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The Parable of the Mustard Seed Luke 17:5-10/2Timothy 1:1-14

Our reading in Luke can appear quite confusing until the grammar and context are explained. The first thing to remember is that our reading comes in the middle of a whole passage about big issues such as sin, forgiveness, faith, duty and relationships. The disciples ask the Lord to increase their faith and He replies saying, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea, and it will obey you'." Firstly, when He says, "If you have faith", the meaning in the Greek is very clearly, "If you have faith, and you do". So Jesus is affirming that they already have faith. What He says about the mulberry tree being uprooted and planted in the sea sounds absurd – in other versions of this saying in the other Gospels, Jesus says, "you can say to this mountain, be uprooted". The point He is making is that it is not a great amount of faith that they need, it is a small amount of faith in a great God. And that is true of all of us – it doesn't matter how small and frail our faith is, as long as our faith is in a mighty God. The disciples did indeed see many strange and impossible things both during their time with Jesus and afterwards. 5 fish and 2 loaves feeding thousands, people healed and even raised from the dead, Jesus walking on water. The point is that with God nothing is impossible. But why does Jesus then go on to the parable of the servant and his master? The disciples want more faith, and there is a suggestion that maybe they want it so that they will be more powerful, be able to do the things that they are seeing Jesus do. And so Jesus reminds them that they need to remain humble – that their calling is to serve God because He is God and not to expect thanks or praise for doing what God has appointed them to do. This is echoed by Paul in 2 Timothy 3 where he says,

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“I thank God who has given me strength, that He considered me trustworthy, appointing me to His service. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus”. It is a privilege to serve God. All the hard work that we do for God never ever puts us in His debt. We love and serve Him because He first loved us. Going back to the mustard seed, the other parable about a mustard seed is the one we read in Matthew 13:31 where Jesus says that the Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, it is the smallest of all seeds and yet when the mustard tree grows up it is the largest in the garden and becomes a shelter for all the birds of the air. Jesus, as you know, used the things He saw around Him as illustrations for His parables. The mustard seeds that Jesus is talking about are indeed just about the smallest seeds that you could possibly see with the naked eye, like specks of dust. Just a tiny amount of faith is all that you need as long as you invest that faith in a mighty God. This is all about the economy of the Kingdom. Jesus told many parables about the Kingdom of God and it often seems like a looking glass world. The first shall be last and the last shall be first. Enormous miracles can come from the tiniest amount of faith. God can increase the smallest offering. If you keep your small amount of faith, or even your larger amount if you have more, if you keep it to yourself – if you do not use it, exercise it act on it, feed it with God’s word, water it with worship, give it to God and ask Him daily what He wants you to do with it then nothing will ever happen. It will not grow; it will not produce any kind of crop. God can do amazing things with the little that we have if we only surrender ourselves to Him. The little boy only had 3 loaves and two fishes but He gave them to Jesus and Jesus fed five thousand people. I think that I have spoken before about Heidi Baker, she is just a small ordinary woman – but the one thing you will notice about Heidi

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when you meet her is that she is full of joy. She didn't have a very auspicious start in life, she didn't have any money, but she surrendered her life to God. In 1995 she and her husband went as missionaries to Mozambique, they took over an orphanage where there were roughly 80 children and founded the charity Iris. Since that time Iris' global operations have expanded to include well-drilling, free health clinics, village feeding programs, the operation of primary and secondary schools, cottage industries and the founding more than 5000 churches in Mozambique. They feed literally thousands of children every day. She still personally goes to the rubbish dumps and rescues abandoned children. She is an international speaker but she lives in a hut that only occasionally has electricity and when she goes out to preach the gospel in the surrounding villages she lives in a tent.

Their ministry is known for its miracles, deafness is a huge problem in many of the villages in Mozambique and they regularly see the deaf healed, amongst other miracles. Some of the cases have even been verified by a scientific magazine.

We are not all called to be missionaries in Mozambique, but we are all called to surrender our lives to God. We are all called to nurture the small amount of faith that we have and to act upon it, to serve God and others in every way that we can. This is all very relevant at Harvest time. The world that we live in does not look much like the Kingdom of God to be honest. But we still pray, let your Kingdom come, let your will be done, on earth as well as in heaven. It is our responsibility to reveal God's Kingdom to the world, in everything that we do and say. God has provided all that is needed for every man, woman and child on the planet. Now we can't solve all the injustice in the world, but we can act justly ourselves, we can promote justice in our small part of the world.

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We cannot feed all of the hungry children, but we can feed some of them and we can speak out and even sometimes act against poverty and inequality in the world. This is what it means to belong to God, this is what it means to surrender ourselves to Him. In Micah 6 verse 8 it says, “He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God”. This is all He wants – He has shown us what is good, and He wants us to act justly, love mercy – mercy, not revenge, not punishment, not anger – but mercy, our God is loving and merciful and He wants us to be the same and to walk humbly with Him. Humility is hard. The world has lost sight of humility as a virtue. True humility is really only found when we have our identity in Christ. A surrendered life is one that seeks always to put God above everything and to serve Him in all things by serving others and always seeking His will in everything. It doesn't matter how small your faith is as long as your small faith is in a mighty God. It doesn't matter how small your faith is as long as you are feeding it and watering it and allowing it to grow. Faith is actually like a muscle you know, if you exercise it, it will grow in size and strength but if you don't use it, it will shrink and waste away and be useless. If we are stingy with our service, only doing what is easy to do, only looking after and caring for our friends, only loving people who are easy to love, only giving what is comfortable and easy to give, never doing anything sacrificial, being kind to and caring for the difficult people or the people you don't even know, only giving God a small amount of anything you have got left over, putting yourself first instead of last, then your faith will be stingy and will struggle to grow. So be generous in every way, give God your best, exercise your faith, physically and emotionally in what you do for others, financially in what you give, spiritually in prayer and

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by always being thankful, even in difficult times, like Paul in His letters to Timothy, be thankful to God for all that He has done for you and seek to serve Him in any and every way that you can. If we exercise and use our faith then we will see a harvest in our own lives and in the lives of those around us.