

Have you moved mountains lately? - Luke 17:5-6

“The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!”⁶ 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.”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

Dear Friends in Christ:

There is a book written “by Linda Kaplan Thaler and Robin Koval named, “***The Power of Small: Why Little Things Make all the Difference***. The authors challenge all of us that our smallest actions, words, and gestures often lead to our greatest long-term rewards and outcomes. They say: our kindness, willingness to help, attention to detail, attitude, desire to offer a positive word, or our simple “please” and “thank you” responses will make all the difference in building strong personal and team relations.” On the other hand little things can also have large negative consequences.

For example “clover mites are no real danger to human health; but, if they make their way inside your house, you could be dealing with cosmetic damage to your belongings. If these tiny red bugs are crushed on furniture, drapes, clothing, or anything else, they leave behind a red stain caused by their body pigments. This is a real problem caused by an insect so tiny that you can barely see it with the naked eye.”

Sometimes little things make all the difference. Jesus reminds us that even faith the size of a mustard seed can do great things. In our text, Jesus says it can move a deeply rooted mulberry tree. We have also heard Jesus speak of faith that can move mountains. But no matter which way we look at it, the simple fact is that even a little faith in the great God who is Lord of all creation, can accomplish the impossible.

So, have you moved any mountains lately? There are many times when we take our faith for granted, or even worse, when we do not use it at all. Sometimes we have a faith in name, and not in reality. And yet, we need our faith to see us through the uncertainty and the difficulty of life in this world of sin. That is why we, with the disciples, want to pray, **Lord, increase our faith**, so that we, as we live in this world as the people of God, we may know all that our God can accomplish, and all He works in us through faith.

You and I have received a wonderful gift from God—the gift of faith. It is faith that enables us lay hold of all the blessings that our God wants us to have through Jesus Christ, namely, the promises of life and forgiveness that are ours through the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ: the forgiveness and life that we all so desperately need. Without this faith, we would have no hope for the future, for all that would lay ahead for us would be death and despair, including eternal death because of our sin and unbelief. But by faith we know and are empowered to trust in the promises of God, who gave His Son that we might have life in Him. But faith does more. Our faith gives us the confidence to live each and every day by the grace of Almighty God. And it guides, guards and empowers us in our lives as the children of God.

In the Old Testament lesson today, it says that ***the righteous will live by his faith***. On the one hand, these words assure us that we have eternal life as the natural consequence of our faith. But it also speak to us in terms of getting through life by faith.

St. Paul knew the power of faith, the power that enabled him, even in the midst of some very difficult times, to go on with the confidence that ***God works all things together for good to those who love Him, to those who are called according to His purposes***. Or, as He says in the epistle lesson today: ***I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him for that day***.

That is the kind of faith we need. In this troubled world of ours, we need a faith that assures us that all things will come out all right in the end. We need faith that will enable us to face the new day, with all its unknowns. We need to live each day in faith that God is with us, and that He would do what is best for us and for all people.

When it comes right down to it, that is the only way for us to live, with the faith that all things and all times are in the hands of a gracious loving God, who has already brought us the greatest blessings by redeeming us from sin and death. And to have that kind of faith is to have a faith that moves mountains.

Someone once said that doubt creates mountains, while faith removes them. And if we were to look back, even over the last six months, how many mountains would have been built up by our doubts?

There are the mountains that we build up as we worry about our future, or, we build the mountain of wonder and worry about having a job. Students build mountains of doubt as they worry about their studies. There are the mountains of doubt about our health, our family, our future. There may even be mountains of doubt about our faith itself, as we wonder whether the sacrifice of Christ on the cross is enough to pay for our sins, too; or as we wonder if our faith is great enough.

But these are the very mountains which faith can, and does, move. Our trust in the gracious and loving mercy of God is all that it takes to turn discouragement and doubt into confidence and victory. And, as Jesus points out, it does not have to be a faith like that of St. Paul, or the faith of some super saint.

All it takes is faith the size of a mustard seed. Even the smallest faith unites us with the blessings of life and salvation in Christ. Even the smallest faith will move those mountains in our lives. Even the smallest faith can help us be the people we are through the cross and the empty tomb of Jesus Christ. But that does not mean we should settle for a small faith.

In our text, the disciples asked Jesus, **"Increase our faith!"** They ask this in light of what Jesus has just taught them about avoiding sin's power in their lives, and of their need to forgive those who sin against them. The disciples felt they did not have what it takes to live up to the standard that Jesus was setting before them. And so they wanted greater faith that would help them to live up to Jesus' standard.

Or we think of the man who came to Jesus because his son was possessed by an evil spirit. He asks Jesus to help, if he can. And Jesus says **"Everything is possible for him who believes."** And the man replies, **"I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"** And how we need to pray that prayer, too. We need the Lord to increase our faith, the faith that does help us to follow His guidance and to live as His people in this wicked, sinful world. We need His Spirit to increase our faith as we wrestle with the devil and his temptations, and as we seek to move those mountains that the devil, too, always seems to place in our path.

Thankfully, this is one prayer God always promises to answer with a resounding, "Yes, I will increase your faith." God does work to bless our faith and to make it strong. Sometimes He tests our faith so that He can refine it like gold and silver are refined.

Sometimes He allows the trials that help us to grow in our faith, as they draw us closer to Him. But He is always there to make sure that the faith we have is exactly what He promises it will be: a faith that can move mountains of doubt and despair, a faith that does overcome as it trusts firmly in the God of all grace and glory.

Is that the faith we have? There is a "small town down in the southern US Bible belt, there were no liquor stores. Eventually, however, a nightclub was built right on Main Street. Members of one of the churches in the area were so disturbed that they conducted several all-night prayer meetings, and asked the Lord to burn down that den of iniquity. A short time later, there was a storm and a lightning struck the tavern and it was completely destroyed by fire.

The owner, knowing how the church people had prayed, sued them for the damages. His lawyer claimed that their prayers had caused the loss. The congregation, on the other hand, also hired a lawyer and fought the charges. After much deliberation the judge declared, "It's the opinion of this court that wherever the guilt may lie, the tavern keeper is the one who really believes in prayer while the church members do not!"

I wonder how often that is true for us, too. We pray for blessings, and yet seem surprised when we receive them. It sometimes seems that we just do not expect the God in whom we believe to actually help those mountains to move. But what Jesus is teaching us is that even the smallest faith is powerful, when it is faith in the Lord of all, who created all things and who has bought us with His own death and resurrection to be His people forever. And we should not be surprised to see the wonderful things He does work for those who believe in Him.

So, have you moved any mountains lately? Look at your life, and how you have overcome, with the grace and mercy of God, the various disappointments, setback and problems that have crept up time and time again. Look at your life, and you will see that He has made a difference day by day, working in you the faith that enables you to overcome sin and live in obedience to His will. Look at your life, and you will see that while things have not always been perfect, or maybe have been far from ideal, you have been able to overcome them by faith the Spirit works in your heart, your faith in a great and gracious God, who unleashes His power for the good of those whose trust is in Him.

Friends, believe in Him, and you can move mountains. Amen.

Oh Lord, increase our faith, that we may do even greater things for You. Amen.