

JESUS OF NAZARETH
SEQUOIA SEED FAITH
MATTHEW 17
8-09-20

All = bold sections – read together

Leader = regular font – leader reads (choose or rotate leaders)

Sung together = italics

NOTE: Please have a white candle ready to light.

Reflect:

CS Lewis: Faith is the art of holding on to things in spite of your changing moods and circumstances.

Welcome

Good Morning!

May the love and joy of the Farther, the grace and peace of the Son and the courage and comfort of the Holy Spirit by ours in abundance!

Call to Worship: Psalm 9 TO THE CHOIRMASTER: ACCORDING TO MUTH-LABBEN. A PSALM OF DAVID

I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart; I will recount all of your wonderful deeds. I will be glad and exult in you; I will sing praise to your name, O Most High.

When my enemies turn back, they stumble and perish before your presence. For you have maintained my just cause; you have sat on the throne, giving righteous judgment.

You have rebuked the nations; you have made the wicked perish; you have blotted out their name forever and ever. The enemy came to an end in everlasting ruins; their cities you rooted out; the very memory of them has perished.

But the LORD sits enthroned forever; he has established his throne for justice, and he judges the world with righteousness; he judges the peoples with uprightness.

The LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek you.

Sing praises to the LORD, who sits enthroned in Zion! Tell among the peoples his deeds! For he who avenges blood is mindful of them; he does not forget the cry of the afflicted.

Be gracious to me, O LORD! See my affliction from those who hate me, O you who lift me up from the gates of death, that I may recount all your praises, that in the gates of the daughter of Zion I may rejoice in your salvation.

The nations have sunk in the pit that they made; in the net that they hid, their own foot has been caught. The LORD has made himself known; he has executed judgment; the wicked are snared in the work of their own hands.

The wicked shall return to Sheol, all the nations that forget God. For the needy shall not always be forgotten, and the hope of the poor shall not perish forever.

Arise, O LORD! Let not man prevail; let the nations be judged before you! Put them in fear, O LORD! Let the nations know that they are but men!



Christ Candle – Light the candle as a reminder that God is Light (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)!

We live in a dark world. A significant portion of that darkness resides in the persecution of Christians around the world for their faith in Jesus of Nazareth. In America, in general, this persecution is minimal. We are free to be disciples of Jesus as individuals, as families and as congregations. We are singled out and threatened with death, violence or imprisonment simply because we identify as a Christian. We have it easy. That is not true for millions of Christians around the world where there are extreme consequences to being a disciple of Jesus from your family, others and the government. In many countries it is illegal to be a Christian and punishable by imprisonment or death. For the foreseeable future, we will look at some of these countries as ranked by Open Doors USA to keep us aware of our brothers and sisters in Christ who need our prayers and help and to remind us to be grateful for how good we have it here.

Last week in the service we mentioned North Korea as the hardest place in the world to be a Christian. The place with the second worst persecution rate is Afghanistan. There are over 37 million people there and only a few thousand Christians. Afghanistan is a tribal society, and loyalty to one's family, clan are extremely important. In an Islamic society, it is illegal for an Afghan person to leave Islam. The country is increasingly challenged by Islamic militants, the Taliban controls or contests more and more areas, and an ISIS-affiliated group also targets minorities. Those who decide to follow Jesus do so in secret.

Prayer Points: Christians from Islam face heavy pressure from family, friends and neighbors. Pray for these believers to have courage and perseverance. The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan does not allow conversion from Islam. Please pray for a softening of the country's leadership and local rulers. Pray for the spread of the gospel in Afghanistan through secret believers and the underground church.

Jesus is the Light. We are a light. Shine His light!

Song: How Great Is Our God -- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cKLQ1td3MbE>

The splendor of a King, clothed in majesty.

Let all the Earth rejoice;

All the Earth rejoice!

He wraps himself in light,

And darkness tries to hide,

And trembles at His voice,

Trembles at His voice.

How great is our God, sing with me,

How great is our God, and all will see,

How great, how great is our God!

Age to age He stands,

And time is in His hands;

Beginning and the end.

The Godhead Three in One,

Father Spirit Son;

The Lion and the Lamb.

The Lion and the Lamb.



*How great is our God, sing with me,
How great is our God, and all will see,
How great, how great is our God.*

*Name above all names!
Worthy of our praise!
My heart will sing,
How great is our God!*

*Name above all names!
Worthy of our praise!
My heart will sing,
How great is our God!*

*How great is our God, sing with me,
How great is our God, and all will see,
How great, how great is our God!*

Responsive Reading – Adapted from Romans 8:1-14, 38, 39

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made us free from the law of sin and death.

For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh,

That the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.

For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

Because the carnal mind is hostility against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.

So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they are not His.

And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

Therefore, disciples of Jesus of Nazareth are not debtors to the flesh, to live according to their sinful desires.

For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are children of God.

For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to



separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Prayer of Confession

Holy Spirit of Truth, you know all too well what lurks within us. We have not faithfully used the powerful gifts of love and service you gave to the church. We are quick to find fault and spread gossip. We undermine the fellowship of believers. We have left strangers and seekers among us feeling like outsiders. We have not done our best to carry the good news of Jesus Christ beyond these walls. Renew a right spirit within us that we may carry Christ's love and mercy from this place to our community and to the world beyond. We pray in the name of Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Father, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Song: Great Is Thy Faithfulness -- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0k1WhFtVp0o>

*Great is Thy faithfulness O God my Father.
There is no shadow of turning with Thee.
Thou changest not Thy compassions they fail not.
As Thou hast been, Thou forever will be.*

*Great is Thy faithfulness. Great is Thy faithfulness.
Morning by morning new mercies I see.
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided.
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me.*

*Summer and winter and springtime and harvest;
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above,
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To thy great faithfulness mercy and love.*

*Great is Thy faithfulness. Great is Thy faithfulness.
Morning by morning new mercies I see.
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided.
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me.*

*Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth.
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide.
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow.
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside.*

*Great is Thy faithfulness. Great is Thy faithfulness.
Morning by morning new mercies I see.
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided.
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me.*

Offering

We remember that giving is an act of faith, a practice of hope and an expression of love.

(You can give by sending your offering to the church, P.O. Box 217, Oakdale Ca 95361 or consider giving online through your bank. Our deacons can help you with this if necessary.)

Youth Celebration

As schools across the country are beginning to open up and consider opening up, let's take a moment to



pray for the education of our youth. We have kids in both public and private schools that will navigate these challenging educational waters along with educational professionals in the classrooms and district offices. Specifically, please pray for Oakdale High School and Ripon Christian High School as they both enter into this uncertain time to make the most of the opportunities they have.

Scripture Reading: Matthew 17

There are three main scenes: (1) The transfiguration, (2) Mustard Seed Faith, (3) The Temple Tax. We will be looking at each of these scenes through the lens of faith which is a major theme in this chapter. First, we will see faith's prize, or object. Second, we will see faith's power and third we will see faith's posture. Please read Matthew 17.

Gospel Message: Sequoia Seed Faith

What gets you up in the morning? Most of us would either say work or school. What if we were to say, "Jesus of Nazareth is why I get up every morning." The apostle Paul, writing to the church in Galatia tells the disciples there that the only thing that counts for anything is "faith working through love" (Galatians 5:6). In other words, the reason worthwhile for getting up each morning is to live faithfully to Jesus of Nazareth by living lives of love at work or at home. Faith working through love! That's it. Is that how we view each day, each encounter with others? What if it wasn't? Paul goes on in verse 15 of the same chapter to strongly warn them that if they continue to "bite and devour" one another, they will destroy each other. When faith working through love is not operating central to our being as disciples of Jesus, biting and devouring and destroying ensues. How well do you live from a "faith working through love" motivation as a disciple of Jesus Christ? This morning we will again focus on faith, a key theme in the book of Matthew and central to what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. If the enemy can get us to deviate from a consistent life of faith, he will successfully destroy our ability to be credible and coherent witnesses of Jesus. When we engage life from a faith working through love motivation, kingdom results happen, faith deepens, God is glorified and we are joy filled in being who God designed us to be.

When you think of faith, does a particular person or story come to mind? Maybe it is someone you know who has inspired you by their belief and trust in some one or something; maybe a parent or teacher or friend. Or maybe you think of a character in a fictional book or maybe a sports or TV celebrity you enjoy watching. Or maybe it is a story from the Bible, maybe of Abraham or David or Esther or Job or Mary. Maybe it's something in nature that you are reminded of; maybe the slow, powerful formative powers of a glacier or the faithfulness in growth of a plant or tree from a seedling. It is this last image that Jesus of Nazareth calls the disciples attention to, the faith of a mustard seed.

The seed of a sequoia, like that of a mustard seed is very small when compared to the tree it will eventually become. In a small cone not more than the size of a walnut, there are around 200 fragile looking seeds that has the potential to someday grow into the world's tallest and largest tree; a tree that will withstand fire, snow, lightning, insects and disease over the centuries it will live. What does sequoia seed faith look like for the disciple of Jesus? Matthew 17 points to three things (there are more): (1) The prize (or object) of faith which we will see in the transfiguration of Jesus. (2) The power of faith that we will see in the story of the healing of the demon possessed boy. (3) The posture of faith that we will see in the story of the temple tax and the miraculous shekel that is taking from the mouth of a fish.

The prize of a disciple's faith is Jesus. Jesus is the prize of faith, the object of faith. That is, our faith



is supremely in Jesus of Nazareth as both our Lord and Savior. And the picture of Jesus of Nazareth that we get in verses 1-8 is awesome, stunning, life-changing. Our familiarity with Jesus can screen us from realizing the sheer immensity of the truth of his incarnation. We can drift into seeing Jesus as mostly human and lose the terrifying awesomeness of his divinity (Hebrews 10:31). We can be so comfortable with our theological formulations that we lose the impact of the uniqueness of his person and work. But God does not want us to be too comfortable, nor will he consign us to our propensities to blindness. As he continues to nudge Peter and the other disciples along toward fuller understanding, so he patiently continues to reveal himself to us through his Word so that we can align our awareness and expectations of Jesus' identity and mission to his own purposes. The social, religious, and philosophical barriers to a clear understanding of Jesus' identity and mission in the first century were overcome by the Father's intentional revelation, and those same barriers in our contemporary world can be overcome by heeding clearly the message that Matthew has recorded for our guidance. Jesus of Nazareth has largely been rather unimpressive. His miracles are shedding that image. The transfiguration revelation blows it away!

Like a tornado that removes everything in its path or a brilliant light that drives away all darkness, Jesus's divinity and supernatural connection with the Father is revealed, removing and driving away all doubt as to who he is. The picture of Jesus that we see displayed in this chapter is awesome. He is transfigured to show his divine relationship to his heavenly Father, which now places a radical challenge on our worldview and in turn affects all we do, say, and think. That is the impact he makes on those who surround him in these incidents. Matthew presents three primary scenes—from the mountain of transfiguration to the village of faulty faith to the sea of the miraculously supplied coin—to demonstrate the centrality of Jesus the Messiah in God's program of salvation history and to persuade his followers to give him ultimate centrality in their worldview. This in turn affects all of our relationships, all of our ministries, and all of our priorities.

The word "transfigured" is the Greek word "metamorphoo" from which we get the English word, metamorphosis. This is the word we use to describe the change of a caterpillar to a butterfly; a change involving a different physical form and/or appearance. Jesus gave Peter, James and John (I feel bad for the other disciples who miss this incredible event), a short glimpse into the depth and majesty of who he is. The appearance of Moses and Elijah only adds to the dramatic nature of the scene. Moses and Elijah represent the Law and the living out the Law in the Old Testament. They are massive figures in the understanding of being in right standing before God. Peter, again the spokesperson, is overwhelmed with the sure majesty and mystery of the situation. He asks if he can build three shelters or tabernacles for them. Why? The tabernacle was the place that God presided in the OT when the Israelites were freed from Egypt and took 40 years to get to the promised land. The tabernacle hid God's presence because when God showed himself to people, they die. His perfect glory overwhelms their sinful nature. He therefore locates himself in a tabernacle or in a pillar of fire so they don't die. Peter may have been right in recognizing the presence of the Living God and that they needed shelter from Him. However, in the midst of this question, Peter is interrupted by the Living God himself. A bright cloud of God's presence, often called the Shekinah Glory envelops them like fog and a voice erupts, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." Whoa! Picture yourself in this scene. What are you thinking and feeling? Well, the disciples were terrified! They fall on their faces.

Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of the Living God comes near to the three disciples, Peter, James and



John in their terrified state. He bends down and he reaches out and touches them; each one of them. He puts his hand on their shoulder saying, “Get up, and do not be afraid.” The divine power and majesty of Jesus of Nazareth is compassionate and loving. The supernatural inbreaking of Christ’s divinity and the presence and voice of God the Father and Holy Spirit overwhelms the disciples so Jesus closes the curtain and shuts the blinds so they are not overwhelmed by the light! He touches them, calms them with his presence as Moses, Elijah and the bright cloud disappear. The gentle, authoritative divine-in-flesh touch of Jesus of Nazareth is in control. It is to him and him alone that our faith resides and rests in. It is the faith that both shapes us and moves us to action to both declare and demonstrate the reality of the presence of the kingdom of God on earth. God speaks from the cloud surrounding them that Jesus of Nazareth is God’s beloved Son and that they are to listen to him. The word for listen implies hearing to act or hearing to obey. It is a listening that forms them to act. Why is it we often listen to learn about but not to act? Why is knowing about Jesus insufficient to save us nor sufficient enough to call ourselves his disciples?

Upon joining the crowd at the bottom of the mountain, Jesus, Peter, James and John encounter a dad whose son has seizures and often endangers himself by falling into fire and water. They are informed that the other 9 disciples of Jesus were not able to heal his boy. While addressed by this one, desperate man (think also of the Canaanite woman and her daughter), Jesus answers generally to the crowd around, calling them “faithless” and “twisted,” seemingly being genuinely wearied and maybe even frustrated with humanity. He asks, “How long am I do be with you?” and “How long am I to bear with you?” This generation represents “no faith” (faithless). It turns out the seizures are because of a demon and that it could be cast out by faith like a mustard seed and not by there “little faith.” The faith of a mustard seed is massive, not little. For us in California, we have an even greater illustration with the giant Sequoia’s that are the largest and biggest trees in the world but come from a very small and frail seed. The faith of the Sequoia seed is that it knows someday it will no longer be small, weak and fragile; that it will grow big and overcome obstacles and persevere. It’s current form and status does not accurately reflect what it can become and be. The mountains referred to were a common idiom of that time (and today for that matter) of obstacles to overcome and not literally a physical mountain.

Little faith sinks (Peter) and little faith is unable to overcome a demon but Sequoia like faith walks on water and casts out demons! Jesus tells them that if they have this kind of faith, there is absolutely no obstacle they cannot overcome. However, lest we drift away from the true meaning of faith and begin to think that with mega, Sequoia like faith all our obstacle will go away; the cancer will be healed, the marriage mended, the job saved, the enemies removed - they often will not. Faith is navigating through the obstacles by seeing them not as obstacle but as opportunities for faith and hope and love. In that sense, any obstacle, even as large as Mount Everest is moved out of the way and becomes an opportunity to glorify God through loving faith in Jesus of Nazareth. Cancer, covid-19, unemployment, divorce, disease, disaster – can all be mountains that are moved, obstacles that are turned into opportunities by loving faith in Jesus Christ.

But some of us might have been formed more by hostile faith than hospitable faith, by duty driven faith than delight driven faith, by hurtful faith than helpful faith. This kind of faith tears down, is little and is unbecoming of a disciple of Jesus. We might look at others different from ourselves politically, racially, socially, economically and go elder brother on them – judging ourselves superior and better. We just might be “more right” than the other but that does not give us the right to demean, belittle,

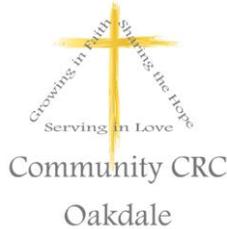


insult, make fun of, joke about or slander anyone. Jesus tells us in Luke 6:28 to bless those who curse us and to pray for those who abuse us. Wow! How counter-cultural is that?!? And how challenging for the disciple to live out, going against the strong cultural current that says we are to get even, get revenge, prove that we are right and triumph over the other. However, Jesus calls us to a faith that is powerful enough to not respond in a worldly way but in a way that honors God by seeking to bless those who verbally and physically harm or threaten to harm us. This is faith working through love in action. It is loving your neighbor as yourself. It is loving even our enemies. It is submitting to our governing authorities when it does not cause me to act in ways contrary to being a disciple of Jesus. The faith of a sequoia seed challenges us to listen to Jesus and do what he says and do it in a manner consistent with how he would do it.

After reminding the disciples of what they fail to grasp as the gospel of Jesus Christ (his betrayal, death and resurrection), they arrive at Capernaum, Jesus' hometown for his three years of ministry and Peter's home town that he grew up in and where his mom still lives. It is there that the religious Jewish collectors of the temple tax approached Peter and asked him if Jesus pays this tax or goes against Jewish custom. Peter says that indeed Jesus does pay this tax. However, Jesus overhears the conversation and jumps in as a great teaching moment. He asks Peter if kings tax their family or others. Peter responds correctly that kings do not tax their own family, they are exempt and Jesus provides the conclusion that then the family is free (not to pay taxes). What is Jesus implying here? Well, the God is the King of the temple and Jesus is the divine Son. Therefore, Jesus is exempt from paying the tax. However, the Jews do not get this and so Jesus says something deeply profound for us today "not to give offense to them". He instructs Peter to go to the Sea of Galilee (only feet away) and cast a line in and the first fish you catch will have a shekel (which is four drachma) that is enough to pay their two shares of the tax. Jesus pays the tax he is not obligated to pay. Why? In order to not needlessly offend them. Can you think of anything the government (church and state) might be asking of us to do that we don't need to do but might be good in order to not offend them? Jesus takes a posture of although being in the right to disobey, he does not. He obeys in order to not cause offense. The posture of faith being shown to Peter here is one of love, to not needlessly offend someone even when in the right. This money is going to the corrupt Jewish temple system and Jesus continues to give it. However, this will forever change in what Jesus is heading towards Jerusalem to accomplish. The disciples do not grasp this yet, but they will.

Let's tie this back into the transfiguration. Why didn't Peter, James and John die in the presence of glory of God at the transfiguration? Because of Jesus. He is the new tabernacle, the new temple in which we dwell and find our safety and shelter and comfort and peace. The disciples will eventually realize that Jesus is the new temple that was destroyed and raised up again in three days. This is the gospel. There will be no need for the temple tax and the temple and its system is obsolete in Jesus Christ as he is the fulfillment of everything it stood for. But this does not happen until after his death and resurrection. Jesus of Nazareth shields us from the glory of God, because through his sacrifice he reconciles us. He pays for our sin, so now the very glory that used to be fatal to everybody can come into our life (that's why the Bible says you're now a temple of the Holy Spirit) because of what Jesus Christ has done! This is the gospel. This is the Good News of Jesus of Nazareth! We can dwell and live lives of faith working through love because our lives are hidden in Christ and because the Holy Spirit indwells us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling in the easy and challenging times of life.

Sequoia seed faith prizes Jesus above all others. He is its delight. He is our delight. Sequoia seed faith



is powerful to remove all obstacles and turn them into opportunities to give witness to Jesus Christ and his kingdom. Sequoia seed faith is demonstrated through and within love, love for God, love for neighbor and love for God's creation. May we all experience the touch of Jesus. May we be transformed from the inside out by God's amazing grace. May we be formed by biblical faith in Jesus of Nazareth that moves us to action that demonstrates our faith and trust in Jesus. May our sequoia seed faith work through love and the only thing that matters, that counts for anything in this world. Amen.

Communion Meditation

Professing: (From Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony)

Jesus stays with us in the Spirit, who renews our hearts, moves us to faith, leads us in the truth, stands by us in our need, and makes our obedience fresh and vibrant. The Spirit's gifts are here to stay in rich variety - fitting responses to timely needs. We thankfully see each other as gifted members of the fellowship which delights in the creative Spirit's work. He gives more than enough to each believer for God's praise and our neighbor's welfare.

Proclaiming: 1 Corinthians 11:23b-25 (Paraphrased)

On the night of his betrayal, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it saying, "this is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." After the meal he took the cup of wine and pouring it out said, "this wine is my blood, a new covenant of grace poured out for the forgiveness of sins."

Remember, believe the body and blood of Jesus was given and shed for the forgiveness of sins.

Song: Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus -- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i5qc0EcNgaw>

*O soul are you weary and troubled? No light in the darkness you see?
There's light for a look at the Savior, and life more abundant and free.*

Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in His wonderful face.

*And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.*

*Through death into life everlasting He passed, and we follow Him there.
O'er us sin no more hath dominion, for more than conquerors we are.*

Turn your eyes upon Jesus.

Look full in His wonderful face.

*And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.*

*His word shall not fail you, He promised. Believe Him and all will be well.
Then go to a world that is dying, His perfect salvation to tell.*

Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in His wonderful face.

*And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.*

Sending as Disciples of Jesus: Matthew 28:18-20 (Paraphrased)

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus. Therefore, as we are sent into the world by him, let us make disciples of all, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that Jesus has commanded us. And let us



remember and treasure that Jesus is with us always, even to the end of the age. Amen!