

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ!

Saved by grace through faith! You hear it all the time. You've heard of grace as "unconditional love" and you've heard of faith as "trust" or "believing". Now for some folks, faith is what tells you "that you shouldn't." For some it's an intensely private thing they keep locked away except on Sunday mornings. I suppose there are some who think you can acquire faith or earn it, because it's necessary if you want to get into heaven.

Now this morning, the disciples ask Jesus to "increase our faith," in other words to give us more faith. We're not sure exactly why they made this request, perhaps to move mountains or mulberry trees, perhaps to continue to be able to do miracles.

Sometimes, if we're honest with ourselves, we admit we want to see, even perform some miraculous deed of power, to see evidence that faith still works, occasionally we convince ourselves that with enough faith we can do anything everything for ourselves. With God's help of course. Yeah, that's the kind of faith we want. Increase our faith! And the answer is "no."

It's not our desire for faith, it's more our desire to have a faith that serves us, a faith that makes us look powerful, impressive. And of course the truth is, faith is powerful, very powerful. Jesus tells us even a little bit, the tiniest of seeds, is enough to move a mountain or a mulberry tree. But that faith isn't for us, it's not for our needs, it's not for our wants.

Jesus tells us he came to serve, not to be served, he washed the feet of his disciples, he told them, and us, that to be first is to be last, to serve everyone else. And Jesus tells us we are to be servants. We are to be table servers. What we do, in our moments, is at the request of Jesus, our Master. When we are weary from doing all we can, yet more will be required of us until we are spent and then we are rewarded, with what we are due for the day.

This seems surprising, even cruel, taken by itself.

God, slave owner, task master, not necessarily the image that would inspire us on to follow. Not the image expected out of God who loves creation and us, but this is our God, who calls his disciples to self-giving love and service.

And as is often the case, there is something more to the question Jesus asks, "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"? The answer of course is none of them. But consider Jesus himself, what did he do on the night he was betrayed? He stripped to his waist and served his disciples by washing their feet. Then, he served them a meal where he was both host and servant, hosting the feast, himself the meal, his body and blood, the bread that was broken was prepared

on a cross. His blood ran freely for their sakes. Christ crucified. "Who among you?" Jesus asks. We know the answer to that, "Lord, you, you did it for us."

This love offers such service to us, and this love inspires the same in us, we his disciples. This offering of ourselves, a result of faith. Not so we earn salvation, but to give our very lives because the Holy Spirit breathes and grows faith into us and into our faith communities. Faith that embraces us and holds us even in the face of uncertainties of life. Faith that sustains us, even when we must give more than we thought we had to give. Now if this was the kind of faith asked for by the disciples, then Jesus' response might have been something other than it was. But like them, we still have much to learn before our prayer and our request. Because we serve the one who so lovingly serves us.

As I've said before, faith isn't for spectators, faith isn't passive, it is active, it reaches out. We are to imitate Christ in all he did, and to me it seems that this is what Jesus is telling us. Jesus lived and served to the point of death, living out the kingdom of God in the world, so we who follow him are faithful if we live the same way as we go about our lives, 24/7. Faith is action, specifically action on behalf of others, in particular those who are different from us. Faith that serves should be our concern as disciples, not faith used only for ourselves, and most especially not faith that is a weapon against others.

God grants faith to us, the body of Christ on earth, so long as that faith is strength for our serving, not strength for our wanting. At the end of the day, though we may be full of faith and grace, we too must say, "we are worthless slaves, we have done only done what we ought to have done."

But God has shown us that we are worth much more to him than we are to the world, giving himself for us. So we trust his way of servant hood as our way.

AMEN