

Luke 17:5-10
19 Pentecost / Proper 22 / Year C
7 October 2007
Preached by the Rev. David Fredrickson

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..."

"I've got the power." These are the words to a song by the pop group SNAP and featured in the movie *Bruce Almighty*, a movie that some of you may have seen. The fact is, each of us is a little power plant. Did you know that every time any of us take a step, we generate six to eight watts of energy? But then – poof! – it dissipates into the air. If only we could capture it. // Believe it or not, this is being looked into. An architectural firm in London is now looking at ways to capture that energy on a large scale and turn it into electricity. For example, 34,000 people walk or dash through London's Victoria Station in one hour, rushing toward their trains. That is a lot of steps. "If you harness that energy," says the firm's director, "you can actually generate a very useful power source." According to *Fast Company* magazine this architectural firm is working to develop vibration-harvesting sensors. These sensors could be implanted in the structure of train stations, bridges, factories or any other building frequently rattled by commuters, vehicles or machinery. The devices could capture the rumblings of all this activity, turn them into electricity, and then store it in a battery. Now that is power in small steps!

In today's passage from Luke, the apostles say to Jesus, "Increase our faith!" So, the question is, if you're Jesus, what do you make of this request? The disciples think their faith is too miniscule to make a difference, so they ask Jesus to enlarge it. But Jesus doesn't seem to be buying it. You see, Jesus understands the significance of small steps, so he takes them over to a mulberry tree and he says to them, "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"

(Luke 17:5-6). In other words, Jesus doesn't buy into their complaint that they need more faith in order to be faithful disciples. And moreover, he is not selling them the notion that he can simply wave a wand and give them more faith.

How many of you have seen a mustard seed? You can buy jars of mustard seeds in the store, so most of you probably have. So if you have encountered one of these little things you know that they are rather hard to handle – each one is about a sixteenth of an inch or one and a half millimeters. That's pretty darn small. What Jesus is doing here is to underscore the notion that faith doesn't have to be huge to have an impact. It doesn't have to make the news to make a difference.

Today it seems that we are overwhelmed by so much. The information age has not freed us from anything, but rather enslaved us more and more to the fear of living in this complex and violent world. As Christians we are called to be peacemakers and reconcilers, but that looks like a pretty impossible task when we consider how deep-seeded the world's problems seem to be.

I want to take us back to a year ago this week, to the Amish schoolhouse of horror in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. You all remember the story I'm sure. What the world saw there, in a very small, reclusive community, was a group of Amish men and women who took a stand; made a decision to forgive the gunman who slaughtered five young girls, their own daughters, inside that schoolhouse. Most impressive about this response to the murders was the way these peace-loving Christians reached out with support to the gunman's widow and children. In the words of Greg Jones, the dean of Duke Divinity School, "Such exemplary acts of witness stir the imaginations of the larger world. We need our imagination to be set on fire by stories that show that what we think is impossible or unrealistic is indeed possible - if we

have the courage to cultivate habits of reconciliation.” In this Amish community we saw a demonstration of a simple act of profound forgiveness; simple steps of faith that impacted the entire world.

Last February, a delegation of 13 Christian leaders from the United States traveled to Iran to meet with political and religious leaders, with the goal of easing tensions between the two countries. Representatives from the American Friends Service Committee (the Quakers) and the Mennonite Central Committee organized the trip which also included leaders from the Episcopal Church, Roman Catholic Church, United Methodist Church, National Council of Churches, Pax Christi and the Sojourners community. At a time when political leaders from each nation are reluctant to hold talks, this outreach by church leaders is small and perhaps insignificant, but all of them went believing the words of our Lord, “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. Even small faith can have enormous impact.

Yet let’s be honest, such flashy ventures have the appearance of a “super-sized” faith effort, not a “seed-sized” effort. That kind of peacemaking effort is far beyond what 99.9 percent of us can be a part of. Yet let us not forget the metaphor here: 34,000 people walking through London’s Victoria Station generating energy without giving it much thought. That is, in the normal exercise, quite literally, of their daily life, for these people can collectively produce a significant amount of usable energy.

This then is the picture of the church at work. We, as the body of Christ, who number into the hundreds of millions or even a billion worldwide, ought to be making a difference in simply the way we walk in our daily lives which we live before others. If each of us stretched

our faith, our comfort zone, even a hair's width, even as much as a mustard seed, we could change the world forever.

This parish has been here nearly 125 years. Think about the faith that has sustained us these years. Mrs. Tobey moved this church building here from Springfield, Mass. trusting that it would be a light on the hill overlooking Wareham; and it has been for all these years. In recent years, think about the faith that brought the Community Resource Network, Good Shepherd's Table, the Wareham Area Committee for the Homeless, better known as Turning Point, and now the Good Shepherd Food Pantry to life. You, the people right here in the pews and others who have gone before you; you, a small group of Christians by putting faith to action have changed countless lives and changed this town forever.

By exercising our faith, we can do anything. By stretching the limits of our faith just a little, by taking just a few small steps, insignificant as they may appear, when they are combined with the efforts of other faithful people, look out because the impact can reach beyond our wildest imaginations. "You have the power."

In Jesus Name; Amen.

¹ Tracy Staedter, *Fast Company*, "Good Vibrations," issue 108, September 2006, page 34.