

Sermon Given at the Anglican Parish of Kingscliff and Pottsville, 05 October 2025

Reading: Luke 17:5-10

Theme: The Humility of Duty and the Surprise of Love

The disciples' request in this passage is one we've all made: "Lord, increase our faith!" It's a holy and honest plea. They feel the weight of Jesus' difficult teachings -forgiveness without limit, avoiding temptation, loving enemies. And they know their own resources are insufficient. They need more power, more strength, more faith.

But Jesus' response is surprising. He doesn't lay hands on them and grant them a spiritual upgrade. Instead, he tells them that the quantity of faith isn't the issue. Even the tiniest, most mustard-seed-sized faith is enough to do the impossible. The power is not in the size of their faith, but in the object of their faith—God Himself.

Then, he tells a story that seems, at first glance, almost harsh. It's a parable about a master and a servant, and it's a masterclass in reorienting our entire spiritual perspective.

The servant works all day in the field. He comes in tired, hungry, and dusty. Does the master invite him to put his feet up at the head of the table? No. The master expects the servant to first prepare his supper, put on an apron, and serve him. Only after the master's needs are met can the servant attend to his own. And Jesus drives the point home: The master doesn't shower the servant with gratitude for simply doing his job. He concludes, "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.'"

This feels jarring to our modern ears. Where is the affirmation? The "good job"? The participation trophy? The 'well done good and faithful servant'?

Jesus is taking us to the very foundation of our relationship with God. He is defining the starting line, not the finish line. He is describing the posture of duty.

Duty says, "I have an obligation to fulfill." Duty says, "This is what is required of me." Duty says, "I am a servant, and the Master's will comes first."

And in the economy of God's kingdom, this is the only appropriate starting point. We cannot come to God with a list of our accomplishments, expecting a reward. We cannot negotiate with Him as if He owes us something. We have only done what was required. Duty, fulfilled, puts us at a zero balance. It brings us to the baseline.

And love begins where duty finishes.

If we stop the parable at verse 10, we have a true but incomplete picture of God. We see a righteous Master and dutiful servants. But the Gospel, the Good News, is what happens after the duty is done.

The stunning truth of the Gospel is that our Master is not like the master in the parable. Our Master is Jesus, who said of himself, "I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22:27).

Our Master is the one who, after we have labored and failed, gets up from the table, girds himself with a towel, and washes our dirty feet. Our Master is the one who, instead of demanding we prepare his supper, prepares a feast for us and invites us to the wedding supper of the Lamb. Our Master is the one who, instead of saying, "I have no need to thank you," looks at us—unworthy servants who have only done our duty—and says, "Well done, my good and faithful servant... Come and share your master's happiness!" (Matthew 25:21).

This is the great reversal of the Gospel! We approach God on the basis of duty, acknowledging we can never put Him in our debt. But He meets us on the basis of grace, love, and fatherly delight.

So, how do we live in this tension?

1. Start with Duty. Begin each day with the humble posture of the servant. "Lord, what do you require of me today? I am yours to command." Do the right thing, not for applause, but because it is your duty as a follower of Christ. This purifies our motives and kills our pride.

2. Be Astonished by Love. When you have done everything, and you stand at your zero balance, ready only to say "I am an unworthy servant," then look up. See the Master, Jesus, coming toward you not with a list of your shortcomings, but with a robe, a ring, and a celebration. He does what no earthly master would do—He embraces you as a friend, a child, a beloved.

So, go and do your duty. Be faithful in the small things. Forgive, serve, and love because it is what you are commanded to do. And then, in that place of humble obedience, get ready. For that is precisely where you will find, to your everlasting joy, that love has already begun. For when we realize how much God loves us, we consider indeed a great privilege and duty to serve Him. Amen.

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