seem to be about Jesus as much as it is about the ones healed. It wasn’t about whether Jesus deserved thanks for this great gift; of course he did. But I don’t believe he got his nose out of joint because the nine didn’t show proper respect. No, I think his concern was for wholeness on the part of those who were healed.

This isn’t the first time Jesus distinguishes between being clean and being well. Sometimes, there is a contrast between being healed and being whole. Luke is careful, as Jesus is careful, to describe what happened as being made clean. In verse 14, Jesus gives the command to go and show themselves to the priests to get the proper, lawful designation that would allow them to be a part of society again. And Luke says, “As they went, they were made clean.” It could be argued that it was an act of faith for them to hightail it to the priests before the cleansing happened. It happened on the way. Their going was their response to Jesus—an act of faith and perhaps gratitude. Maybe it was there. Maybe that’s why they didn’t come back. They were oozing gratitude as they arrived at the priest’s door and submitted themselves to the scrutiny that was required. Maybe their gratitude kept them from running away from the red tape and hoop jumping so they could return to their families, who would also be grateful and less likely to be suspicious when they brought the proper documentation from the proper authorities. Maybe that was why they didn’t take the time to come back to Jesus. They might have been busy spreading the good news everywhere they went.

That might also explain why it was the Samaritan who came back. He might have been turned away by the priest who didn’t think he had authority over an outsider to pronounce him clean. Or maybe it didn’t matter as much to him since he lived outside the Jewish community. We’re just guessing here. We don’t know what was in their heads. And this isn’t to excuse them as much as an attempt to understand them so that we can understand our actions when we get it wrong, too. Because we will. And we do. And we hope for grace.

We don’t know the “whys” of the actions of the ten former lepers. But we can know something about what Jesus was concerned for them. When the one returns, Jesus says, “Were not ten made clean?”

Notice the careful language - *made clean*. At times, Jesus doesn't seem to care much about the rules of the society he grew up in. At other times, he wants to make sure that he follows the law precisely. It seems that for him this was only step one in the journey toward wellness. That was his concern for the other nine; they weren't done—or they weren't done as they could have been. There was more to come for them and their relationships with God and one another. Jesus wanted them to be clean, certainly, to be within the law. But he wanted more for them than that. He wanted them to be well, to be whole.

Notice the common phrase, "Your faith has made you well," in verse 19. But if they showed faith in following the command to go to the priests, why didn't the others receive this blessing too? What extra did the Samaritan do that moved his being made clean into being made well? Acknowledgment. Gratitude, yes, certainly, but directed gratitude. Jesus pointed it out to him and any who had ears to hear: "Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"

As an aside, we don't have to hear a xenophobic attitude in the "this foreigner" designation. Some do, it is true. But it might also be a teaching moment from the man who upset the hometown crowd by telling them how God loves foreigners. See Luke 4:23-28 for the scene. Maybe it was his way of opening minds and maybe even hearts to the idea that their God is not an exclusive line-drawing God, but a God who tears down human-made barriers of difference.

"Your faith has made you well." Jesus saw in the Samaritan who returned a recognition of relationship. Luke says he praised God and also thanked Jesus. But Jesus comments on the praise and not the thanks. It isn't gratitude that makes the difference, or it isn't gratitude alone. It's gratitude that brings one to praise, to an acknowledgment of God's action and presence in one's life that brings wholeness. Jesus is here denouncing what some see as Christian atheism, or what the prophets called praising God with lips but with hearts that were far from God. The wholeness comes from action and reflection, from works of faith wrapped in worship and grateful praise.

Jesus wants more than just that we are clean, law-abiding, good people. He wants us to be committed to being well, to a faith that is whole.

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Call to Worship

We are 10 lepers, with scars and wounds — and hope
for your healing touch. From our souls' depths
we raise our voices to you.

"Jesus, Master! Have pity on us!"

As we glimpse the grace you pour upon us,
we thank you.

<https://www.mountcarmelblessedsacrament.com/call-to-worship-centering-prayers-118/>

Collect

God our Creator and Redeemer, open our eyes to a larger awareness of your goodness, and our souls to deeper gratitude. Then, uplifted with thanksgiving, may we give ourselves to unpleasant tasks with good grace, and show irk-some people a good will such as we offer our best friends. Through Christ Jesus our ever-present Lord.

Amen!

<http://www.bruceprewer.com/DocC/C57sun28.htm>

Call to Confession

Even when we are faithless, Christ remains faithful.
Trusting in grace, let us confess our sins.

Prayer of Confession

**Jesus, Master,
have mercy on us.
We keep our distance from you,
for we are broken and sick with sin.
Yet you see us, and cleanse us and make us whole.
Forgive us when we forget to return to you –
have mercy when we fail to praise your name,
and help us to exude the faith that makes us well. Amen.**

Declaration of Forgiveness

Hear the good news:
Your call has been answered.
Christ has healed you,
and forgives your sin.
With glad hearts, return praise to God.

Feasting on the Word, Worship Companion, Liturgies for Year C, Vol. 2, Kimberly Bracken Long, ed. WJK Press, 2013, 206.

Benediction (Luke 17)

Jesus said to the leper,
“Get up and go on your way.
Your faith has made you well.”
Let us all claim Jesus’ healing
and liberation in our lives.
Get up and go on your way!

In Jesus' name,
your faith has made you whole
And all God's people say:
Amen.

Rebecca Gaudino, Ministry Matters, <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/4265/worship-elements-october-9-2022>.

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost – **Persistent Faith**

October 19, 2025

[Luke 18:1-8](#)

Color – Green

WORSHIP PLANNING

Persistence. What does that mean for us in worship? Just the fact that we gather week after week when the community around us doesn't see the point might be a part of that persistence. Too often, congregations feel the weight of failure because they aren't growing or don't have the right people or whatever signs that we sometimes think measure our faithfulness. But when we gather, few or many, week by week, we are holding fast to faith. We can celebrate that in worship. We can give God thanks for divine faithfulness, even as we offer our own faithfulness.

Week after week, we pray for God's kingdom to come and for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. And we are a part of that working of will. As we pray that prayer, we are signing up again to be a part of the redeeming force at work, reconciling the world to God. It is a high calling, but we are up to it. Our presence attests to that. So, embrace the moment as you worship.

At the heart of this text is justice. Prayer, faith, and persistence are the tools to bring about God's justice in the world. Justice work begins with awareness. What issues facing your community need addressing? What injustices are present in the congregation? How do we draw attention to these in healing ways? What advocacy work might we do as a congregation? What sanctuary might we provide in our faith gathering? These are questions without easy answers, but none can be resolved without prayer and worship. Call for discernment. Ask God to speak into the minds and hearts of those who have gathered. What is the role of the gathered worshipers in God's great work of salvation and transformation? Where can we stand with the Spirit in our local community? How do we avoid being the unjust judge who refuses to listen to the cry for justice?

Celebrate the persistence of the worshiping community; lift up the persistent faith. But also declare that work continues and much more prayer - with words and with hands and feet - is needed.

PREACHING NOTES

[Luke 18:1-8](#)

Let's just make a list of the parables we wish Jesus had never told. That might be a good exercise for us preachers. At least, it's something to do in our heads before we get to work wrestling with the text. Just for fun. For relief. So, what do we do with this parable of the unjust judge and the persistent widow? Do we make it simple? Keep at it. That seems to be what Luke is suggesting, anyway. He tells us when he introduces this parable by saying Jesus told this about "their need to pray always and not to lose heart" (Luke 18:1 NRSV). Luke says that is what this is about. And it is a powerful message. Hang in there. Keep at it. Keep chipping away, and eventually, you'll get an answer.

Except what does that say about the God we worship, the one of whom Jesus asks, “Will he delay long in answering them?” Despite his own response, we would have to say, “Well, yes, in our experience, God delays. Sometimes painfully so.” It isn’t a stretch to say that in every congregation, there are those who have worn out their knees and shed many tears in persistent prayer and are unable to see an answer that comes close to answering their pleas. They will hear the suggestion to keep at it more as a burden than a blessing. It’s more like a slap in the face than a pat on the back.

Was Jesus just wrong about the speediness of God’s response? Or was there something different about time? What seems slow to us isn’t slow to God. “Nor are your ways my ways” (Isaiah 55:8 NRSV), and all that. “A thousand years in your sight are like yesterday” (Psalm 90:4 NRSV) doesn’t sound like a quick response. And it has never been our responsibility to give excuses for God.

If not excuses, what about explanations? Are we expected – required – to give explanations for God? Well, no, not really. Except we need them ourselves. We need to understand what is going on and what is expected of us so that we can continue in our journey of faith, our discipleship path. The problem with explanations is that they often change due to circumstance and perspective and, often, need.

Hold off on explaining God, then. Let’s look at us. Luke tells us that this parable is to tell us about our “need to pray always and not to lose heart” (Luke 18:1 NRSV). So, what do we learn about prayer in this parable? What is the proper prayer position, according to the story Luke records? What words should we utter and in what direction do we utter them? Hmm. Another look tells us that we don’t learn much about prayer or about how to pray from this text. We see that we’re to keep at it. And eventually, we’ll break through the walls of heaven, and God will grudgingly grant us the justice we desire.

Wait a minute there. Jesus himself says that isn’t how God functions. This is a parable of contrast and not of similarity. God isn’t an unjust judge who has to be badgered into answering prayers for justice. Rather, God is a God of justice, who lays it out clearly, weighs it toward the most vulnerable, demands it most vociferously from the prophets and preachers, from the scholars and the priests. It’s there; it’s been given, this justice; it is within our reach, in our grasp. And yet. And yet.

What if we’ve got the parable backward? What if the woman who begs and pleads and makes a noisy nuisance of herself is not us, but God? And what if the unjust one, the one who has no fear of God and no respect for anyone, is not God but us? What if justice has been declared, but because of selfishness and greed, because of prejudice and fear, it isn’t given to those who need it and is only offered to those who can afford it?

And if this parable is about prayer, why does that terrible question hang in the air before us like a fiery finger writing on a wall: “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” Is this a parable about how to pray, or is it about living the life of a disciple? Well, yes! Both, of course. Praying is doing, and doing is praying. The woman in the story was praying as she stood vigil at the judge’s door. She was praying as she pled for justice. She was praying as she made a nuisance of herself to such a degree that even someone who cared for neither God or human beings finally caved and gave her what she clamored for.

When we’re told to be persistent in prayer, it means moving our feet. It means knocking on doors. It means advocating for justice. And don’t lose heart. Don’t give up when it doesn’t seem to bring the desired change. Because part of the change is in us, as we are shaping our hearts into the mold of his

heart. We care for the ones he cares for. We are advocating for the ones he advocates for. Justice comes quickly, but not universally until we pound on the doors holding it back. Until we resist the tide of complacency and tear down a justice system of favoritism and judgments that can be bought and sold. Thoughts and prayers, according to this parable, are much more active and frontline. And we keep at it. Don't lose heart.

And yes, we still need the quiet conversations with God, where we pour out our hearts and weep our laments. We still need a place to withdraw. But we withdraw so that we can then go back out and stand vigil against injustice once more. Because we have a persistent faith.

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Call to Worship

We have gathered once again, Lord of all and Lord of us.

We come to lift our prayers, and to sing your praises once again.

We come to ask and hope and long to see your justice in the land.

We worship in that hope and will work in that Spirit.

Derek Weber, March 2025

Prayer: Persistence

(inspired by Luke 18: 1-8)

God of Justice,
we know that in this hard world there are judges
that neither fear God nor respect their fellow men.

But you call us to remember
the woman who gave one a hard time,
crying out to him day and night, until he changed his mind -
her sheer stubbornness.

And we celebrate all those, women and men,
who persist in the cause of right;
who will not keep quiet;
who insist on raising the issues, again and again;
who campaign for unpopular causes,
write letters, send emails, sign petitions:
people round the world
who pick up their pens or take to the streets -
and young girls determined to go to school.

We celebrate them: steadfast, down-to-earth,
blessed with both stubbornness and courage,
to change the world. Amen.

Written by Jan Sutch Pickard, and posted on the Monthly Prayers page of the Christian Aid website.

<http://www.christianaid.org.uk/>. Reposted: <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2016/10/prayer-luke-18-1-8.html>

Call to Confession

The new covenant God has made with Israel
and with us,
begins in forgiveness.
Though we continually break covenant with God,
God remains faithful.
We confess our sins to God,
trusting that God will forgive us and remember
our sins no more.

Prayer of Confession

**Gracious God,
we confess that we do not meditate on your commands
and teachings
all day long.
We do not keep your word before us always
and in all things.
Instead, we turn away from your demanding truth
and wander toward easier options.
Forgive us we pray,
for pursuing our own desires rather than yours.
Forgive us for growing weary in following you;
for failing to pray and work tirelessly for justice;
for losing hope in your power to transform the powers of this world.
Tune our ears to the sound of your justice.
Turn our hearts to your commandments
and word of grace.
Do not remember our sin,
but remember your mercy forever.
We pray in Christ's name. Amen.**

Declaration of Forgiveness

Friends, God promises to forgive us,
to put our sins out of God's own mind and heart.
In this way, God gives us not just a second chance
but a new beginning.
Believe the good news of the gospel:
our salvation is through faith in Christ Jesus.

Thanks be to God! Amen.

Feasting on the Word, Worship Companion, Liturgies for Year C, Vol. 2, Kimberly Bracken Long, ed. WJK Press, 2013, 218.

Benediction

(based on Luke 18: 1-8)

May you continually wrestle with prayer.

May you beseech the door of heaven with shameless boldness.

May your prayers produce, in you,
a countenance of joy,
a gracious demeanor,
and a peaceful heart

And may the God of hope, fill you with all peace,
that you may abound in hope,
assured that your prayers are heard
by a loving and gracious Father.

Written by Ryan, Pastor at Adamsville Presbyterian Church. Posted on rethinklife.

<http://dialogizomai.blogspot.ca/>, reposted: <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2013/09/benediction-luke-18-1-8.html>.

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost – **Humble Faith**

October 26, 2025

[Luke 18:9-14](#)

Color – Green

WORSHIP PLANNING

How shall we pray? This isn't the text where that question appears. But it does seem to be behind the parable that Jesus tells. In this case, however, it isn't so much the words or the format that he wants to convey; rather, it is the attitude that matters to Jesus. Humility doesn't rank highly in our culture these days. To many, it seems like weakness. Or worse, it seems like surrender. So, how do we talk about or encourage humility in our worship today?

Listening is a part of humility. When we listen, we put ourselves in a position to allow someone else's wisdom or experience to inform us. How might we listen to one another in worship today? How might we give space for differing opinions on important topics as we pray together or explore scripture together? Practice listening as we worship today.

How can we understand humility to be a strength and not a weakness? Humility grounded in faith, firm on the foundation of Christ, is humility that no longer needs to prove itself. We don't need to get anything over anyone. We stand secure in that hope and then share out of the joy of belonging. Our worship becomes an invitation to enter into this relationship and to find our identity in Christ and the community. So, we practice our witness to the world as we worship in humble faith.

PREACHING NOTES

[Luke 18:9-14](#)

Sometimes, Jesus' parables are subtle, and the application seems elusive. Other times, it hits us like a brick. We might be set up to respond to this parable in a positive and growing way. But we might also be set up to dismiss it as someone else's problem if we aren't careful.

None of us would ever envision praying a prayer as blatant as the Pharisee's prayer here in this passage. It is all we can do to avoid a snort of derision when we read these words. "How dare he?" we think. What arrogance. And it is arrogant, we rightly condemn it. But don't we also ask God to bless our accomplishments at times? Don't we breathe a thanksgiving and "glad it's not me" when we see the results of stupidity or immorality taking a toll? Maybe we wouldn't stand in the sanctuary during worship and pray such prayers; at least, I would hope not. But are we any more likely to pray the tax collector's prayer?

That would be an interesting sight if, during the prayers of the people, we all stood far off, beat our chests, and declared what sinners we were. Wouldn't it? That wouldn't be a service that I would want to attend regularly, to be honest.

So, if these aren't models for our prayer life or good and bad examples, what can we grasp from this passage? Well, the first thing is that prayer is complex. Not complex, as in hard to do, but complex, as in multidimensional. Last week, we saw that the eighteenth chapter of Luke begins with the parable of the

unjust judge and the persistent widow. That's one of those "huh?" kinds of stories because Jesus uses a negative example to tell us about God. However, a central point of the story is that prayer is something we keep doing. Prayer is a consistent behavior, not a one-off act or a last-minute grasping at straws. We are to fill ourselves up with prayer.

It is important to start with that story so that today's story can be put into perspective. If persistence, if patterns of behavior were all that mattered, then the Pharisee would be the hero of the story. But he clearly isn't. So, there has to be another dimension to prayer. Frequency is important, but so is intent. Or perhaps we should say, so is the spirit in which you pray. Habits can be healthy and life-giving, or they can be repetitious and empty. Or worse. A part of what determines the impact of the habit on your well-being is the intent you bring to the encounter. Jesus is contrasting a closed system of prayer - the Pharisee who was sure he had already done everything needed for righteousness and therefore didn't really need God - to an open system - the tax collector who knew he needed everything, that his life was empty and worthless unless God would fill him.

Jesus invites us to bring a willing spirit to God in prayer. The eighteenth chapter continues with one of Jesus' encounters with children. "Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it" (Luke 18:17). So, attitude or intent is at the heart of our prayer life.

But what about the effect? "Why bother at all?" we might argue. Ah, well, here is where it gets even more complex, even more layered. If Jesus is so keen on the spirit we bring to prayer, there must be some effect that is accomplished because of that right spirit. If prayer is, at its simplest, a conversation with God, then the desired effect is a relationship - a life-giving, soul-sustaining, direction-giving, comfort-sharing, challenge-offering relationship. If that is the case, then coming to God already filled up, already righteous in our own minds, already trusting in self, provides no room for this relationship to take root and grow. But coming to God empty and needy allows room for the relationship to grow and for transformation to take place.

This is the prayer with wings, the prayer that reaches out for God and carries us into God's presence. Jesus is trying to help us see that our intent makes all the difference. It isn't about judgment, about God's displeasure if we do it wrong. It is about the spiritual physics that won't allow two "bodies" (our will and God's will) to occupy the same space. We've got to make room for answers to prayer. We've got to begin the act of prayer with humility. That then reveals to us that we walk the journey of faith with humility. It becomes a mark of all of our relationships. It is a mark of our discipleship. We come to be filled up. We come open and empty. We come to listen and learn and grow, even as we help others grow. Together, we invite the one who can bring transformation work in us, through us, and between us. "Have mercy on me, a sinner," we pray with joy.

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Opening Prayer

Lord our God,
You yourself remind us through Your holy people
that all our religious practices,
even the eucharistic sacrifice,
are not worth anything
if we use them to bend You our way.
God, may we come to You
in humility and repentance,
ready to encounter You in love
and to turn toward You.
Accept us as Your sons and daughters,
together with Jesus Christ,
your Son and our Lord for ever.

<https://ocarm.org/en/item/79>

Prayer of the Day

Good and gracious God,
you promise to pour out your Spirit upon us;
you are the hope of the world.
Give us strength, that we might serve you;
make us humble, that we might live for your glory alone.
In the name of Jesus we pray. **Amen.**

Feasting on the Word, Worship Companion, Liturgies for Year C, Vol. 2, Kimberly Bracken Long, ed. WJK Press, 2013, 230.

Prayer of Confession

(inspired by Luke 18: 9-14)

Lord God in heaven,
we confess that we try to measure our faithfulness
by comparing ourselves with others.
Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us as sinners.

Forgive us O God where we fail to see your Spirit's work in others,
in those who have lived before us.

Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us as sinners.

Forgive us for choosing comfort and convenience over faithfulness.

Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us as sinners.

Posted on the Mennonite Church USA Archives site. <http://www.mcusa-archives.org/Resources/HeritageSunday/2001MennoniteHeritageSunday.htm>, reposted: <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2013/09/prayer-measuring-faithfulness.html>

Benediction

What greater joy can we know that to go home justified because of our humility before God who redeems? Let us leave this place to live as we came in – openly and desiring to praise God and witness to a saving love. Go in humble grace. In Christ’s name. Amen.

Derek Weber, March 2025