

## **Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family**

### **Title: You Are God's Beloved**

### **Lesson: Luke 17:5-10**

<sup>5</sup> *The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!"*

<sup>6</sup> *He replied, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you."*

<sup>7</sup> *"Suppose one of you has a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Will he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? <sup>8</sup> Won't he rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'? <sup>9</sup> Will he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? <sup>10</sup> So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'"*

**(Slide 1)** No one can live alone. Think back to the days of the Covid-19 pandemic. Remember when most community activities were shut down, and we had to spend day after day at home? During that time, we longed for community — for being with one another, for laughter, for shared presence.

We have a deep tendency to live in community. It's only natural that, based on our lifestyles, values, and beliefs, we form and belong to various communities. Yet, as we know, the communities we belong to are not always full of joy and laughter. Sometimes there is conflict, sometimes tension, and sometimes people get hurt and even leave. Being in the same community doesn't mean that everyone is close or intimate. That's why someone once said, *"Community is the place where the person you least want to live with always lives."*

In Luke 17, we find that concerns about community were not much different in Jesus' time. In verse 5, the disciples said to Jesus, *"Increase our faith!"* To understand why they said this, we need to look at what was happening before that moment.

Jesus had been healing the sick, feeding the hungry, and teaching all who wanted to listen — without discrimination or favoritism. Because of that, good news about Jesus spread, and many people began to follow Him. In other words, a community began to form around Jesus. Since it was centered on Him, we might expect it to be a special, ideal kind of community — but it wasn't without conflict. Even among the disciples, there was jealousy, resentment, and hurt.

When the disciples came to Jesus with their frustrations and hurts about others in the community, Jesus said, “If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and come back to you seven times saying ‘I repent,’ you must forgive them.”

Even though the disciples followed and believed in Jesus, this teaching about forgiveness was difficult for them to accept. Think about it — if someone in your church disappoints or hurts you deeply, it’s not easy to forgive, even once. It may take a long time for the relationship to heal — or maybe it never does. But Jesus says that even if this happens seven times in one day, we must forgive. In another Gospel, He says even seventy-seven times!

That seemed impossible. The disciples thought the problem was that their faith wasn’t strong enough, so they asked Jesus to “increase” their faith. But Jesus told them that even faith as small as a mustard seed is enough.

How can that be possible?

I’ve often found insight in the writings of **Henri Nouwen**. Recently, I read his book *Community*, where he reflects on how forgiveness becomes possible. He points us to Luke 6, which describes an important rhythm in Jesus’ life:

**(Slide 2)** “At that time Jesus went out to a mountain to pray, and He spent the night in prayer to God. When morning came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also designated apostles.”

Before calling His community together, Jesus first spent the night alone in prayer — in solitude. In that sacred solitude, He listened to the voice of the Father saying, “*You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.*”

Prayer is precisely this: listening to the voice of God who calls us beloved.

Because Jesus continually listened to that voice, He was able to face every situation — even betrayal, rejection, and death. The same crowd that shouted “Hosanna!” soon shouted “Crucify Him!” Yet Jesus held fast to that one truth: “*I am God’s beloved Son, and my Father delights in me.*”

There are so many other voices in the world that try to tell us who we are. Voices that say, “Prove that you are worthy of love,” “Show your value,” “Become successful,” or “Gain power — then people will love you.” We all know these voices, and sometimes they shake us deeply.

Jesus also heard such voices — “Turn these stones into bread,” “Become famous,” “Seize power.” But Jesus listened only to the voice of His Father and said, “*No. I don’t have to prove anything. I am already the beloved.*”

And that same voice calls out to us today. God does not only call Jesus beloved — God calls each of us His beloved sons and daughters. You and I — we are already God’s beloved children. Only God can love us with a love that is unconditional and complete.

When we truly listen to that voice, we are no longer shaken by the voices that hurt or discourage us. Because when we forget that we are God’s beloved, we start to look for that sense of worth and love from other people in our community — people who can never give us what only God can give.

Sometimes we expect unconditional love from others. But the more we expect that from human beings, the more disappointed and empty we become. Our relationships grow tangled — filled with frustration and dependence — and we end up becoming each other’s demons instead of each other’s companions.

**(Slide 3)** Community, then, is where *solitude meets solitude*. It is a gathering of people who, in their own solitude, have listened to the voice that says, “*You are my beloved.*”

Of course, even if we listen to God’s voice, we are not perfect. There will still be moments of hurt and misunderstanding. That’s why, as Henri Nouwen says, every healthy community needs two daily disciplines: **forgiveness** and **celebration**.

Forgiveness means allowing others to be human — to be who they are, not God. It means recognizing that others cannot give us perfect, unconditional love. They can only give us a small portion of the love they have — just as we can only give a small portion of ours.

We need community because we cannot live alone — and therefore forgiveness is not something we practice once in a while. It may be something we must practice every single day.

And when we accept that only God can give what humans cannot, *celebration begins*.

Through forgiveness, we no longer demand others to be God; instead, we begin to notice and celebrate their existence and their unique gifts. In a community where forgiveness and celebration live together, people say to one another, “*You are God’s beloved child.*”

Beloved, you are God's beloved sons and daughters. You are the ones in whom God delights. Do you believe that?

Then I invite you to say this with me. If you are a woman, say "daughter"; if you are a man, say "son."

"I am God's beloved child."

Yes, you are God's beloved children. And so are the people sitting next to you. So now, turn to those around you and say, "*You are God's beloved child.*"

Yes — we are all God's beloved children.

No matter what situation you are in, or what challenges you face, remember this one truth: **You are God's beloved.**

Only God can love you fully. Only God can satisfy your deepest hunger and longing.

When we listen to that divine voice — the voice of love — the painful voices lose their power. We find the strength to forgive even what once seemed impossible to forgive.

No matter what anyone says, no matter what happens in your life, remember: **You are God's beloved child.**

Beloved, even faith as small as a mustard seed is enough for God to do great things within us.

When we remember that we are God's beloved, and hold on to that love, our community becomes a place overflowing with forgiveness and celebration.

So this week, go and tell one person: "*You are God's beloved child.*"

That is the beginning of mustard-seed faith.

**Amen.**