

**St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Luke 17:5-10

***“Faith, Trust and Service”***

It has been said, and you may have heard it on TV or on the radio – good things come in small packages, however there are some people that are not content with small packages. Apparently, the apostles were not content with what they perceived as their amount of faith. And so, they said to Jesus, *"Increase our faith!"* And the Lord said, *"If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you."* Jesus explicitly says this in today's Gospel, and then He says in Mark 11:23, whoever *"does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him."* Remember Peter, when he saw Jesus coming to him, and he started to walk on the water and all of a sudden he realized just what was happening – he began to sink, he was taking on water because doubt crept in. I can remember for years teaching Confirmation classes that faith is “trusting God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit for all things and in all circumstances.” Faith is limitless – and I think that really is what we are getting at this morning. Faith, trust – and then service.

Jesus speaks about a servant doing his duty, and is to do his duty not seeking praise or glory. This is all part of Jesus' response to the request of the apostles, *"Increase our Faith."* Jesus tells the apostles that you are doing what is expected of you, no more, and no less. It seems to me 'our duty' is to live each day by faith in Jesus Christ, to walk by faith - and to be about performing that duty each and every day, in all things and in all circumstances.

It has been a little warm lately, don't you think? It is finally going to start to get cool this week, but I am in awe when I see some of the wonderful servants in this church who come out in spite of the weather, and do things like picking weeds, changing ceiling tiles, doing all of the things. You know, y'all are guilty of this, and have all been a part of this. It is so wonderful because that is what builds a church, that is what makes us a family. It is not just the people that put on the fancy robes, and process with the cross, it is the people in the pews that get down and dirty and do stuff. You all are guilty of that, and I am so grateful for that.

Jesus illustrated His teaching on faith by pointing to a nearby mulberry tree - a large, stout tree known for its longevity and deep root system. Our faith is to be like the mulberry tree, large, strong, long-lasting and deeply rooted in the love we have for God. When Jesus taught His disciples to “say” to the mulberry tree (Luke 17:6), the Greek word used for “say” ἐλέγετε is in the imperfect tense, which is about an action that was still going on in the past. In other words to repeatedly command the problem to depart. It is almost like ‘depart or begone Satan!’ It still goes on, repeatedly command the problem to depart. Don't just say it once but keep going until you achieve a breakthrough. Persistence - keep commanding your problem to be uprooted. Don't give up – and continue to believe.

I think that Jesus is saying that the only way to increase our faith is by using whatever faith we have. Even a teeny tiny faith the size of a mustard seed could uproot the tree with the most

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tenacious roots and transplant it elsewhere, like in the sea. I want to suggest to you that the most minuscule faith, if exercised, can accomplish the most seemingly impossible. Use it or lose it. Use it and it will grow. The impossible, immovable mountains which confront us suddenly are no longer impossible, no longer immovable barriers. The “mountainous” nature of the problem is no longer mountainous. Together with God, we are an overwhelming force. It’s not saying that the problems suddenly disappear entirely, but the mountainous overwhelming part? That’s gone, thrown into the sea.

In Matthew 21:21-23 Jesus said, *"Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' it will happen. And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith."* The requirement to moving mountains in prayer is having faith in God.

So why did Jesus use a mustard seed? Today, we have everything at our fingertips; we have our phones and we can check on something, if I say something and you say “hmmm – is that right?” You pull out your iPhone and you google it, - some people do. We have so many things that are ready to eat, but in Jesus’ day almost everyone had their own garden. An important part of the garden in Jesus’ day was the mustard plant. The mustard plant was well known for its power against disease, its ability to counter act against venom, it is pretty spicy and adds its own unique flavor to foods, and it is so tiny - that it is amazing that from such a small start it becomes a tree!

Faith is like a seed. It starts as something small and over time grows into something larger that allows us to do great things in Christ’s name. Many people believe they would be better equipped to live the Christian life if God would only grant them more faith. Jesus focused not only on the quantity of faith but its character. More faith does not equal greater ability to accomplish things, since God is the One who does the work. The Lord is able to accomplish great things with only a grain of genuine faith. Even a small amount of faith can lead to remarkable results if it is the result of a genuine trust in Almighty God.

When we ask for more faith like the disciples did in today’s Holy Gospel, it’s often because we are facing difficulties in life and we fear that our faith will weaken or that it won’t match the trials that we are facing. Jesus tells both the disciples and us that the quantity of faith we have is not important. What matters is the quality of our hearts; the quality of our faith. A small amount of faith will enable us to do great things for God. Having faith does not mean that we will have the power to perform crowd-pleasing miracles. Sometimes the simplest things done in faith can have huge impacts. Sometimes it is just touching someone on the shoulder and saying, “I am praying for you, I love you.” Sometimes it is seeing the face of a young man who comes out to serve his first service as an Acolyte, or a guy who is his cousin and has been serving only two years longer – he still has that look of awe and wonder in his face. I am talking about Reese, and Peyton for his first service. Just look at them today. Lily, she may not look like she is really interested, but I know she is. This is as good as swimming to her, she gets it.

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How many of us plant vegetables or flowers – peanuts, cotton, or corn? They all start as seeds. Once these seeds are planted, they slowly grow into plants and vegetables of different sizes. For example, all you have to do is look at some of the pumpkins that are entered into various weigh-ins at this time of year. Some of them weigh hundreds of pounds (not on my doorstep – because you have to pick it up and put it there,) but they all started from a small seed.

Three years ago – on October 2, 2016 I gave everyone their own mustard seed. I had the ushers pass them out. Believe me they are tiny – about the size of the head of a pin. Shocking results came from such a small seed which was expected to yield nothing. “It’s tiny, what could it possibly do?” But Jesus told us that the mustard seed produced a plant, actually a tree that became greater than all herbs or garden plants. In Luke 13:19 on page 1622 of your Pew Bible, Jesus described the kingdom of God saying: *“It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air perched in its branches.”* I heard from some people that they really liked opening the Bible during the sermon and I will try to re-incorporate that into sermons to come. Jesus told us that this tiny little dot – grows to an incredible place; an incredible size. To explain it further Jesus put it this way: Please turn to Matthew 13:31-33 on page 1522: *“The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches.”* These same words are recorded in Mark 4:31-32. And another example in Matthew 17:20; just turn a few pages to 1529 of the Pew Bible. Jesus replied, *“Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.”*

And so in closing this morning, I want to come back to that definition of faith, that is “trusting God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit for all things and in all circumstances.” Our response to the blessing of faith that God gives us should be a desire and ability to do what Jesus asks us to do, including great things.