In Luke's version of the Good News, today's passage follows immediately after some instructions by Jesus to the apostles about the basic requirements for living as Kingdom people, or what St. John calls, "the community of the beloved."

One of the instructions Jesus gives is that if someone in the community does something offensive and then comes and repents, the person is to be forgiven.

Then Jesus goes on to say that if that happens seven times in one day, still forgiveness is to be extended.

It's at that point that the apostles in a sense say, "Good Lord, increase our faith!"

The response of Jesus to their request may be more positive than it sounds in our translation.

It's been suggested that it could read something like this:
"If you have even a tiny bit of faith, say the size of a mustard seed, and you do, you will be able to accomplish unimaginable things."

Then Jesus tells this story about a slave (our translation has "servant") who comes in from a hard day's work.

The Greek word used there is doulos.

A slave is not an employee or a servant who gets paid wages. A slave is owed nothing.

Now it's important to note that Luke's Jesus is actually speaking here to a group of baptized Christians living maybe 50 years after the Resurrection. Luke's Jesus seems to be pointing out to those folks and us, that because of Baptism, they and we, are in this kind of "doulos" relationship with God in which any good we do is due totally to the grace of God.

We can't claim a paycheck because it is all God's gift to begin with.

Faith, then is about trusting that we are in this relationship with God in which, puny as we are, undeserving as we are, God can accomplish marvels with our cooperation.

It is only in this kind of doulos relationship, one of total dependence, that we can find it within us to forgive again and again and again, for example.

Our relationship with God is one of a doulos — one of dependence, one where we rely on God to help us to accomplish anything worthwhile. That can free us to trust that God is implanting in our hearts great dreams for a more just, compassionate, forgiving, loving world.
Yesterday I read an interview with two men, one a Palestinian Muslim whose 10-year-old daughter was killed by Israeli soldiers as she left school one day; the other an Israeli man whose 14-year-old daughter was killed by a Palestinian suicide bomber.

The chances for some peaceful resolution to the violence between Palestinians and Israelis seem more and more remote these days. Yet these two men have become fast friends and are members of two groups. Both groups are made up of both Palestinians and Israelis. One is called The Bereaved Families Forum; the other is called Combatants for Peace.

In the face of insurmountable odds, here are two people continuing to act with “courage, love and self-discipline.”

Howard Zinn, writer, peace activist, wrote an article in The Nation in 2004, titled “The Optimism of Uncertainty.” He said:

To be hopeful in bad times is not just foolishly romantic. It is based on the fact that human history is a history not only of cruelty, but of compassion, sacrifice, courage and kindness.

What we choose to emphasize in this complex history will determine our lives.

If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something. If we remember those times and places — and there are many, where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act, and at least the possibility of sending this spinning top of a world in a different and maybe better, direction.

Through the prophet, Habakkuk, God who speaks to puny folks like us,:

Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that those running [this race] may read it. For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay.

And a last word from Chairman Jesus:

“If you have even a tiny bit of faith, say the size of a mustard seed, and you do, you will be able to accomplish unimaginable things.”

He gathers us here again to remind us that's it's good to live as slaves/doulos of this unimaginably generous God.