

Glen Ridge Congregational Church  
The Rev. John Sampson  
“Increase Our Trust”



Mustard Seed, Greg Burdine

Luke 17:5 – 10  
October 5, 2025

Will you pray with me?

God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, our rock and our redeemer.

Amen.

So, I'll start out by saying there are about five sermons in this little reading that we had today. I'm only going to focus on one part of it.

The lectionary, which is the cycle of readings given to the church to consider sharing each week, sometimes is a great thing. It lets us systematically read through the different writings that make up the books of the Bible. It makes us engage with some of the more difficult passages. It reveals to us voices and experiences we might not have ever heard of before.

But sometimes the lectionary doesn't do us such a great service. And I think that is the case today. If we hear this reading, we might think that the disciples are just sitting around and then all of the sudden they stand up and say, "Grant us more faith," as if it's just out of the blue without any prompting. So, I'm going to share with you what happens right before this that causes them to say, "Grant us more faith."

Jesus is with his disciples and he's talking about forgiveness and it starts out actually really great. He says all of us will sin against each other at some point. All of us will bring the brokenness that we all hold into our relationships with one another. And because of that, we will cause each other hurt and pain.

I don't think that's anything we don't know already.

And then he lays out what we should do about it. He says if someone sins against you, rebuke them. Tell them how you have been hurt by them. Tell them that it's not acceptable what they've done. Tell them they need to change their ways. Then he says, if they do that, the next step for them is to repent. It is to change the direction of their behavior, showing that they understand the hurt with more than just words, that in action that they will be with you differently than they have been before. And then he says, only then must you forgive.

It's a very different, I think, understanding of forgiveness than we might have been presented with growing up in the church or in our lives. For many of us, we were taught or learned that to forgive is almost a knee-jerk reaction. Somebody does something that hurts us, we automatically forgive.

Here Jesus is saying no, there are important steps between the action and our forgiveness. They include taking responsibility and changing our ways. To me, this seems like a wonderful way to think about forgiveness.

And then Jesus pushes it. He says, "Do this action of forgiving not just once, not just twice, but on and on and on." The discipline of forgiveness is not a one-time action. It is a way of life needed for us to be in community with one another. When the disciples hear this, that's when they stand up and say, "Oh, give us more faith." Because it seems like what Jesus is asking is something extremely difficult. And we know this from our lives, don't we? To be in relationship with someone who may hurt us, who we have told hurts us, who's even done things to change their ways. Who we have forgiven only to share their brokenness with us again. God grant us more faith that we can do this good work.

The word that is translated as faith in Greek is "pistis" and it means faith. But like any word it has different shades of meaning and one of those shades of meaning is trust. God, give us more trust in what you have challenged us to do regarding forgiveness.

Do we trust that forgiving is really the right way? I know when I have been hurt by someone, there is part of me, a lizard brain part of me, that goes back to another scripture in the Bible that says, "An eye for an eye." And I am on board with that. You did this bad thing to me. I'm going to do that bad thing to you. Jesus calls us to break out of that instinctual inertia, to wake up to the commandment of love and to forgive even when it is hard. Even when trust is broken, even if we're back to square one with each other.

I will just say this. I do not think that Jesus ever asks us to put ourselves in harm's way. Right? There are some situations where if we were to forgive and to stay in relationship, whether it's with another person or another group, it would cause us harm. I don't think that's what he's talking about here. I think what he's talking about here is to make sure we are safe and to see if we can forgive out of that safe place. And maybe in this life we will be able to and maybe in this life we will not be able to.

But forgiveness is always the goal.

He says if you have faith, trust in the power of forgiveness no bigger than this little mustard seed, a seed none of us can see, but I can feel, miraculous things could happen. It's like throwing a tree into the ocean. In other places, he says it could move mountains. It could change, in a seemingly miraculous way, a situation, a relationship, a dynamic that seems so toxic and hurtful, into a moment of redemption and of healing and of love.

Do we trust in the power of forgiveness? Do we trust in Jesus and his vision for us? It's as if he's saying to us, "Trust me. I'm going to tell you something that seems crazy, but forgiveness is the way."

Amen.