**Sermon October 2, 2022
Luke 17:5-10**

“Increase our faith!” the disciples say to Jesus in this morning’s Gospel. Jesus replies with the parable of the mustard seed. A little faith can have a big impact. These are encouraging words to people in small congregations, like St. Martin’s.
 So today let’s examine our thoughts and feelings about being like the mustard seeds in God’s dominion.

The Scriptures are full of examples of the strength of small groups of the faithful, and the power of small or insignificant people. David slew the giant Goliath with a slingshot. In Acts, when the first disciples gathered in small clusters and prayed, great numbers became followers. Timothy is reminded by Paul that even though he is young, he is able to be a leader in the community.
 Despite small numbers, youth, or lack of status or prestige, the faith of these people made extraordinary things happen.

Being part of a small church does not mean that we are missing something. Smallness is in many ways a gift. Small groups of Christians can witness to the power of Christ in a unique way.
 Small groups of concerned Christians can embrace social outcasts, showing the love of God in a particular place and time. Small churches tend to be more inclusive—more generous—less bureaucratic ---than large churches. The members of a small church tend to intrepid and loyal.
 Being small also means that we don’t have to get it right all the time. We tend to be more flexible—able to change tactics or focus—or simply admit when we are wrong and move on.
 And our little mustard seed of a church has landed in a place where people are struggling to make sense of what it means to be human in a broken world—and we can help with that.

Some of the most painful questions I get as a priest are “Is it ok to feel distant from your faith when you are going through a hard time? Or, “What does it even mean to have faith? And, “Is it ok to have doubt? And sometimes people wonder--- is there really a God because of all the hurt and suffering in the world.

 And so, I started to think again, as I have before, about how often we assume that having faith means not doubting.

 We assume that *having* faith means not *struggling* with faith----that having faith means being totally trusting, and peaceful, and serene, even when really bad stuff is happening to us or around us—because God will only give us stuff we can handle—or it’s God’s will—or something like that.

We struggle with fear, confusion, and doubt. But we have been given a measure of faith—and faith the size of a mustard seed is sufficient. Each of us in our small way can be an instrument of God’s peace, love, and mercy.

. “Increase our faith,” the disciples ask, and Jesus seems to be saying that we don’t need more faith—we need to realize that we already have faith.

 It’s like Jesus is saying ***how much faith do you have*?** and we’re like ***I don’t know Jesus, it’s not very much it’s like this small*** and Jesus says, “good enough for me!”

 The faith of the Righteous is not as much about never doubting as it is about having a heart which longs for that which it ***cannot***create for itself…to be righteous is to be a person – to be *a people* – who take the promises of God seriously enough to be unafraid of doubt. Doubt is as much about being in relationship with God as faith is. Even if it’s a tiny mustard seed amount, it’s enough.
 So, if things are hard. If you are struggling. If when it comes to God you feel more like complaining than praising, know that this too is faith.

Neither our faith nor our actions can earn us God’s favor. Nor can our faith or our actions earn us salvation. There is nothing you can do to earn salvation – it is a free gift offered by Christ through his life, death and resurrection.

God’s love is a free gift offered with no requirements or regulations. God simply is love. And Christ’s life, death and resurrection have already saved us. Nothing we can do, no amount of faith we can generate, makes God love us more or makes us more saved. Being saved is a done deal.

Our faith does not need to impress God or anyone else. Our faith simply needs to respond to what God has given us.

Be aware of all the gifts God has given you. And know that you are infinitely loved. That is your faith. And that faith, even if it’s as small as the tiniest mustard seed – that faith can transform you and the world. For God, working through you can do more than you can ever ask or imagine.

Amen