

Seventeenth Weekend After Pentecost (RCL/C)  
Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4, 2 Tim. 1:1-14, Luke 17:5-10  
October 1-2, 2022  
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

**We know so little – so why not trust in the One who knows everything??** I was visiting the Book of Job this past week to find possible Bible quotes for the Sunday School children who will be enjoying an animal craft this Sunday, as we get them ready for the Blessing of the Animals on Oct. 9 (postponed from this week because of the rain forecast). In the Book of Job God reminds Job **and** us over and over again of how **little** we know:

**38** <sup>4-7</sup>Where were you when I created the earth?  
Tell me, since you know so much!  
Who decided on its size? Certainly you'll know that!  
Who came up with the blueprints and measurements?  
How was its foundation poured,  
and who set the cornerstone,  
While the morning stars sang in chorus  
and all the angels shouted praise?

**39** <sup>1-2</sup>“Do you know the month when mountain goats give birth?  
Have you ever watched a doe bear her fawn?  
Do you know how many months she is pregnant?  
Do you know the season of her delivery...?”

<sup>5</sup>“Who do you think set the wild donkey free,  
opened the corral gates and let him go? ...

<sup>9</sup>“Will the wild buffalo condescend to serve you,  
volunteer to spend the night in your barn?

<sup>19-20</sup>“Are you the one who gave the horse his prowess  
and adorned him with a shimmering mane?  
Did you create him to prance proudly  
and strike terror with his royal snorts?

<sup>26-28</sup>“Was it through your know-how that the hawk learned to fly,  
soaring effortlessly on thermal updrafts?  
Did you command the eagle's flight,  
and teach her to build her nest in the heights,  
Perfectly at home on the high cliff face,  
invulnerable on pinnacle and crag?”

Certainly not. We don't know those things. We know so little. But we want **answers**. Answers to why Cuba and Florida were lashed so horribly by Hurricane Ian, answers to why Putin thinks he can annex Ukraine as his own, answers to why people we care about so deeply (maybe why we ourselves) are suffering: sick or sad or addicted or dying or shut off emotionally or deaf to Good News. We ask why and we plead for answers and our Savior simply says, "Trust!"

In today's Gospel the disciples beg Jesus, "*Increase our faith!*" (Luke 17:5b) They weren't looking for Jesus to give them a lecture about religious doctrine. They weren't looking to **know** more – they wanted to **trust** more. They longed to trust Jesus, to believe that what He asked of them was even **possible**, but it seemed **impossible**. Right before the conversation we hear in today's Gospel Jesus had raised the bar pretty high for His little band of followers:

*"If you see your friend going wrong, correct him. If he responds, forgive him. Even if it's personal against you and repeated seven times through the day, and seven times he says, 'I'm sorry, I won't do it again,' forgive him."* (Luke 17:3-4, *The Message*)

Hellooooo..... That's a tall order. But Jesus' friends don't ask, "Are you kiddin' us?" They don't say, "No way is that happening!" They ask, "*Increase our faith,*" help us trust that what You're asking is possible, that You will give us grace to succeed. Because without You we're not getting to first base.

And then Jesus says something kinda confusing:

*"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."* (Luke 17:6)

Hurricane Ian uprooted whole houses and planted them in the Gulf of Mexico, but none of us is going to transplant a tree by praying about it. To get the fact that Jesus is describing something even more impossible than we think, it helps to know that the tree he was

talking about could grow to 60 feet tall, and its roots spread so wide to support that height that people wouldn't plant it any closer than 36 feet away from a cistern, a water tank. Any closer and its roots would seek out the water and pry its woody fingers into the tank, cracking and ruining it. So the tree was larger than we might guess, and the mustard seed smaller. If we have mustard seeds at home, we probably have the yellow kind that we add to a Mason jar of cucumbers if we're pickling them, or to water in which we're cooking corned beef. Jesus was probably talking about a different kind, that you **might** be familiar with if you like Indian food. To make dal or vegetable curry you sauté tiny black mustard seeds in oil till they burst and reveal the yellow inside.

So here's the point Jesus is making: if we have the slightest **smidgeon** of faith, the merest **atom** of trust in Jesus, He predicts, He promises, **we will be able to do the impossible, because trust in God makes the impossible possible. Trust in God, trust in our Savior, harnesses God's power.** We will be able to forgive those who have wounded us most deeply, however often they do it. We will receive the ability to serve in ways we never imagined. Because it's not a matter of drumming that up within ourselves. It's trusting that Jesus will share with us His own ability to forgive. The Holy Spirit, arriving in a splash of baptismal water and bathing our souls daily, will give us God's grace, empower us with God's love, fill us with God's courage, fortify us with God's strength, to do the work that the Holy Spirit inspires, so that God's Kingdom may come and God's will be done, through us, here and now, on our watch, however God desires and empowers. After all, Jesus predicts to His friends, *"Greater works than I do, you will do."* (John 14:25)

I for one appreciate any and all reminders that the strength of Heaven is at my disposal. Even though we're celebrating St. Francis this week, here's inspiration from a

prayer of blessing called “The Breastplate of St. Patrick” (or “The Deer’s Cry”). May we trust that all of this is so!

I arise today, through the strength of Heaven;  
light of Sun, brilliance of Moon, splendor of Fire,  
speed of Lightning, swiftness of Wind, depth of Sea,  
stability of Earth, firmness of Rock.

I arise today, through God's strength to pilot me:  
God's might to uphold me,  
God's wisdom to guide me,  
God's eye to look before me,  
God's ear to hear me,  
God's word to speak for me,  
God's hand to guard me,  
God's way to lie before me,  
God's shield to protect me,  
God's host to secure me:  
against snares of devils,  
against temptations of vices...  
against everyone who shall wish me ill,  
afar and anear, alone and in a crowd.

Christ with me,  
Christ before me,  
Christ behind me,  
Christ in me,  
Christ beneath me,  
Christ above me,  
Christ on my right,  
Christ on my left,  
Christ in breadth,  
Christ in length,  
Christ in height,  
Christ in the heart of every [one] who thinks of me,  
Christ in the mouth of every [one] who speaks of me,  
Christ in every eye that sees me,  
Christ in every ear that hears me.

I arise today through a mighty strength,  
the invocation of the Trinity...  
Salvation is of the Lord...  
Salvation is of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

So let's remember: if we have the slightest **smidgeon** of faith, the merest **atom** of trust in Jesus, He predicts, He promises, **we will be able to do the impossible, because trust in God harnesses God's power.** After all: we know so little – why **not** trust in the One who knows everything?? Amen

<sup>1</sup>[worldprayers.org/archive/prayers/invocations/i\\_arise\\_today\\_through\\_a\\_mighty.html](http://worldprayers.org/archive/prayers/invocations/i_arise_today_through_a_mighty.html)

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham