

*“How much is really enough?”*  
Rev. Dr. Brandon S. Perrine

<sup>19</sup> *The thought of my affliction and my homelessness  
is wormwood and gall!*

<sup>20</sup> *My soul continually thinks of it  
and is bowed down within me.*

<sup>21</sup> *But this I call to mind,  
and therefore I have hope:*

<sup>22</sup> *The steadfast love of God never ceases,  
God’s mercies never come to an end;*

<sup>23</sup> *they are new every morning;  
great is your faithfulness.*

<sup>24</sup> *‘The LORD is my portion,’ says my soul,  
‘therefore I will hope in God.’*

<sup>5</sup>*The apostles said to the Lord, ‘Increase our faith!’* <sup>6</sup>*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.’*

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I read last week that “Faith is like Wi-Fi. It’s invisible, but it has the power to connect [us] to what [we] need.” I’m fairly certain that this is an overly simplistic definition of faith, but it’s amusing nonetheless. This morning’s readings have me thinking about faith: big-picture faith, as a concept, not yours or mine in particular, but what really *is* faith and how much of it do we really *need*?

Is faith being afflicted and homeless, as the author states in our reading from Lamentations, and still trusting in the love, mercy, and faithfulness of God to be one's portion when there is literally nothing else to hold on to? Is faith a superpower that when possessed in adequate portion and wielded with correct form enables the moving of trees and mountains, as Jesus seems to imply? Is faith just another word for belief and, if it is, is everything that we believe also faith? Or, do we have to separate religious faith from other kinds of faith, like faith in science or gravity or the trustworthiness of a friend? I'm not really sure that I understand what faith is. Are you scared to hear your minister say that?

Whatever faith is, when the disciples ask for more of it, Jesus basically says no. They don't need any more. Just the tiniest bit is enough. Jesus uses the metaphor of moving a mulberry tree with faith the size of a mustard seed, but what he's really doing, I think, is challenging the way the disciples are thinking about faith. It's not just something to have, to possess. Faith isn't intellectual assent or blind trust. And simply having more of it, doesn't make you more holy or more Christian. Faith doesn't live in our heads or in our hearts. Faith lives, I think, in our hands and in our feet. In our doing not our doctrine, in our generosity not our certitude, in our being not in our believing. Faith, like so many other things, isn't finally about us. It's about others—about those who benefit when we *do* faith. Whatever the disciples were asking for when they begged Jesus to increase their faith, they already had enough. Tiny faith, Jesus explains, can change the world. It's not about what faith *is*, it's about what faith *does*.

When I was a kid, my grandma gave me a little keychain. On the end there was a clear round ball about the size of a marble. Encased in the plastic was a mustard seed. I remember staring at that seed and thinking of all that I could do if only my faith were that big. No joke, I tried believing really hard and stepping off the edge in the deep end of the pool to see if I could walk on water. I tried concentrating on things with my faith to see if I could make them move. I took Jesus' a bit too literally and I misunderstood what faith really is. Faith is something we do.

On the one hand, I'm hoping this comes across as good news to us. Some of us struggle with the doctrines or orthodox Christianity—Apostles' Creed Christianity. Some of us struggle with what we often call religious faith entirely, because over the centuries, we've turned Jesus's message into a religion of right and correct belief instead of a lifestyle of right action. For those struggling, or doubting, or outright rejecting the interpretation of Christianity as a religion of right belief in God, in Jesus, in the Bible, this may be freeing news, and I hope it is.

But on the other hand, this is also likely challenging news. Some of us like Christianity because as long as we can mentally tick off the right "belief boxes" and show up to church once in a while, we're covered! And yet, the Jesus we hear about today seems to say that we really don't need any more of *that* kind of Christianity. Faith, he says, changes the world. Christian faith is something we do. And that's challenging, isn't it?

Now, please don't misunderstand me, I'm not saying that belief has no value. I'm not saying that *your* beliefs have no value. Belief can ground us in a shared story, be a source of comfort and conscience, and motivate action. I'm simply saying that belief does not constitute genuine Christian faith and disbelief does not constitute the rejection of genuine Christian faith, as Jesus seems to have understood it. Action is the best, perhaps the only measure of faith. Faith changes the world.

Today, churches around the world celebrate World Communion Sunday as a witness to unity and common mission. There are approximately 2.38 billion Christians in the world today.<sup>1</sup> I wonder, what could happen if all of them, all of us, did faith today, like Jesus? What could happen if all of us practiced peacemaking, followed forgiveness, shared resources, blessed children, welcomed outsiders, defied empire, expressed gratitude, refrained from judgement, challenged status quo, loved self *and* neighbor, called out injustice, demanded accountability, healed hurts, dreamed of

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<sup>1</sup> "How Many Christians are in the World Today?" Worldpopulationreview.com, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/most-christian-countries>.

heaven on earth and worked to make it a reality for all. What could happen if all 2.38 billion of us did that, even for a day? We could change the world. That is faith. Let it begin with us. Amen.