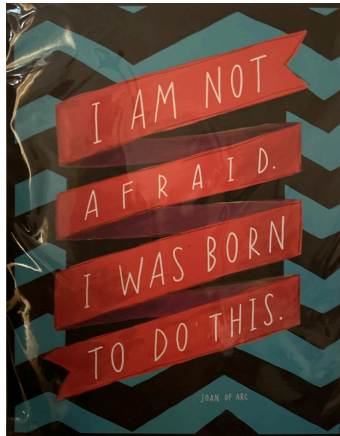


Sermon
The Seventeenth Sunday After Pentecost
Sunday, October 5th, 2025
Church of the Ascension, Ottawa
The Reverend Victoria Scott
Readings: LAMENTATIONS 1:1-6; PSALM 137; 2 TIMOTHY 1:1-14; LUKE 17:5-10



On our screen this morning, you'll see a poster that I gave to my daughter Annabel, before she headed off to university. These words are attributed to Joan of Arc, said, apparently, as she embarked on a mission to save France from the English. We might read these words as being about career or vocation, about purpose in life, but this statement goes even deeper than that...

We've just heard another one of Jesus's parables. The disciples ask that he increase their faith, and he replies with a story of mustard seeds and uprooting mulberry trees, and ends with statements about "worthless slaves" doing only what they ought to have done - statements that are likely to cause us to bristle.

The lectionary doesn't include the verses immediately before these, but they are important. Just before the disciples ask Jesus to increase their faith, he says this to them:

"'Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to anyone by whom they come! **2** It would be better for you if a millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea than for you to cause one of these little ones to stumble. **3** Be on your guard! If another disciple ^b sins, you must rebuke the offender, and if there is repentance, you must forgive. **4** And if the same person sins against you seven times a day, and turns back to you seven times and says, "I repent", you must forgive.' (Luke 17:1-4)

Do not cause another to stumble, and if they sin and repent, forgive. This is about challenges in relationships, and a call to be loving, generous and forgiving as we

navigate these challenges. Do you think the disciples might have been a little afraid of what was being asked of them? I do!

Increase our faith. This is the cry of disciples overwhelmed by scarcity: they are fearful that they don't have enough faith to do what Jesus has asked. This makes faith a commodity. It makes faith a competition. Jesus shows us that this isn't what faith is about. Faith isn't about more or less.

I listened to an interesting podcast this week about faith. It began examples of opposites such as lament and exultation, sorrow and joy, praise and criticism. The host of this podcast asked: What is the opposite of faith? Is it doubt? Is it unfaithfulness? Jesus shows us - in this parable, and in all that he did - Jesus shows us that the opposite of faith is fear.

Faith is a way of being in the world. It's a way that trusts that the love and forgiveness and courage that Jesus embodied as he walked this earth is what we are made for in our humanity.

How are we to interpret Jesus's examples about slaves in this parable? What about this word "worthless"? This word is *achreos* in Greek - the root word is *chreios*, with the prefix *a-* to make it a negative. *Chreios* is more about need than profitability, as in "that which should happen because it is needed". When this word is made negative, as in our passage this morning, it can be translated as "without need". To say that the disciples are slaves without need having done only what they ought to have done removes the shadow that worthless casts over this example. What if Jesus gives this example to show the disciples that they have what they need to be and to do what he is calling them to?

What if we are invited to hear this parable as an invitation to be what we are made to be: forgiven and forgiving, loving, and courageous? What if this parable is an invitation to recognize that we have what we need to move through this earthly life of ours saying as Joan of Arc did: "I am not afraid....I was born to do this." We have what we need, inside, waiting to be lived out; and, we have the example of Jesus to show us how to live it out!

There is actually more to these words attributed to Joan of Arc - this was not a self-aggrandizing statement. This wasn't a statement of self-sufficiency and personal empowerment. Her words are shortened for impact, but there is more to it. The story goes that as she set off to visit the Dauphin, knowing that she'd travel through English-watched territory, she was asked how she could make such a journey and she replied:

"I do not fear the soldiers, for my road is made open to me, and if the soldiers come, I have God, my Lord, who will know how to clear the route that leads to my lord the Dauphin. It was for this that I was born!"

This is a statement of trust in God, trust that God was with her. Trust that the way would be made clear. This is a statement of courage that comes not from self-sufficiency, but from relationship with God - from faith in God's accompaniment through this life.

How do we focus on faith not fear as we walk this earth? What do we need to do to be able to say "I am not afraid...i was born to do this."?

Our other readings this morning speak to this. How, you might ask? How does the weeping by the shores of Babylon in our psalm, the dashing of little ones on the rocks connect to this?

The recognition that God is with us in all things, the recognition that we have what we need - in us, and in the example of Jesus - to live lovingly, courageously, generously, in our humanity doesn't eliminate the challenges of this life, this world. We're not meant to deny the struggle, the lament, the sorrow, the trauma that is a very real part of our human existence. Passages such as our psalm this morning name those things. This is a psalm of a traumatized people, and we have these passages in scripture to reflect the very real range of our human experience.

Paul's Letter to Timothy has "I am not afraid...I was born for this" between the lines. This is a letter of encouragement: to trust "...in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. It acknowledges that the help of the Holy Spirit is there as we move, again, and again, from fear to trust. From fear to faith.

We *are* made to be forgiven and forgiving, loving, and courageous. We have what we need, inside, waiting to be lived out; and, we have the example of Jesus to show us how to live it out. To recognize that fear and faith are opposites doesn't mean that we'll never feel fear again, but Jesus calls us not to act out of that fear. He calls us to move and to act in this world with faith and courage that come from trust in God with us, and from a trust that we are loved and made to love.

I offer, in closing, this "Prayer for Courage", by poet and author Padraig O'Tuama. May what he expresses here be reflected in our lives, today, and everyday:

Courage comes from the heart
and we are always welcomed by God,
the Croí [the heart] of all being.

We bear witness to our faith,
knowing that we are called
to live lives of courage,
love and reconciliation
in the ordinary and extraordinary
moments of each day.

We bear witness, too, to our failures
and our complicity in the fractures of our world.

May we be courageous today.

May we learn today.

May we love today.

Amen.