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### **“A Mustard Seed Conspiracy”**

Luke 17:5-6

On our first trip to Great Britain, Eric and I took a train from London into northern Scotland. The rhythm of the train on the tracks was mesmerizing and we fought the urge to allow jet lag to keep us from enjoying some of the incredible scenery. On our right, going north, were stunning vistas of the North Sea. To our left were gently rolling hills - bright green grass waving in the air, fields of barley, livestock, and something I had never seen before. Bright yellow-green fields, deeply stained with bold hues of color drew my attention away from the water.

Now, I am a Kansas girl - born and bred - and I don't think there is anything in the world that compares to wheat fields, but if I were pressed, I would have to admit that these fields took my Kansas breath away. Mustard fields, I was told - ready for harvest. From the tiniest of seeds comes something so bright and vibrant. No wonder, I thought, Jesus used the mustard seed as a metaphor for faith.

When asked by his closest followers how to increase their faith, Jesus answered, “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)

Or, listen to this text from *The Message*: “The apostles came up and said to the Master, “Give us more faith.” But the Master said, “You don't need more faith. There is no ‘more’ or ‘less’ in faith. If you have a bare kernel of faith, say the size of a poppy seed, you could say to this sycamore tree, ‘Go jump in the lake,’ and it would do it.”

Mustard seeds are miniscule. Yellow mustard seeds make up approximately 100,000 seeds per pound. That's equivalent to about 2 cups. Brown and oriental mustard seeds have about 200,000 seeds per pound! Mustard seed grows very

easily and has amazing reproductive qualities. A handful of mustard seed will produce 5 million seeds by its second harvest.

Jesus used this tiny seed in comparison to faith. What is interesting to me is to hear people talk about faith:

“I wish I had a strong faith like yours.”

“Keep the faith!”

“He has a strong faith.”

“I’m praying for faith.”

“You will need a lot of faith to do that.”

The goal is to get more, have more, and use more... faith. But Jesus teaches that all the faith we need is a mustard seeds worth. A teensy, insy bit and we can move trees, even mountains. This is good news for me. Some days I wake up and I can hardly muster up a mustard seed worth of faith. When the disciples requested increased faith, they were acknowledging their sense of inadequacy. Perhaps you have had thoughts about your faith:

“My faith isn’t being strong enough” or

“I’m more of a doubter than a believer” or

“I just can’t believe that” or

“When God passed out faith, I must have been absent.”

Wilbur Rees quips about this problem, “I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please, not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep, but just enough to equal a cup of warm milk or a snooze in the sunshine. I don’t want enough of God to make me love a black man or pick beets with a migrant. I want ecstasy, not transformation; I want the warmth of the womb, not a new birth. I want a pound of the eternal in a paper sack. I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please.”

(Wilbur Rees, in Charles Swindoll’s “Improving Your Serve”)

So often, we assume that other people have more faith than we do just because our beliefs aren’t set firmly in stone. We think that our doubts about God are obstacles to our faith. Instead, suggests Kathleen Norris, consider doubt a seed of faith, a sign that your faith is alive and ready to grow.

Jesus’ response is not a judgment on their lack of faith but an indirect affirmation of the faith they had already. Jesus suggests that we just need to tap into the little part of us which believes already. A little bit of this faith can make a mammoth difference in our lives. “Preaching Through the Christian Year, A comprehensive Commentary on the Lectionary”, p. 431

Faith can be inspired by great books, by great teachers, or by great deeds, but in the end, we realize that all of those things are tools to help us know the little mustard seed inside of us. The great philosophers and teachers of the world awaken the spark of faith inside us and help us to believe in ourselves.

Anne Lamott writes “I have a lot of faith. But I am also afraid a lot, and have no real certainty about anything. I remembered something Father Tom had told me-- that the opposite of faith is not doubt, but certainty. Certainty is missing the point entirely. Faith includes noticing the mess, the emptiness and discomfort, and letting it be there until some light returns.” “Plan B: Further Thoughts on Faith”

Or, from Doris Bett: “Faith is not synonymous with certainty... (but) is the decision to keep your eyes open.”

By telling the parable of the mustard seed, Jesus lets us in on an astonishing secret. God has chosen to change the world through little bits of faith inside of you and me, the unassuming, the imperceptible. That has always been God’s strategy – changing the world through a conspiracy of a handful of people.

Jesus’ words are not a reprimand; they are an invitation to live out of the full possibilities of the little bit of faith we can gather. As small as it may have been, their faith was sufficient to cancel the word *impossible* from their vocabulary.

A surprising number of Christians no longer believe they can make any real difference in the face of current culture. When was the last time you heard

someone talk about making a real impact for those around him/her? And most importantly, when was the last time *you* believed you had the capacity to make a real difference? We seem to have very limited expectations of what God can do through us in this time and place.

But there are some mustard seed conspiracies going on around here.

- With faith that we can more effectively tell the story of UCC, a new church growth team is being formed. They are using their mustard seed faith to develop new ways of sharing the good news UCC has to offer!
- A mustard seed conspiracy group met this week to talk about ways we can reach out to our own members who are ill or hospitalized. They are working on meals, transportation, and other ways to assist those who need a bit of support.

There are those who are putting into practice their mustard seed faith and allowing it to grow. Momentum is growing. The realization that faith does make a difference is calling us out of our complacency and apathetic attitudes to be a part of something exciting!

Take a moment this week to consider where you can practice your faith. It doesn't have to be big or make a big splash – take the faith you have and put it into practice.

1. Volunteer to help with a project;
2. offer your service to a neighbor;
3. make a phone call or send a card to someone who needs support;
4. offer free babysitting for a family with young children;
5. make a donation above and beyond your normal gift;
6. call the church office to help with a ministry of this church;
7. sign up to serve at the Hygiene Pantry;
8. start recycling if you don't already;

All you have to have is faith the size of a mustard seed.