

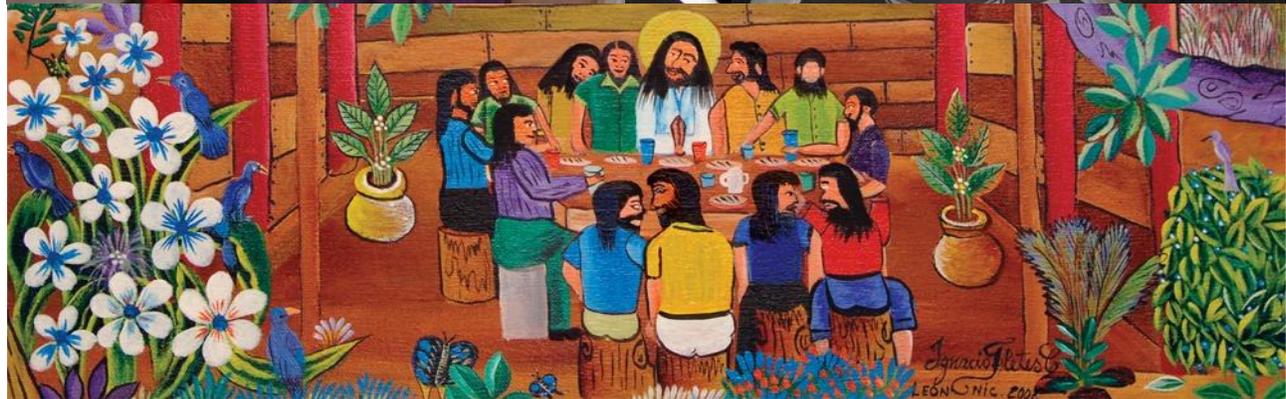
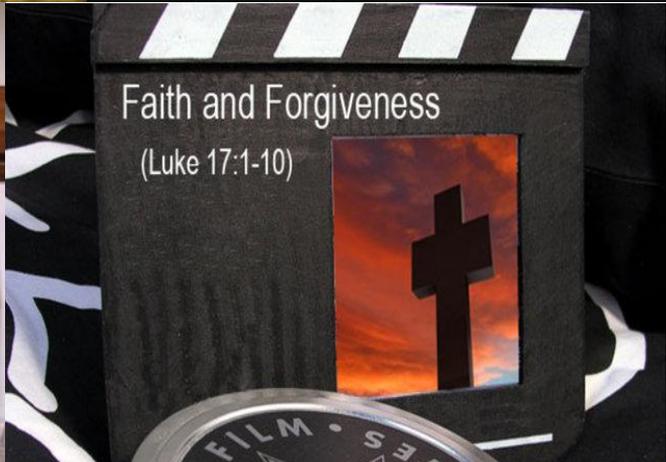
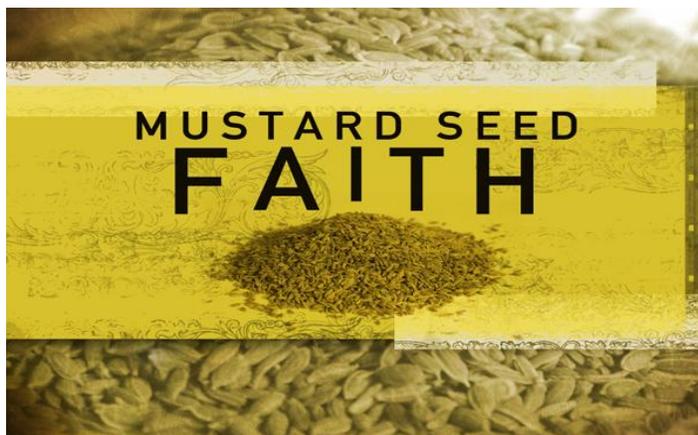
SERMON FOR WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY

The First Chinese Church of Christ in Hawai'i UCC

7:45 & 10:30 Worship Services

Scripture: 2 Timothy 1:1-14; Luke 17:5-10

Message: ***"Faith Grows When We Are in Community!"***



Gathering in the Word

On this World Wide Communion Sunday, Luke 17:1-10 challenges us this morning to expect great things of ourselves and GOD. We are to hope and want to live out "*the sacrament and sacredness of our present moments*" while sharing ordinary things with extraordinary care and to become more Christ-like! Whatever happens or is *not* happening in our lives—the good, the bad, and the ugly—GOD is always with us!

In rekindling, revitalizing, and renewing our faith—we can shine brightly for GOD is in these dark and challenging times we face! Plus—we also have one another!

Hearing GOD's Word

Luke 17:1-10 (The VOICE Bible)

Jesus (to his disciples): ¹You can't stop temptations to do wrong from coming. But how tragic it will be for the person who becomes the source of the temptation! ²It would be better if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones. ³So each of you needs to be careful. If your brother sins [against you], confront him about it, and if he has a change of mind and heart, then forgive him. ⁴Even if he wrongs you seven times in a single day, if he turns back to you each time and says he's sorry and will change, you must forgive him.

The Lord's Emissaries: ⁵ *We don't have enough faith for this!* Help our faith to grow!

Jesus (*pointing to a nearby mulberry tree*): ⁶ *it's not like you need a huge amount of faith. If you just had faith the size of a single, tiny mustard seed, you could say to this huge tree, "Pull up your roots and replant yourself in the sea," and it would fly through the sky and do what you said. So even a little faith can accomplish the seemingly impossible.*

⁷ *Imagine this scenario. You have a servant—say he's been out plowing a field or taking care of the sheep—and he comes in hot and sweaty from his work. Are you going to say, "You poor thing! Come in and sit down right away"? Of course not! ⁸ Wouldn't you be more likely to say, "First, cook my supper and set the table, and then after I've eaten, you can get something to eat and drink for yourself"? ⁹ And after your servant has done everything you told him to do, are you going to make a big deal about it and thank him? [I don't think so!] ¹⁰ Now apply this situation to yourselves. When you've done everything I'm telling you to do, just say, "We're servants, unworthy of extra consideration or thanks; we're just doing our duty."*

The theme and subject matter in Luke 17 is remaining faithful through hardship.

Anyone had hardships lately?

Jesus responds in verses 1-4 about forgiving those who offend us. Maybe those who do cause others to stumble would be better off at the bottom of the sea. But that fact is that most of the people who may deserve such a watery grave won't get one and will keep on causing scandals and spiritual upsets for others! These folks are not going away

and no church will ever be free of these folks either—even for us here at TFCCCH!

The probability that we will be hurt by one another in the church is high and ongoing!

Bummers!

What do we do?

- ✓ The thing to do for us is to be honest about such hurts and to confront those who offend and hurt us!
- ✓ Nothing feels better than confrontation disagreements!
- ✓ Especially when you are convinced that you are the wounded and so innocent party—it is something of a moral head-rush to tell-off and chastise the one who inflicted the hurt to you!
- ✓ There is no indignation as sweet as righteous indignation—after all!

But Jesus makes it clear that it can never be for the sake of revenge that you do such confronting but with the hope of restoration such that the moment the offender repents—**your next job is to get off your *high horse of confrontation* and forgive him or her; and letting the matter drop for good!**

Hawaiian-style is: once you forgive, you never bring it out again! NEVER!

What's more—**that attitude of forgiveness needs to be true even for repeat offenders who do that same thing to you over and over and over!** And let's be honest—the people whom we know and maybe even love

that have hurt us tend to inflict the same hurt repeatedly over the years.

Jesus says in verse 4—“Keep on forgiving!”

So in verse 5, the disciples reply, “OK Lord, we don’t have enough faith for this! Help our faith to grow!” Jesus then reaches for a bit of good old gospel hyperbole (*exaggeration, overstatement*)—and tells them, **Increase your faith?!**

- ✓ Why? The smallest faith (*the size of a mustard seed!*) in the world can tell trees to walk—and the trees walk!
- ✓ You’ve got more faith than that right now so don’t go telling me you don’t have enough in your faith tank to forgive someone seven times in a row!
- ✓ **In other words—what you need is not more faith but fewer excuses!**

To hammer all of this home Jesus’ actual points a bit more—**Jesus** then tells a story that as much says:

“Oh and by the way, WHEN you have forgiven someone seven times with the faith you already have, don’t come jogging back to me like some dancing dog and expect *a pat on the head* for being such a super disciple. You’ll be doing no more than what you’ve seen me do. It’s the family way in the Kingdom of GOD and when you act in unity with who you are by grace—that’s wonderful—but you’ll just have to pardon me if I don’t crank up the angel choir with the Hallelujah Chorus each time you forgive your mother-in-law for telling you for the umpteenth time that you may not be good enough for her daughter. This is how it goes in life. Deal with it and let’s move on.”

This is really the nitty-gritty and basic reality of our life!

Doing the Word

So what is the Word of God for us on this World
Communion Sunday?

1.ONE: WE HAVE MUSTARD SEEDⁱ FAITH!

- ✓ Even the smallest amount of faith can move mountains and firmly rooted trees! Surely then—our faith can also strengthen us in the face of injustice!
- ✓ And when we do things because of our *mustard seed faith*, **GOD’S incalculable power is unleashed by us because of our faith!**
- ✓ So put your FAITH to use all the time! A little faith goes a long way!

2.TWO: WE ALREADY HAVE IN JESUS ALL WE NEED TO LIVE GODLY LIVES THAT EXUDE GRACE AND FORGIVENESS!

- ✓ We are to love the unlovable and forgive even repeat offenders in our church, our family and everyone else!
- ✓ Doing these acts of GOD’S grace should be routine, normal and usual for all of us!

**Can we do this?
Stories?**

3.THREE: FAITH HAS MANY DIMENSIONS AND NUANCES—IT IS HONEST SADNESS, TENACIOUS REMEMBERING, YES—PERFORMANCE OF DUTY TO

GOD, A HOLY CALLING, AND HOLDING FAST TO SOUND TEACHING!

- ✓ Our faith grows in a communal (shared, common, public, collective, mutual) context and environment.
- ✓ What does that mean?
- ✓ We share and we mentor each other!
- ✓ Stories?

Sent in the Word

Jason Chu's Story of Cutting – A 14yo Girl's Story

Tonight after the show (a 15-minute set at a weekly youth outreach service in a rural/lower-income area), a shy but super excited girl wearing a long-sleeved sweater waited afterwards to talk to me. Before even saying hello, she wrapped her arms around me; after a long hug, she stood in front of me barely saying anything, just repeating "Thanks for coming... this was really awesome. Your music really spoke to me". Again and again.

It seemed like something in the music had touched her on a level where she had really needed it. When I asked she revealed her name (Sarah), age (14), and that she loves music and has been having a rough time. I guessed, but didn't ask, that some of my words about *cutting* and *self-harm* rang true with her. The whole time, she rarely said more than one or two words, instead simply smiling and gazing at me.

I've never had this kind of response before. A lot of people have enjoyed or even been moved to tears by the songs, but this girl was looking at me with the same look that I've

seen in fans of Justin Bieber, One Direction - huge, genre-defining artists like that.

After a while, there were some other students who wanted to talk, so I said bye to her and talked with them about my inspiration, music, etc. Then, from outside the auditorium, I saw Sarah return, accompanied by another skinny teenager with dark eye shadow and dyed hair. After a lull in my conversation with the other students, this second girl ran up and also threw her arms around me, hugging me tightly. After another long hug, she also, like Sarah, stood there looking at me and smiling in an awestruck fashion. This girl (Michelle) also revealed, on my prompting, that she loves music, is having a hard time in school, and was really touched by the songs I'd performed.

After a little more awkwardness (seriously they were saying nothing, just beaming and looking at me), I excused myself to go get a plate of food. I wound up talking to some other students and ministry staff, but then maybe 15-20 minutes later, Sarah and Michelle came up to me and asked if we could go talk in private. I sensed that something important was going on, and went to the other side of the room with them.

They were really shy and nervous about whatever it was that they had to say, so I tried to calm them down - "It's OK, whatever you have to say... I'm here to listen, I'm here for you." Eventually, Michelle choked out - "I... there's something I carry around, and I want to give it to you as... kind of like a promise."

She fumbled in the back pocket of her jeans, and pulled out something, hiding it in her palm. I brought my hand up to

hers, and she dropped a tiny makeup case into it, emptied of its original contents and instead carrying several tiny razor blades inside. Crying, she again hugged me, and I held her until I felt her sobs slow and stop.

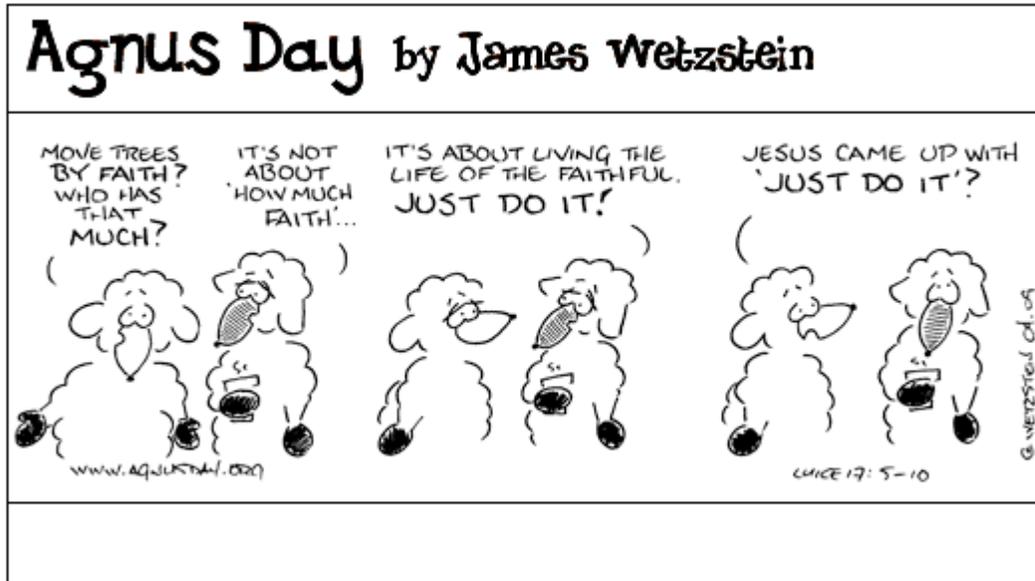
She stepped back, wiping her eyes, and Sarah looked at me, anxious but also seemingly emboldened by my response to Michelle's revelation - "I carry these around too" - and as I stretched out my other hand she dropped several large, loose, individual razor blades into my palm - enough of them that I dropped one or two on the floor and had to bend down to scoop them into my sweater's pocket.

Straightening up, she also cried into my shoulder - tears, I think, of relief, release, and nervous energy. When she too stepped back, standing next to Michelle, I looked at them and told them that what they'd done was a very brave thing, opening up like this, and that I was proud of them and honored that they felt able to be so open and honest with me. They let me pray for them, and I asked for them to keep in touch and reach out if they ever need to vent or share. Before their ride left, I also passed them some stickers and a couple of posters with the motto "In a broken world, we have hope, we find healing, we see... Much Love".

Epilogue from Jason:

On my way out to the car, I ran into the father of the student who had invited me to the outreach event. He said his wife, a counselor at their son's high school, had told him that, after my performance at the school the day before, the counseling team had been over-booked for the entire day. In his words, "What you did awoke something in the student

body... In a good way, it's something that needed to be talked about."



! Say a mustard seed is 1.5 millimeters. There are 1,000 millimeters in a meter. If you stacked mustard seeds on top of each other starting from the base of Mount Hermon it would take 1,202,666.67 mustard seeds to reach the height of Mount Hermon. If you laid those on a straight line on the ground they would go for 1972.9 yards, which is equivalent to 6.5 football fields. That's a lot of mustard seeds. Do you get the idea that a mustard seed is very, very, very, very, very, very small compared to a mountain?