

"Literally True"

Text: Luke 17:3-10

"May the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you." Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians, you've all heard words pronounced incorrectly, sometimes creating strange, wonderful imagery. One of my grandchildren complained to her mom that her sister was such a chatterbox she "was just dizhausting." This past week another held up an old dress and asked her mom if she "decorized it." It's not nearly as cute when adults do that sort of thing.

It can also be amusing when we spell and pronounce words correctly, but use them badly. In a convention essay I once wrote "...*died in the wool*." Obviously I meant "*dyed in the wool*" but the effect was worth the error. Of course my old English professor was in attendance. He said he couldn't shake the image of sheep dying just before being sheared. For me it conjured up images of men who wanted to be buried in their Sunday best.

I'm sure you've heard others. "*I could care less*" – which of course means the person does care (the expression is "*I couldn't care less*.") Or "*If worst comes to worse*" – which actually means that things are getting better. One particular irritant is the extreme overuse of "literally." The way it is used today, "literally" literally almost never means literally. "*My boss literally blew up in front of the whole staff today*." Highly unlikely. "*No, he literally just melted down right on the spot*." Again, probably not.

It can be somewhat entertaining, but there's a problem. We unconsciously come to expect that no one *literally* means *exactly* what they say in their day-to-day conversations. No one literally hits the showers, keeps his nose to the grindstone, or shoots the breeze. Worse than that, we *always* exaggerate. (Like just now when I said "always.") "*I've literally told her about a thousand times not to do that*." "*I could literally give you a million reasons why that is a bad idea*." The real problem here is that that same general mindset is carried into our understanding of God's Word – and that's not good. God's Word means what it says. It does not use exaggeration or embellishment to make a point. It speaks literally and factually. Bear this fact in mind as you read our text for this morning (or any part of God's Word for that matter) and you will discover new depths and insights. Our text for this morning is found in Luke's Gospel, the 17th Chapter:

ESV **Luke 17:3-10** ***Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, ⁴ and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him."*** ⁵ ¶ ***The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!"*** ⁶ ***And the Lord said, "If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you."*** ⁷ ¶ ***"Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and recline at table'? ⁸ Will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink'? ⁹ Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? ¹⁰ So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'"***

This is God's Word. Note well. No exaggerations, no falsehood, no embellishment. All truth, all the time. In humble acceptance of the absolute truth of these words, so we pray, "***Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth.***" Amen.

What a completely different and unique perspective we can gain from our reading of God's Word just by bearing in mind that God communicates *with* sinful human beings, but he does not communicate *like* sinful human beings. He neither embellishes the facts nor exaggerates the consequences. He does not brag, nor does he use what is even partly false to communicate what is true. In the verses prior to our text, Jesus said that it really *would* be better, literally better, to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around your neck than to offend one of God's little ones.

Think about that for just a moment. We tend to exaggerate to make a point. Not so with God. He does not communicate with exaggerations or overstatements. We tend to read assertions like the "millstone" statement as if they meant what we would mean if we wrote them. So we might say something like, "*I'd rather have a root canal without Novocain than to go out with her again!*" – but we don't really mean it. So too we read statements like "***better to have a millstone hung around his neck***" and naturally tend to assume what we are really not permitted to assume, that God is exaggerating. Once we get past that fallacy, again, we are free to explore the real truth of the passage. In this case, since it really is true that death by millstone is better, then we turn our attention to just how horrible it must be, in God's eyes, to

cause one of his precious little ones to sin, or to damage their Christian faith. Quick and certain death is preferable in God's estimation.

With this in mind, we scan down through our text, and several things jump out at us. God really does mean, for example, that we are to forgive our neighbor his trespass - even if he sins against us seven times in one day. Nor is God exaggerating when he says that even a very small faith can accomplish extraordinary miracles.

Do we tend to read such things as though God is exaggerating a bit? Almost certainly. Who here has ever imagined that he could, with a word, uproot a full-grown Mulberry tree and have it obey his command to be planted in a nearby sea? Who has ever really believed that he could do such a thing? God is in no way embellishing the facts when he says such things. Staggering, sobering thought, isn't it? It makes us wonder just how small our faith is and what amazing wonders we could perform with just a little faith. Or are we still missing something here?

Recognizing that Jesus is speaking literally, look closer. What does he actually say? Even when we look at the literal words, we tend to focus on the flamboyant image of uprooting a full-grown tree and hurling it into the sea. But that's not what he said. What he actually did say next is even more noteworthy. Jesus did not say that his disciples could "cast it into the sea," he said **"plant it in the sea."** Yes, *plant* – meaning that the tree would keep producing there, in that impossible environment for that variety of tree.

Literally true? Absolutely. Amazing? Beyond question. Yet the real question is this: *"Why would anyone ever want to do something like that?"* The answer is that there would be no "mission purpose" in doing something like that. Jesus was always all about the mission. Everything he said and did worked to advance his goal of bringing light and life to our fallen world. Why then would he give power to his disciples to do something that would be of eternal benefit to no one?

Remembering that it was always all about the mission, what was Jesus teaching? What can we learn from his words? The Holy Spirit, writing through the Apostle Paul, may well have given us a clue in 1 Corinthians 3:6. There, using this same word **"planted,"** Paul wrote: **"I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth."** Paul didn't plant mulberry trees. He planted the Word of God. And what was Paul's unique calling? He uprooted that Word (which had originally been planted among the Jews) and planted it in what to them seemed like the last place that Word could ever be expected to grow – among the Gentiles. A mulberry tree

growing in the ocean was as nothing compared to the gospel flourishing among the pagan gentiles. For this, the greatest of all miracles, Jesus' disciples had faith enough.

With this background, we are ready to examine the scenario outlined last of all by our Lord in our text for this morning. It is the picture of a servant – a slave really – who returns from working in his master's fields only to serve his master's evening needs before finally tending to his own. The point of the account was undoubtedly to drive home to the disciples that planting God's Word in others was not the work that would save them. Even perfect obedience on their part would not earn them anything from their Master. Even perfect obedience to every commandment of God's Law is supposed to be regarded as the simple, reasonable service of every servant of God. No more, no less.

Consider that fact for a moment in light of what we know about the perfect truth and sincerity of God's Word. God is not exaggerating here. While we tend to think of perfect obedience to God's Holy Law as a maximum, Jesus is here instructing us to think of *perfect obedience* as a minimum – our simple, reasonable service. Perfect obedience = bare minimum. Anything less is considered failure.

Plug that truth into your life in order to gain an ever greater understanding of just what God is teaching us here. What do you suppose God would owe you if you spent your entire life always and only doing what you were supposed to? The answer is nothing at all. That would just mean that you did what you were supposed to do.

Doesn't seem fair, does it? *That*, precisely, is the problem. It is *our* problem. We do not think of God's Law in terms that our God allows. We do not regard absolute, flawless compliance as our *reasonable service or duty*. We have this idea that failing in one point can be corrected or justified by serving in another; that doing "most" makes up for occasional failure. We routinely come to regard God's commandments as less than what they really are – a bare and reasonable minimum for every single one of his children to follow. We don't really even care to address in our minds the simple truth laid out in our text that we are **"unworthy slaves."** (**"Slaves"** by the way is the best and clearest meaning of the original word used by our Lord.) We have trouble both with **"slave"** (we'd prefer to think of ourselves as *servants*) and with **"unworthy"** (we'd prefer something a bit softer, more complimentary, like *trusted*.) *"Trusted servants"* sounds much better than **"Unworthy slaves."** God's Word doesn't deal in half-truths or hyperbole. God's Word says what it means and means what it says, which here means we need to wrap our minds around **"unworthy**

slaves." A slave does what he does without thought of payment. A servant is a hireling that earns something from his employer by his service.

What do you suppose would happen if we would really come to grips with the fact that perfect obedience to God's commandments is our *minimum standard of conduct*? What would happen if we would learn to regard even what we might consider an especially magnanimous act on our part as simply part of that which is *always* expected of us? What if we could truly learn to look at ourselves as **"unworthy slaves"**? Perhaps then we would finally look with full, open honesty into the mirror of God's Holy Law, and see ourselves as we really are – thoroughly sinful human beings and unworthy spiritual failures.

But then the message of the Good News that we have a Savior in Jesus Christ would break upon our beaten down, beleaguered hearts like the sun breaking through the clouds after interminable days of gloom. Who then could possibly find the message of a Redeemer to be boring or uneventful? Those that think of themselves as "good enough" don't need a savior. Saviors are for miserable sinners – which means that honestly acknowledging our sins makes Jesus instantly more valuable and infinitely more necessary than anything else in our existence. Once we learn to recognize just what God expects from each one of us, and how absolutely we have failed to keep God's holy laws, then how joyfully thrills the news that another – Jesus Christ – has satisfied the demands that for you and me were quite literally *impossible* for us to supply.

It was Jesus who adopted the exact attitude he himself mentioned in our text. He is the one who considered perfect obedience as his reasonable service, and counted himself as an unworthy slave of humankind. All this he did so that he might rescue us from the eternal hell we had deserved.

Jesus is never diminished when we frankly and literally admit just how sinful we really are, and how far short we fall in our thoughts, words, and actions. In fact just the opposite is true. Jesus is enhanced and becomes all the more precious to us. Then it is that we come to realize just how profound was our failure and how perfect, how amazing, was his sacrifice. Nothing else even comes close. How precious indeed is our Lord Jesus Christ – the Master, the Savior of mankind. Our only hope and our only Savior. Literally. Amen.

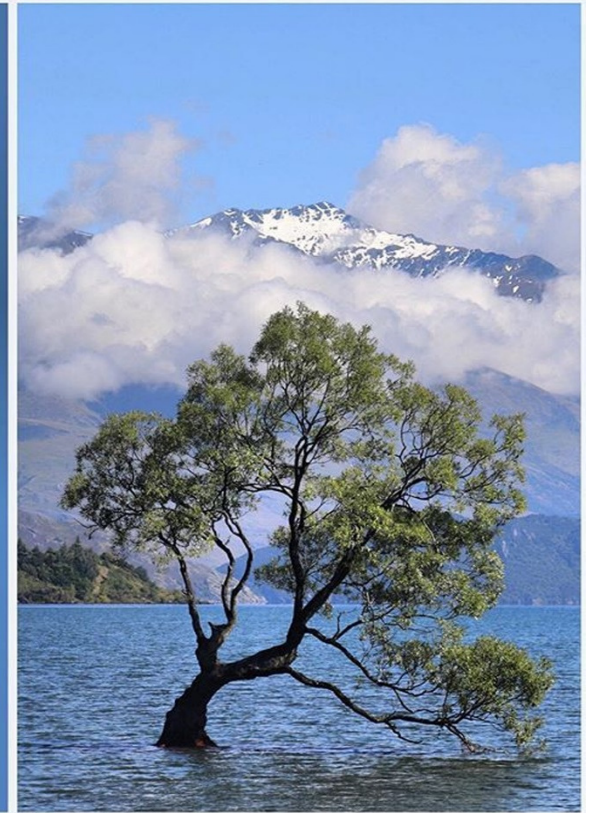
ESV **Habakkuk 1:1-4 2:1-4** The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet saw. ² O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save? ³ Why do you make me see iniquity, and why do you idly look at wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. ⁴ So the law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; so justice goes forth perverted. ¶ I will take my stand at my watchpost and station myself on the tower, and look out to see what he will say to me, and what I will answer concerning my complaint. ² And the LORD answered me: "Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it. ³ For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end--it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay. ⁴ "Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith.

ESV **2 Timothy 1:1-14** Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God according to the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus, ²To Timothy, my beloved child: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. ³ I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. ⁴ As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. ⁵ I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well. ⁶ For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, ⁷ for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. ⁸ Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, ⁹ who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, ¹⁰ and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, ¹¹ for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, ¹² which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me. ¹³ Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁴ By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.

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LUKE 17:6



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The 17th Sunday after Pentecost – October 2, 2022

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 457 (Red Hymnal)

"What a Friend We Have in Jesus"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The First Lesson: (Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4) We, like the Prophet Habakkuk, ought to be disgusted not only by the sin that we see all around us, but even more so by the sin that we see *within* us. The world around us knows no better. We do – or ought to. Thank God that we are not saved by our works or actions. Instead, as we hear in this lesson, we are assured that the righteous live eternally only by faith in Jesus Christ.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 85 (Page 40) (Brown Hymnal)

The Second Lesson: (2 Timothy 1:1-14) Paul wrote 2 Timothy shortly before his execution in Rome. The tone of the Letter is that of a Christian man who faces his own death, but who can do so with confidence because he knows and believes in the One who has died to save him. Pray God that he would give to you the same gifts, asking him to give you a heart and mind filled with this same Christian hope and confidence when your last hour is at hand. Our salvation is also sure through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed (Brown Hymnal page 15)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 338 (Red Hymnal)

"Thine Forever God of Love"

The Sermon – Text: Luke 17:3-10 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Literally True"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-sermon Hymn – 353 (Verses 1-5) (Red Hymnal)

"Lord Jesus Christ, My Savior Blest"

Prayers

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 353 (Verses 6-7) (Red Hymnal)

"Lord Jesus Christ, My Savior Blest"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States and around the world. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, join us for refreshments after the service, and come again.

Attendance – Sunday (61) Average (33)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Bible Study
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Pastor Nathanael Mayhew is considering the call to Immanuel of Winter Haven. Pastor Rob Sauers has returned the call to Redemption of Lynnwood. Pastor James Naumann has returned the call to Ascension of Tacoma. Pastor Tim Daub is considering the call as 3rd Foreign Missionary.

Church Council Notes – Five members of the Church Council, plus the Pastor, were present for the meeting on September 25th. Smoke, water, and police emergency sensors, supplied by our insurance carrier, have been installed in the church and parsonage. Offerings for August were short of budgeted needs by \$2,488. Our General Fund is now (-\$5,000). The replacement of the church's leaking water heater remains a work in progress. The next Council meeting is scheduled for October 30th.

Women's Fellowship Meeting – The Women's Fellowship is scheduled to meet during the fellowship hour next Sunday. See Cindy Ollenburger if you have questions.

Poinsettia Order – Please consult the sheet on the mailbox table if you would like to order Poinsettias. See Sandy Roehl if you have questions.

Looking Ahead – Our annual Joint Reformation Service is scheduled for Sunday, October 30th at Our Savior's in Jamestown. The service is at 5pm with a fellowship meal to follow.