

The first time I went to Haiti was about a year after the big earthquake in 2010. The one that left more than a million people homeless and between 200-300,000 dead. I was the executive director of a nonprofit my ex husband - a Haitian - founded, with the goal of building public libraries in areas without access to such resources. Having never been to Haiti before, I thought I had prepared myself for the devastation.

I had not.

People were camping under tarps on top of rubble. The air was still heavy with dust and grief. People were cooking over small fires beside what had once been their homes. It felt impossible—too much destruction, too much need.

People had asked us, “Why libraries? Why books, when people need food, water, shelter?” But for us, it was never either-or. Haiti has always been rich in spirit, creativity, and intellect. Books aren’t luxuries; they’re tools. For people who still have a future, whose dignity isn’t buried in the rubble.

And everywhere I looked, there was life. People were rebuilding with whatever they had. They were sharing food, teaching children, singing hymns among the ruins.

Haitians have shown me mustard-seed faith better than anyone I have ever known: faith that acts when there’s no reason to believe it will matter, faith that refuses to die even when everything else has fallen.

That is what Jesus is talking about in today’s gospel: *faith for the hard things*.

Jesus is on the road to Jerusalem, teaching his disciples about forgiveness and perseverance. He tells them that if someone sins against them seven times a day and repents each time, they must forgive.

And the disciples groan and say exactly what we would: “Increase our faith!”

It isn’t a polite request; it’s a cry from people who know they’re in over their heads.

“We want to do what you’re asking, Jesus, but we don’t think we can.”

Jesus replies: “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.”

We’ve romanticized that line over the centuries—made it sound easy or sweet: “Just have a little faith and everything will work out.” But Jesus isn’t comforting the disciples; he’s commissioning them. He’s saying, “You already have what you need—now go do the hard thing.”

Mustard seeds weren’t dainty symbols of inspiration. They were wild, invasive, persistent. Like the birdseed flowers that I told you popped up in my raised beds. I just had to rip it all out because the plants had gotten out of control!! Mustard bushes are like that. Once planted, they changed the landscape. And mulberry trees? Their roots ran deep and hold strong—like bitterness, fear, or fatigue, the things that sometimes take root in us when life gives us lemons instead of lemonade.

They’re great images, the mustard bush going wild and the mulberry tree with its deep roots. However, the images Jesus gives us aren’t meant to be poetic. They’re images that should evoke grit and endurance. Even a small, living faith can start to uproot what everyone else says will never move, to do things we think we will never be able to do.

Because that’s the thing: the disciples weren’t asking for faith to feel better; they were asking for faith to do. To do the hard things.

To forgive people who might hurt them again.

To love their enemies.

To keep following when the road led toward the cross.

But Jesus told them they didn't need more faith; they needed to use the faith they already had. Faith the size of a mustard seed. Just that tiny bit of faith. Because that faith is of God and God would ensure the harvest.

Faith isn't waiting for certainty. Faith is obedience that keeps walking when certainty is gone.

That's what Haiti taught me. That faith didn't look like confidence. It looked like showing up anyway. Picking up rubble with hands that were trembling. Trusting that God could take what little we offer and multiply it.

That's what mustard-seed faith looks like in action: doing the next right thing when you can't see the outcome.

But we know, like the disciples clearly knew, that sometimes the hard thing isn't rebuilding what's broken out there; it's wrestling with what's broken in here. Just before the passage we read today, Jesus told them that they had to forgive. Over and over. That's why they asked for an increase of faith. Because they knew how hard that was going to be.

This week I got a call from my daughter who lives in Chicago. Twenty minutes from the ICE raid that happened this week. Families pulled from their homes in the night, children zip-tied together. My daughter, who was born in Mexico and has a certificate of a birth abroad rather than a birth certificate.

My first reaction was the same as hers – fear. For my daughter, for those families, for myself. A fear I can't even describe.

But underneath the fear is anger at the people choosing this type of violence, the people supporting this kind of hatred. And I'll be honest: forgiveness does not come easily to this mother's heart, especially when I know the risk to my own daughter.

But with that tiny little mustard seed, Jesus ties faith to forgiveness. "If they repent, forgive them," he says. But forgiveness isn't cheap. The cross taught us that. Forgiveness doesn't ignore harm or say it's ok. But what I hear Jesus saying is that even when repentance doesn't come, the work of faith continues: to keep our hearts open enough that fear and bitterness and fatigue don't take root.

And I'll tell you, I don't have that in me on my own. Every single day I have to pray, "Lord, increase my faith," because sometimes I can't muster forgiveness, especially for the unrepentant. But when I pray that, what I sense in return is the same whisper the disciples heard: "You already have what you need. Trust me. All you need is a mustard seed. Let me handle the rest."

So maybe I can't yet forgive, but I can pray. Maybe I can't fix it, but I can refuse to surrender my soul to bitterness. That's a mustard seed — tiny, trembling, alive — and God can grow it into something stronger than resentment. That is the hard work of faith — trusting God to begin the healing in us before it ever takes shape in the world. And maybe that's where it begins for all of us — with one small act of faith, and trusting that little mustard seed in God's hands will be enough.

So I wonder what hard thing is God calling you to do right now?

Maybe it's to forgive—again.

Maybe it's to keep serving when gratitude runs thin and no thanks are offered.

Maybe it's to speak truth to power when the room goes quiet.

Maybe it's to hope when cynicism feels safer.

Maybe it's to love when your heart says it's had enough.

Maybe it's simply to stay openhearted in a world that keeps breaking yours.

Whatever it is, you don't need more faith to begin.

Plant the seed you have.

Take the step you can.

And trust God to meet you in the doing.

Because mustard-seed faith isn't about sitting back and waiting for God to act; it's about joining God in the work—trusting that when we act, even shakily, God will grow it into something greater than we can see.

Amen.