

10.5.2025 Pentecost 17

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Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4; Psalm 37:1-9; 2 Timothy 1:1-14; Luke 17:5-10

“Infinite faith”

*Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Jesus’ words, “*If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you,*” might cause you to wonder, “Just what is this faith that Jesus is talking about? Jesus is, of course, speaking figuratively, but the point is that faith has the power to do marvelous, new, and even unheard-of things. Faith is the infinite power of God dwelling in you.

Jesus’ words were occasioned by the apostles saying to the Lord, “*Increase our faith!*” Their request is interesting for a couple of reasons. First, the disciples are called “apostles,” and they address Jesus as “Lord,” which suggests that these words reflect the apostolic faith of the early church read back into the life of Jesus. This is a very real request reflecting the demands of following Jesus, no longer as disciples, but as his witnessing church, his apostles to the world.

Those who would follow the risen Lord, like us, find ourselves often in the deep end of the pool, risking and giving our lives for Christ. The demands of the world upon the apostles and the early church must have been massive. I can imagine them, like us, turning to the Lord in prayer and saying, “Lord, increase our faith so that we might meet the demands of ministry in your name!” As heirs of this apostolic faith, the words “*Increase our faith*” might also be ours.

The second thing about the apostles’ request is that they appear to think faith is measurable in some way, as in a smidge, skosh, dash, teaspoon, tablespoon – you get the idea – of faith. Yet Jesus’ answer indicates that one either has faith or doesn’t have faith. What Jesus is implying with the example of the mustard seed is that the “amount” of faith is unimportant; rather, what is important is possessing genuine and sincere faith. If faith is genuine and sincere, it need be no larger than a mustard seed to do wonderful things. The startling thing is that Jesus implies the apostles do not have faith the size of even a mustard seed. Jesus is trying to teach the apostles, the church, and us, that when faith relies upon God for all things – the impossible becomes possible. Wow!

Matthew 17 contains a similar episode in which after Jesus healed a boy possessed by an unclean spirit, the disciples asked him, “Why couldn’t we cast out the unclean spirit? Jesus answered, “*Because of your little faith. For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you* (Mt. 17:20).” In both Luke and Matthew, Jesus is implying that faith is a truly limitless power. Faith is infinite because it comes from God. Faith is the infinite power of God dwelling in you.

Jesus' question to us is, "How sincere and infinite is your faith?" To answer that question, I ask: "How powerful and infinite is your God?" Or more simply, "How big is your God?" Jesus reveals the God of infinite love for this world, not just part of the world, not just one nation in the world, but all the world. John 3:16 openly declares this love: "*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him might not perish but have eternal life.*" This God loves our enemies, calling us to an infinite love. This God forgives sinners, calling us to an infinite forgiveness. This God welcomes and eats with sinners and outcasts, calling us to an infinite welcome for all people. Without faith, this infinite love of God is impossible. Jesus is describing not human power; but rather, faith as the infinite power of God dwelling in you.

In today's epistle, Paul wrote to his friend and fellow worker, Timothy, about the way faith is transmitted, saying, "*I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you.*" Like Timothy, the faith that lives in each of us first lived in someone who shared their faith with us. I'd like to ask you to think about someone in your life who has shared their faith with you. The miracle of faith is that it is God's infinite power, yet it is transmitted through often frail and imperfect human beings – who seek to do impossible acts of love.

Is there someone like Eunice or Lois in your life who passed faith on to you? Tradition tells us that Timothy became the bishop of Ephesus and the faith that Eunice and Lois gave to him, he gave others. How are you living like Eunice, Lois, or Timothy, sharing a genuine and infinite faith with future generations?

Paul calls such faith, not "*a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power, and love and self-discipline.*" I think Paul mentions cowardice because very often we are afraid to let go and live completely by faith. We can be afraid to trust in the infinite power of God. Faith is the courage to truly let go and allow God's power to live through you. Faith is not your power; it is, as Paul writes, the power of God living in and through you in love and self-discipline.

Jesus speaks today about such power, love, and self-discipline in the servants who have done all that was commanded of them, say, "*We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!*" The self-denial and humility of these servants is the obvious product of their faith in the master. If we are honest, faith pushes us to acknowledge that even when we have done all we ought to have done, we have been doing and living not by our own power but by the power of God living in us.

Your gifts of intellect, physical abilities, gender, identity, ethnicity, nationality and language – all that is you – are the ways God's power is alive in you. Such genuine faith exceeds all human expectations; it envisions God alive in this world. Faith sees love where there is hate; pardon where

there is hurt; and hope where there is despair. Faith acts not for oneself but for others. With such faith, you will do the impossible: you will plant mulberry trees in the sea and move mountains.

Our 2026 Stewardship Appeal, titled, *To whom much is given, much is expected* (Lk. 17:42) is asking, “What are the impossible things God is calling us to do today?” God is expecting great things from us as members and friends of this church. As St. Mark’s, we attempt great things not only for ourselves, but looking outward with an infinite faith and love, we attempt great things for all people in this world. We seek to welcome, love, forgive, and accept others. The infinite faith living in you envisions a world where all people – no matter how different – are sisters and brothers.

Faith may seem small and puny, as insignificant as a mustard seed, yet when you speak words of forgiveness, words of acceptance, words of welcome, you offer God’s infinite power of love and hope to others. When you open your arms to embrace those who are different, to feed the hungry, or to give financial help, your faith makes the impossible possible.

As Jesus suffered *for you*, he suffers *through you* when you work for peace, for an end to hunger, for an end to discrimination. Faith is God’s infinite power alive in you to reshape this world with love, pardon and hope. God has placed faith in you so that you might work for God in this world!

The faith that dwells hidden in you carries you each day. Yet in your life there will be times when you will not be able to carry yourself – physically, mentally or emotionally – and yet the infinite power of faith will continue to carry you. And when your life ends, the infinite power of faith will carry you into the infinite love of God.

Daily, lay hold of this faith. Let go of yourself, your fears and doubts, and believe anew. God’s infinite faith lives in you. Amen.