

**REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE : SUNDAY 4 SEPTEMBER 2011  
MORNING SERVICE**

**THEME:**

**We have faith, let us use it.**

**Sing before:** Scripture versification 14-1:1,2 [Romans 13:11 – 14]

*Let us commence this meeting with God by declaring openly to one another and to God:*

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Beloved grace and peace be to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, through the mighty working of God the Holy Spirit.

**Amen**

Psalm of praise: Psalm 48:1, 4

**Confession of faith:** Apostles Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into Hell, the third day He rose again from the dead, He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from there He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, a holy universal Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting

**Amen.**

*After the reading of the Law we confess our guilt and pray for forgiveness and a new life before God with Psalm 86:1,3*

Law

Psalm: 86:1,3

**Prayer:**

- **Doxology**
- **Worship**
- **Confession of sins**
- **Forgiveness**
- **Gratitude**
- **Prayer for the need of the congregation of the church, the authorities and the sinful world and appeal to God's promises**
- **General prayer**

- **Enlightenment from the Holy Spirit for the sake of the ministry of the Word.**  
**Amen**

Psalm 23:1,2

**Scripture reading:** Luke 17:1-10

**Scripture text:** Luke 17:5-6

**5 And the apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith."**

**6 So the Lord said, "If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.**

(Luke 17:5-6)

Beloved in our Lord Jesus Christ, in all our lives there have been times when we felt that our faith was too little, too weak and too small. Especially when we have a big task to shoulder or when we are in the middle of a crisis, such a feeling may come over us. When we hear and become aware of the intimate personal relationship the Lord has with us, and also hear that He expects us to have the same intimate personal relationship with Him, such a feeling can also come over us. It happens especially when we realize what it comprises to each individually and for us as a church to live in an intimate personal relationship with the Lord. Our conduct and words, our whole life must come to be in compliance with the will of the Lord. We, in fact, are children of God and He is our Father, therefore it is compulsory for us to mirror God's characteristics.

To be in compliance to the Lord by our words and conduct means that we will have to be changed. We cannot just continue in our normal natural ways with our lives. To many of us changing is a crisis-time. It is in such times, during big tribulation that people, together with the disciples, in prayer ask: Lord, grant us more faith!

It is important to take note that the disciples put this question after the Lord Jesus set two great demands to them. We read about this in the first four verses.

The first demand the Lord puts: You must live in such a way that you, by word or deed, do not cause somebody to become disloyal to Me. Jesus looks in a matter-of-fact way at the world we and His disciples live in. Therefore He said that it is unavoidable for things causing us to stumble. Sin has gained a stronghold in this world and the most powerful stronghold of sin is the natural disposition of every human being.

Our natural disposition is to always break away. By nature, because we then would not feel free, we do not want to be bound by rules and regulations. And the Satan does not procrastinate. He gladly joins our natural disposition by enticing and encouraging us to break away. He wants us to stumble in our relationship with the Lord. Should we observe the world surrounding us, everybody, young and old, see all the things aimed at causing us to stumble, accosting us. Those are all the bright beautiful matters presented to us. And when we, through the eyes of our sinful disposition, observe these matters, they of course appear much more enticing than diligently serving the Lord in everything. Of course it is much better and nicer to

rather be abusive and defensive than turning the other cheek or rendering a soft answer. It is of course much more enjoyable to be “in” with your friends and to partake in their fun than to be obedient to your parents at home and working on your relationship with them. In this way we can name a whole lot of things confirming that stumbling blocks are unavoidable.

But here Jesus is not speaking to the Satan or to the unbelievers who are doing things that could cause us to stumble. He is talking to believers and to us. Therefore the warning: **"It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come!"** (Luke 17:1) Then Jesus continued teaching that the punishment to somebody who causes one of these children to stumble would be so terrible that it will be better for him to die a horrible death.

Listen carefully to the words of Jesus: **"Take heed to yourselves."** (Luke 17:3) As believers we are instructed to be careful in all our words and deeds. Other people are looking at us. Children look up to adults. People who have just recently come to the faith look up to us whom have already grown a bit in our faith. They observe us and do as we do.

And now, beloved, we know how easily it happens that in the heat of things we say something or react in a way without us properly taking heed to our words or deeds. And it is only when your child uses those same words that you get a fright and realize that you have caused your child to stumble by saying something not befitting a believer. Or maybe the Lord is more lenient towards us and grants us the opportunity of coming to our senses and immediately realizing what we did or said.

This first demand the Lord puts to us is indeed very difficult. Every day, in order not to cause anybody to stumble, you and me must purposefully take heed to our words and deeds.

The second demand the Lord Jesus puts to us is just as difficult, to some even more difficult: **Should your brother sin against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.** (Luke 17:3) We shall say: Yes Lord, we will forgive our brother and sister because they at least repented their wrongdoing.

Now Jesus stretches this patience and forgiveness we revealed even further. He says: **"And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him."** (Luke 17:4) We would say once, maybe twice is already asking a lot, but we could manage it to forgive, should he repents. In fact, the Lord expects a lot more, He refers to utmost forgiveness. “Seven times,” the Lord Jesus told Peter, “up to seventy times seven.” In other words we must not count how many times we forgive somebody truly repenting. We must continually forgive. The Lord leaves us no choice. He does not say that we **may** forgive him, He says that we **must** forgive him.

Little sister and brother, you children could now say: “But sir, you do not know what horrible things that friend at school did to me. You do not know how it hurt me” Indeed, I do not know, but the Lord knows, and it is the Lord issuing this command. He says that we must forgive somebody who says that he is sorry, and that is that, no further discussion.

Brothers, sisters and children, these are enormously large demands put to us by the Lord. To, by our words and deeds, never be a stumbling block to another, to go to the utmost in forgiving – that is something not possible to just everybody. To be able to do so you need abnormal powers, you need power from God to enable you to do it. To persevere as a child of God, to be a church of the Lord and to continually do what the Lord expects from us requires supernatural power. Because we must change to what the Lord wants us to be, He puts high demands to us. This means that inevitably we must become different from that what we are used to, or from how many people know us to be.

Therefore the apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith. Should we have a little more faith, then we would be able to comply with these high demands." Do you also ask: "Lord, grant me more faith, because should I have a little more faith, then I would be able to remain a brother or sister to my fellow believer. Lord, if I have just a little more faith, then I would manage to rear my child in the fears of your Name. Lord, should I have just a little more faith, I would manage to truly obey my parents."

Beloved, when we ask the Lord for more faith, carefully consider what we are asking. Reflect on where faith comes from. Yes, faith comes from the Lord. Through His Holy Spirit He grants us faith. Should we now ask the Lord: "Give us more faith," then we say to the Lord: "Lord, You gave us faith, but we are of the opinion that it is a bit too little. With this small amount we are not going to manage doing what You expect from us." We now revert to Adam's tricks and snub the Lord: "Should we be unable to comply with what You expect from us Lord, the fault is not with us, You gave us too little faith."

"No," says our Lord Jesus, "I did not grant you too little. The faith you received by the Holy Spirit is exactly what you need." Everything we need we have already received in the faith worked in us by the Holy Spirit.

Therefore Jesus uses the image of the mustard seed. This mustard seed will not become better or stronger if you add more seed to it. In that little seed is everything needed. With the faith it is just the same. In the faith we received is everything we need. To become a mustard plant that mustard seed must have the opportunity to grow. It has to be planted in the soil, watered and germinate. From that small mustard seed comes everything already locked into it.

With faith it works in the same way. Our faith must have the opportunity to grow. Now you would immediately ask where those opportunities are. The Holy Spirit shows us that in the first four verses Jesus has already pointed them out. But those are problems, is our quick response. No, they are not problems. A problem is only a problem for as long as we want to keep it a problem. The truth of the matter is that they are opportunities our heavenly Father sent to our lives. They are opportunities granted by Him so that we can grow and live in the faith.

The change that has to come to all of us to be a clearer child of the Lord is a big task. To be a church of the Lord in the way He expects is a difficult task. It is not easy to guide my child into his or her relationship with the Lord because there are so many factors playing a role here. Maybe you and me have not yet become willing for the Lord to change us, therefore it is

difficult for us to be a clearer child and church of the Lord in the way He expects. Maybe my own relationship with the Lord is not intimate and personal enough to guide my child in his or her relationship with the Lord. But beloved, all our shortcomings do not render the command of the Lord impossible. The Lord started His eternal relationship with us and the Holy Spirit has already granted everything we need. He gave us faith. Therefore we can persevere and continue trying to do what the Lord demands from us. Because He will let it happen in us, we will manage to do so.

We return to the mustard seed. How can this mustard plant become larger and more beautiful and produce fruit above ground? When its roots deeply penetrate the soil to get food. How can our faith, to the exterior of our lives, become visible and carry fruit? When the root of our faith also goes deeper and closer – deeper into the Word of the Lord, closer to the Lord, amongst the people also belonging to the Lord. Indeed the Lord must help us to grow and live in the faith. Therefore, every Sunday and every other opportunity, He calls us to be consoled and warned by Him from the Word. Therefore He assembled us as a faith-community to serve Him. Therefore He also taught us to pray. Pray that the Holy Spirit fills and leads us in this process of growth. The deeper and firmer the root of our faith in the Lord and the Lord's people is, the easier it becomes to grow, and the clearer our faith becomes visible in our lives.

The moment we realize what an enormous power the Lord has already granted us in the faith, we will be able to do things which, to the eyes of the people, will appear as miracles. Jesus says: **"If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you"**. (Luke 17:6) Jesus does not say that we will be performing miracles. But when we grasp the opportunities, granted by the Lord in our lives, and we live in and handle that opportunity from within the faith, then things, appearing like miracles to us, will happen.

Should it now be told to you as congregation that this congregation will within six months stand stronger in the faith and still be a congregation of the Lord, notwithstanding all matters wanting to prevent us from it, there will be only a few agreeing. But let us today take the Lord to His Word. Let us handle in the faith all these opportunities the Lord now brings to the road of this congregation and after six months see whether in fact we did not transplant the mulberry tree. I dare to say that this congregation, by only taking the Lord to His Word, will not only transplant just one mulberry tree, but the complete orchard.

Immediately we will ask: but will we manage it? Yes, certainly. Faith is an immense power worked by the Holy Spirit within us, because faith is the link tying us to the almighty God. And in the faith we follow the footsteps of our good Shepherd, leading us. On the road of our Lord Jesus' path there also appeared many things for Him to stumble over. Satan tempted Him, He was denied by His disciple, He was betrayed by His disciple, He even, scared and trembling in Gethsemane, asked His Father to let the cup pass from Him. But for our sakes He persevered in the faith. He, in the shadow of the cross and all the contempt going with it, continued believing that what He is doing is according to the will of His father. Because He used His faith, Christ conquered in the faith.

Jesus Christ, therefore is not for no reason, called the Beginner and Finisher of the faith. Through the Holy Spirit every one of us and this congregation is incorporated, by the ties of faith, to Christ. Through the strength He, abundantly grants, and wants to grant us we will be able to grow and live in the faith and handle every opportunity He brings to our road.

May, in this way, this church of the Lord Jesus be so filled with the work of the Holy Spirit that the life in the faith and the handling of every opportunity in the faith becomes a way of life for her.

**Amen!**

Closing prayer.

Closing Psalm: 46:1, 6

The Lord bless and keep you, the Lord make his face shine on you, the Lord turn His countenance to you and give peace.

**Amen**

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4 September 2011  
Scripture Modern King James Version