

Proper 22, Year C

- I think I've said before about how unlikely Jesus is to give a direct answer to a question. If you haven't heard me say that, it's absolutely true. Many of the parables that Jesus tells, in fact, are stories illustrating truths in response to questions that he's asked.
- But I may not have mentioned before that the same is sometimes true of requests that Jesus receives. Such as this one, where the disciples make a simple request of their Lord: "Increase our faith!" they say.
- It's a perfectly reasonable request, when you step back and look at it
- But like commentator Debie Smith says, while Jesus doesn't exactly say 'no' outright, he certainly doesn't do what they're asking
- He doesn't increase their faith
- So why on earth not?
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- I have a thought about that
- Maybe it's because we've had so many passages lately where Jesus talks about wealth, talks about the way that we view wealth and what we do with it, and always seems to be emphasizing that we have more than we think – that no matter what, it turns out, we have enough
- But I think Jesus might be making a similar point here
- "Increase our faith," the disciples cry, and in response Jesus seems almost to ask, "why?"
- "If you had faith the size of a mustard, look what you could do!"
- In other words, the tiniest bit of faith – faith the size of a mustard seed – is so much more than enough to work miracles and do the impossible
- You have enough already, Jesus seems to be saying, to do what it is that you need to do, and more
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- That cry from the disciples, though, is a cry I think we can all sympathize with. I think we've all had times where we have cried out to God, "increase our faith!"
- On our best days maybe, we might ask this of God in times of adversity – increase our faith, Lord, so that we might trust in you. Might have faith that your will will be done.
- Or maybe when things are going well we might occasionally have the wherewithal to say to God, give me more faith, so that I can live the way you want me to live
- But what if, on those days, in times where we really feel tested, we didn't ask for greater

faith, but recognized how great the faith we already have is?

- What would our lives look like if we actually lived that way?
- If we actually counted on God's omnipresent abundance, and realized that in most cases, even the tiniest bit of input, of faith, from us is more than enough?
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- What if that's what Jesus wants to tell us in this story?
- That we already have all the equipment we need to work miracles, and in fact, it doesn't require something more than what we already know about God and what God has done for us in Christ
- This is the God, after all, who created the known universe from nothing – who made the descendants of a couple long past childbearing age more numerous than the stars in the sky – who over and over provided for a chosen people who forgot him at every turn, parting the seas for them and then bringing water from rocks and bread from the skies – who inspired prophets to write verse after verse of beautiful poetry calling people to return to God – who finally descended all the way down to where we were so that we might one day return all the way back to God
- Think of the God who did all that, and then try to answer, why would that God need any more than a mustard seed of faith, of trust, in order to work the miraculous, to uproot a tree and plant it in the sea?
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- I think we often read this parable as though if this is what God can do with a mustard seed, we're meant to imagine how much more God could do with greater faith than that
- But I think the beauty of this parable is that God is trying to tell us, once again, to rethink sufficiency, to rethink how we define the word 'enough'
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- We have seen God, known God, encountered Christ every day and occasionally even been aware enough to recognize that fact
- We have all, at one point or another, witnessed a miracle, I think – at least a minor one
- We have all been witness to the incredible grace of God – the Grace from which this community gets even its name
- And yes, we struggle with doubt or uncertainty from time to time
- But I think we almost always have at least a mustard seed's worth of faith
- Just enough faith to show up, perhaps, on a Sunday when we're not otherwise feeling it

- Or just enough faith to cry out to God in a moment where we aren't even sure ourselves whether or not God is listening
- Just enough faith to offer even a wordless prayer, a sigh too deep for words, in times of fear and anxiety
- Maybe that's all a mustard seed is
- But imagine, Jesus says, how much that can do.
- That's enough.