

A Given

Habakkuk 1: 1-4, 2:1-4

Luke 17: 5-10

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World Communion Sunday, Ukama, NIN

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Habakkuk 1: 1-4, 2:1-4

The oracle that the prophet Habakkuk saw. O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen? Or cry to you “Violence!” and you will not save? Why do you make me see wrong-doing and look at trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. So the law becomes slack and justice never prevails. The wicked surround the righteous—therefore judgment comes forth perverted.

I will stand at my watchpost, and station myself on the rampart; I will keep watch to see what he will say to me, and what he will answer concerning my complaint. Then the Lord answered me and said: Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it. For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay. Look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them, but the righteous live by their faith.

Luke 17: 5-10

The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!” The Lord replied, “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. “Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field, ‘Come here at once and take your place at the table’? Would you not rather say to him, ‘Prepare supper for me, put on your apron and serve me while I eat and drink; later you may eat and drink’? Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, ‘We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!’”

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Increase our faith. Give us more and deeper trust in God. Give us more and deeper confidence in God’s promises. Grow our beliefs in the divine, the sacred, the holy. Add to our religious convictions, enhance our spiritual life, strengthen our beliefs. The disciples ask for help in growing as followers of Jesus Christ, and their wish, their hope, is most likely ours as well. Isn’t that a great thing, and even a humble act of faith, to ask for more faith?

Yet Jesus’ response is surprising as he reduces the amount of their faith to something miniscule, something smaller than a mustard seed, as if their faith could fit on the tip of a pencil and then they would be able to do the impossible.

I remember being in 2nd grade when I first heard about what could be done by faith even if it was as tiny as a mustard seed. As a 7 year old I understood faith to be believing in God so that I could do magical things by even a little of it. Faith was a magical superpower! I could move mountains if I wanted to, I could plant mulberry trees in the sea and they would grow. I believed that I could look at something, think about how much I loved God, and God loved me, and instantly I could move things, change things, make things happen in the ways that I wanted

them to be. Of course that did not happen, and I was afraid that maybe my faith, my superpower, wasn't even as big as a mustard seed.

While it's easy to dismiss a child's cute but inaccurate perception of faith and increasing faith there are still very real echoes of that thinking in some adult understanding of faith and growing faith as faith is not just a passive feeling or an inner understanding, but a living, breathing force in and for the world. What could our faith in God accomplish in our broken world if we truly lived it out?

“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”

You can almost hear the disciples agree, ‘yes, yes, we know our faith is small. Please help us to grow it, to increase it.’

Jesus wants them, wants us, to see however that faith is not something we can measure as if we planted a seed and we could then see the vines grow and the flowers bloom so that year by year the vines grew longer, thicker, and the flowers bloomed bigger and brighter. Faith is not something we can quantify like a financial investment where we gain percentages and dividends. Faith is not a product on the shelf that we can skip over the small box this time and instead reach for the larger package, or have an extra scoop added on.

We do not need a lot of faith, we only need a tiny little speck. But we need to put our faith in the right place--in God, the One who gives us life and nurtures it, the One who loves us unconditionally, the One we can trust completely, and the One who can and does in fact move mountains. No magic, no superpower.

Faith is marked by quality not quantity, by authenticity not an amount. It is how we write the vision and make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it. It is how we write the vision and make it plain on banners, so that a walker, a driver, a passerby, might read it. It is how we enact the vision.

Faith grows, faith increases, by being lived out, by being worked for and built upon the experiences that take the gospel deep into our hearts, into the community, and into the world. It is felt and known, enhanced and enriched, through lived experience. Each step, each time, we move forward in loving others, welcoming the stranger, and caring for creation as God calls us to do, faith increases. Each step, each time, we move forward in justice-seeking, forgiving and peacemaking as Jesus does, faith increases. Each step, each time, we move forward in boldly living out the gospel, in seeking wisdom and guidance from the Holy Spirit for our path, faith increases.

As 19th century evangelist F.B. Meyerⁱ wisely said, “It is not the quantity of faith, but the quality of faith, that is important. A grain of mustard seed and a pellet of dust are similar in appearance, but the difference is immense. The one has no life burning at the heart of it, while the other contains life as God kindled it. Faith that has in it the principle of life is a faith with God in it.

For Jesus, this is an absolute given; it is a basic condition that can be taken completely for granted. It is without a doubt or question the way for the apostles' faith, our faith, to increase. Just as the servants were expected to do their jobs, to come in from the fields and serve the meal, not to be served themselves as they would act according to the directions given by the master, just as any of us would be expected to follow the tasks assigned to us by a boss, it is a given. We must be actively engaged in prayerful, reflective action for faith to grow and thrive.

Today is World Communion Sunday as we gather at the table of unity with Christians around the world, affirming our diversity and our belonging as Jesus Christ has set the table for

every one of us as his body and his blood was given for each of us. However we arrive at the table, whatever bread of heaven we eat, whatever cup of blessing we drink, whatever language and culture and liturgy affirms and celebrates the given that Jesus Christ is the head of the Body, the Church, our Redeemer, the image of the invisible God, we are welcomed. We take this day and this time at the table mindful that there are yet still many and growing divisions among us, differences in beliefs, practices, theologies, and witness that seek understanding, healing, and reconciliation, so that together our faith may increase as strife and contention decrease.

Today we also receive our Neighbors in Need offering, our special annual offering that supports ministries of justice and compassion in the United States, moving us forward in faith as justice-seekers and advocates.

Today we also lift up and celebrate our Ukama partnership, affirming the risen Christ in our midst wherever we may be as one, giving thanks for the relationship we have with our spiritual family in Zimbabwe as we grow in faith together.

On this day that holds so much promise for Christians in each bite of bread and sip of the cup, on this day on which the vision of what can be is bold and clear, may our faith increase by our practices and ways of living the gospel's good news out into the world in ways that has life burning at the heart of it. Amen.

ⁱ <http://www.moreillustrations.com/Illustrations/faith%206.html>