

**Highland Presbyterian Church**  
**17<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost – October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2022**  
**“Enough”**

**A sermon by Megan McCarty**

Lamentations 3:19-26

Luke 17:5-10

The story we find in the lectionary today will sort of throw you for a loop because it's one of those stories where Jesus gets a little annoyed; even a little snarky. Honestly, this is my favorite kind of Jesus. He's just so relatable... But in today's passage, Jesus is not irritated with the Pharisees, not with the rich or the powerful, but with his friends—the disciples.

The story begins with the disciples approaching Jesus with a seemingly reasonable request: *“Lord! Increase our faith!”* It's an understandable request given the sort of things Jesus has been telling them that they must emulate:

- Love your enemies.
- Bless those who curse you.
- Forgive even when it's not deserved.
- Give without expecting anything in return.
- Be ready to take up your cross.

But Jesus responds to the disciple's request with a touch of irritation—the Greek would suggest a bit of snark—and he tells them that if they had faith as small as a mustard seed, they could command a mulberry tree to uproot itself and replant in the sea...and it would obey. He then proceeds to ask them whether a servant would be so cavalier as to demand a meal with his master, or special praise for doing his basic household duties.

Now, this part may strike us as a little odd because we know Jesus – and most especially Luke's Jesus – was not in the habit of speaking unkindly about slaves or people of low status. Just last week we heard the familiar story of the rich man and Lazarus, where a beggar is assigned higher honor than his rich neighbor. And we know also that Jesus compared the kingdom to a banquet in which all are invited—slave and free, rich and poor alike—and he often talked about how the least among us would take the high place of honor at that Table to eat with the Master. Jesus was in the business of turning hierarchies and power structures on their head, so why does he resort to conventional social structures to make this point to the disciples?

We have to keep in mind that, throughout the gospels Jesus reserves his harshest criticisms for the proud and saves his most biting satire for the folks who need to be brought down a peg. From the beginning, Jesus' ministry was about lifting up the humble and humbling the proud, of challenging those in authority and giving voice to the marginalized, so it's safe to assume that there must have been an element of pride or entitlement at work in the disciple's request to warrant this sort of response from Jesus.

And I wonder if we don't get a little clue as to what that was in Jesus' bizarre use of the image of a mulberry tree getting planted in the ocean. I wonder if Jesus was gently,

playfully poking fun at the disciples' ongoing preoccupation with flashy signs and wonders as a measure of true faith. They'd been asking for an upgrade in supernatural powers; at one point suggesting that it sure would be nice to be able to call down fire from heaven every time someone turned them away from their home. (We should note that Jesus responded with similar agitation to that request.)

But the signs and wonders performed by Jesus and described in the gospels always had a point. They were always constructive. They... Healed, Liberated, Multiplied, Fed, Blessed, Restored, Comforted. They pointed to the mission of Jesus and the purpose of the Kingdom he inaugurated. And today these stories remind us of our own call to...Heal, Liberate, Multiply, Feed, Bless, Restore, Comfort.

There's nothing more ridiculously useless than replanting a mulberry tree in the ocean! And I wonder if Jesus wasn't reminding his disciples that faith isn't manifested in flashy magic tricks, or pointless, self-congratulatory displays of power, or in destruction and uprooting, but in daily acts of faithfulness—those mundane acts of obedience that grow the kingdom, one carefully tended little mustard seed at a time.

It's helpful here to contrast this bizarre idea of uprooting a mulberry tree with the work of the servant who tends sheep, works the land, plants seeds, makes dinner. Jesus is telling the disciples that if they have enough faith to be faithful, then that is enough. Faith, after all, is a gift. We don't have any business telling God we don't have enough, when God always gives us enough to be faithful. God always gives us enough to do something useful.

The big mistake that the disciples are making here isn't so much in asking for more faith, but in thinking they don't have enough, in thinking God's gift to them was insufficient. How easy it is to think we don't have enough! These guys were in the very presence of Jesus and *still* they wanted more!

Walter Brueggemann has said: "We all have a hunger for certitude. The problem is the Gospel is not about certitude, it's about fidelity." We're not so unlike the disciples.. How often do we tell ourselves: "If I only had more faith, I could..."

Do something important  
Do something impressive  
I'd never struggle with doubt.  
I wouldn't be so scared.  
I'd finally be appreciated.  
I'd finally know I'm right.  
It would finally all make sense.

There was a 16<sup>th</sup> Century Spanish mystic and nun named Teresa of Ávila. It is written in numerous sources that she was routinely witnessed levitating by the sisters at daily prayer with her. But, for all the rapture for God that Teresa experienced in her body and soul, she also admitted there were times each day when God, who she referred to as her Beloved, felt so incredibly elusive. She knew the spiritual life was about ecstatic

connection with the Divine. AND (as she said) doing the work of washing the pots and pans in the kitchen. The highs and the lows and every day in between. Teresa counseled Christians to expect and welcome it all. This famous "little way" of Teresa's has inspired generations of Christians to honor God by being faithful in the little things....by taking this faith thing one step at a time. Teresa talked often about the smallness of her own faith. But she never questioned God's goodness or fairness in giving her what she had. She never demanded more because she knew she had been given enough to be faithful. She knew she had enough.

We are about to have a chance to connect with the divine; our beloved, through a joyful feast of communion. Something that can feel like a mundane act – eating bread and drinking juice – is actually a moment of ecstatic connection with God. We approach the table today, but we don't approach it alone. We approach it on this World Communion Sunday with Christians around the world, in congregations large and small, speaking every language and one language. There is a connection that is much bigger than us. And that is a wonderful visual and reminder to us this day as we try to remember that our faith is enough. We are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses to help us get through the moments where we think we have to ask for more faith.

The next time you wonder if the amount of faith you have is enough for anything much to happen, remember this lesson of the mustard seed. Remember Jesus's annoyance with us silly humans. As is usually the case in the Bible - it's not about us and how much faith we might have. It's all about God. So even if your faith is just the size of a mustard seed, it is enough. You are enough. We are enough. Amen.