



Sermon for the 17th Sunday after Pentecost Oct. 2, 2022. Increase our Faith!

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene

Kristin Keyes

[Lamentations 1:1-6](#), [Psalm 137](#), [2 Timothy 1:1-14](#), [Luke 17:5-10](#)

Alpha & Omega, nurturer of connections, help us to continue to nurture and maintain relationships built today so that we may grow closer with God through the friendships we build. For the sake of your kingdom, world without end. Amen.

That was the Collect our friends wrote in response to our Women's retreat yesterday. It truly was a wonderful time of camaraderie, play, relaxing, and sharing a meal together in our quest of finding the sacred in everyday living.

What a collection of scriptures to unravel today – ranging from the lowest of lows, anger, retribution, a feeling of drudgery – is following Christ really no better than being a worthless slave? – to St. Paul's assertions of the joys, revealed to us through our Savior Christ Jesus, of putting our trust in God alone.

Then we have St. Frances of Assisi, whom we celebrate today by blessing our pets [which we will do at the Lane's home at our 10 a.m. service] – a way to honor his life and teachings of poverty, humility, adoration of God's creation and all it entails, and his unwavering commitment to live his life like Christ did.

Our Old Testament scripture and Psalm speak of the lowest of lows, no hope, despair over the many losses the people of Israel were experiencing. To me, these passages provide a glimpse into how we can fully express our feelings before God. Without filter, from the depths of our hearts and sorrow. And it is often at this lowest of lows when we are in deep sadness and despair, that we can feel the healing power of pure honesty with God.

I'd like to share a story from my own life. One of my spiritual guides, Fr. Richard Rohr, a Franciscan friar and founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation, says that true transformation often starts when we reach our lowest lows, our point of deep despair, when it feels like the only choice we have is to turn to God, or to fall into complete addiction, or worse, to take away the pain.

About twenty years ago, I was in that place. My marriage to my daughter's father was exploding into an incredibly rancorous divorce, filled with abuse, anger, and real fear for our safety – me, my daughter, and my mother who was living with us. I lost my job during this time yet had to figure out how to keep a house going, feed my family, and somehow keep us safe. At one point, I was so despondent, I didn't even have the energy to make it downstairs to eat and spent a solid week in bed. My mother took over the care of my daughter and me, and my sister flew in from Naples, Italy where she was living, and stayed for several weeks to help me find my footing again.

I was attending St. Thomas' Episcopal Church in a suburb of Philadelphia where I lived at the time. It is a large Gothic church with hundreds of parishioners and is located on

an historic hill that has been home to a church for more than 300 years. After a long hiatus, I had started attending church there in the year prior to my daughter's birth.

As my life continued to implode, it was a race to see which would win – turning to God or turning to wine to take away the pain. I was supported and embraced by my church family, who did much to keep me from falling into a deep abyss.

On one Sunday in the spring of 2002, the bishop of Pennsylvania, Franklin Turner, was preaching and presiding at our service. He preached on the scriptures that are often read during services celebrating St. Frances, from Matthew: "Come unto me all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest."

Of course, I'd heard this scripture many times. But something Bishop Turner said this Sunday was life-changing for me -- it was the focus on the rest of the passage: "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For MY yoke is easy and MY burden is light."

I was at my lowest and felt as though I was breaking apart at the seams with despair. I heard Jesus calling to me, and at the communion rail, I gave it all to Jesus. I just couldn't carry this by myself anymore, and I certainly did not want to fall any further into the abyss I was experiencing. In fact, I remember laughing sarcastically in my head and thinking – you really want a piece of this? Well then, here ya' go – I hope you have as much fun as I am right now. I did say 'sarcastically.'

In my desperate prayer, I felt the light of God's presence filtering through the cracks and filling me with a comfort I had never felt before. God extended a true sense of companionship to me, and I knew he was with me in a deep and abiding way. My circumstances didn't go away or change, but somehow it was different – the burden was indeed much lighter and easier to carry because God gave me an inner calm I had never felt before. I was no longer alone, and I did not have to figure it all out on my own. And, from that experience, I have come to realize that God is my partner in this life. Whenever I feel the impossible, I invite Jesus to share it with me and to walk with me. It indeed makes a difference.

In our Gospel, we hear the disciples ask for Jesus to "increase our faith." Like someone can go from 25% to 50% full of faith. In this passage Jesus offers the metaphor that faith the size of a mustard seed can move a tree into the sea, and that slaves are just doing their job and not expecting to be thanked. Faith is certainly not about quantity! Here Jesus is affirming the power of faith. Even the smallest can produce amazing things for God's kingdom. Even the most mundane acts of discipleship carry the extraordinary potential for transforming the world.

Take heart and trust, as Paul tells us, "God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline." In Corinthians, Paul reminds us that "God's grace is sufficient for us. His power is made perfect in weakness. I will boast more gladly of my weakness," Paul says, "so that the power of Christ may dwell in me." It is through my weakness; God's power is given room to grow. Amen.