

Traditional Home service

Sunday 2nd October

OPENING PRAYER

O Lord, we beseech you mercifully to hear the prayers of your people who call upon you; and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfil them; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

PRAYER OF PENITENCE

Come, let us return to the Lord and say:

*Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
we have sinned against you, through our
own fault, in thought, and word, and
deed, and in what we have left undone.
We are heartily sorry, and repent of all our
sins. For your Son our Lord Jesus
Christ's sake, forgive us all that is past;
and grant that we may serve you in
newness of life to the glory of your name.
Amen.*

PRAISE

Let everything be said and done in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God through Jesus Christ. Sing psalms, hymns and sacred songs:

Let us sing to God with thankful hearts.
Open our lips, Lord:
and we shall praise your name.

HYMN 1 (God of love and God of power)

READINGS - Lamentations 1.1-6
2 Timothy 1.1-14
Luke 17.5-10

TALK

CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.
Amen.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

*Spend some time praying for our nation,
our community and our families.*

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen.

HYMN 2 (My faith looks up to thee)

CONCLUSION

Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with you all; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always.
Amen.

HYMNS TO USE

God of love and God of power,
make us worthy of this hour;
offering lives if it's thy will,
keeping free our spirits still.
God of love and power,
thou hast called us for this hour.

"Wisdom, honour, power, and blessing!"
with angelic host we cry;
round thy throne, thy name confessing,
Lord, we would to thee draw nigh.
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Glory be to God on high!

My faith looks up to thee
Thou Lamb of Calvary
Saviour divine!
Now hear me while I pray
Take all my guilt away
O let me from this day
Be wholly thine!

May thy rich grace impart
Strength to my fainting heart
My zeal inspire!
As thou hast died for me
O may my love to thee
Pure, warm, and changeless be
A living fire!

When life's dark maze I tread
And griefs around me spread
Be thou my guide
Bid darkness turn to day
Wipe sorrow's tears away
Nor let me ever stray
From thee aside

When ends life's transient dream
When death's cold, sullen stream
Shall o'er me roll
Blest Saviour, then in love
Fear and distrust remove
O bear me safe above
A ransomed soul!

Sermon - Peter Smethurst
Mustard seed faith

Luke 17:5-6 The apostles said to the Lord, "Give us more faith!" He replied, "Suppose you have faith as small as a mustard seed. Then you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be pulled up. Be planted in the sea.' And it will obey you.

Have you ever wished that you had more faith? Stronger faith? Deeper faith? Sometimes, we think that if we can only muster up more faith from within ourselves, we can accomplish more.

One of the greatest mistakes we can make in the Christian life is to think that faith itself is the source of power. But on two separate occasions in the Gospel Accounts, Jesus talks about a "mustard seed" faith that can result in great things.

What Does 'Faith as Small as a Mustard Seed' Even Mean?

Why does Jesus use a mustard seed to describe faith? In Jesus' day, the mustard seed was used proverbially to represent the smallest of things.

And with a diameter of 1 to 2 millimetres it's a fitting illustration!

By using this illustration to describe faith, Jesus is directing our attention, not to the quantity or strength of our faith, but to the object of our faith.

Our faith is only as strong as the object in which its placed.

If our faith, even if it's the size of a mustard seed, is placed in the all-powerful God, great things can happen. It has been said that it is not necessary to have great faith if it is faith in the great God.

The Bible defines faith as a self-emptied, dependent assurance in God's character and promises. The most famous biblical definition of faith is Hebrews 11:1: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

Assurance and conviction are not wishy-washy words.

In this context "assurance" refers to a high degree of certainty that God's word is accurate, complete, and usable and "conviction" is a firmly held belief or opinion.

So, faith is being certain that God's word is accurate and complete and that His promises can be relied upon even when our senses contradict the truth of His Word.

This kind of faith is explained in verse 6: "...for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists [His "I AM" character] and that He rewards those who seek Him [we can rely upon His promises]."

Biblical faith has nothing to do with personal self-effort (Ephesians 2:8-9 says: For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast.)

We are not called to rely on human strength and wisdom. St Paul said that he preached with a demonstration of the Spirit's power "so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power." (1 Corinthians 2:5).

In other words, when we talk about Biblical faith, all the strength and power that we need comes from the object of our faith - God Himself, not the "size" of faith. Even a "mustard seed" faith will do if it is faith in Almighty God.

Jesus uses this analogy twice. Once in Luke 17:6, which is part of today's reading and also in Matthew 17:20.

In each of these accounts, Jesus is confronting a lack of faith in the disciples.

In Luke 17, Jesus is teaching his disciples about forgiveness, telling them that, even if someone offends you "seven times in the day," they were to forgive him seven times (Luke 17:3-4). Upon hearing this difficult command, the disciples respond, "Increase our faith!" (Luke 17:5). They assumed that "more faith" would give them the power to forgive.

Jesus uses the illustration of the mustard seed: "If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be

uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you" (Luke 17:6).

In Matthew 17, a man pleads with Jesus to heal his son who was suffering from an oppressive demon. The man tells Jesus that he had already gone to his disciples, but "they could not heal him".

Jesus responds to this with sorrow over the "faithless and twisted generation" and then casts the demon out of the boy.

When the disciples ask Jesus why they couldn't cast him out, Jesus responds, "Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you."

On the face of it this statement sounds contradictory. Jesus said they couldn't cast out the demon because of their little faith and goes on to say that if they had faith as small as a mustard seed nothing would be impossible to them.

Up until this time the disciples had been healing the sick and casting out demons, and on this occasion, we can assume that they had done everything that they had done in the past, but without success. They had gone through their routine but the devil would come out.

Without doubt the disciples had been faced with a very disturbing manifestation of demonic power. This must have been very frightening – but fear is the opposite of faith.

The problem was that faced with the violence of this demon their faith in God's power had not been up to the challenge.

But on both these occasions, Jesus tells them that if they have only a little faith in the all-powerful God then big things would happen. It is not the 'amount' of faith which brings the impossible within reach, but the power of God, which is available to even the 'smallest' faith.

The stark contrast between the smallest of seeds and the immensity of a mountain range is a powerful one.

Equally the fig mulberry tree that grows in Israel has roots that spread out for hundreds of feet in each direction and at that time would have been literally impossible to uproot.

Jesus is telling us that only faith in a powerful God can accomplish the things that only a powerful God can do.

This does not mean, however, that we can harness God's power to accomplish whatever we desire. We cannot hijack the power of God for our own purposes.

If faith is a self-emptied, dependent assurance in the character and promise of God, then that faith will only pursue things that align with his character and agree with his promises.

Jesus made it clear where our power comes from: "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5)

When Jesus explained to His disciples that wealth wouldn't qualify people for the kingdom of God it's recorded: When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." (Matthew 19:25-26)

All faith comes from God and all power comes from God and if we humbly look to the power of God that is within us then God can respond to our faith and achieve those things which we feel are impossible.

When I was thinking about this the Holy Spirit gave me an unusual illustration. Some weeks ago Linda and I watched a film called "Knight and Day" in which Tom Cruise plays a superspy trying to protect Cameron Diaz from being killed by hundreds of well-armed villains. The film is very much tongue in cheek and we thoroughly enjoyed it. In the film the Cameron Diaz character is very wilful and thinks that she can save herself and Tom Cruise must repeatedly explain to her that her prospects of survival with him are quite high whereas without him she has no hope. He does this by lifting his hand above her head and saying that with him her chances are up here but without him, he says pointing to the floor, her chances

are down there. This “with me” and “without me” illustration is repeated throughout the film.

Jesus said that with Him all things are possible but without Him we can do nothing.

How do we apply this to Real Life?

We as Christians must take care to place our faith, not in our own knowledge, willpower and abilities, but in God Himself.

This means we must seek to know Him deeply. We must study His character and dwell on His promises.

We can do this by studying the New Testament and meditating on what God has promised us as believers in Jesus Christ.

Perhaps make a note of every attribute and characteristic of God that we find during our personal Bible reading.

It can also be helpful to keep a prayer journal. I must confess that some of my journalling has not always been consistent but thankfully God does not condemn me and is there when I go back to it.

A Prayer for Mustard Seed Faith to Move Mountains

Dear God, You are the God of the impossible. We are so weak and frail, but you are all-powerful. Thank you that our hope doesn't rest in the strength of our own faith, but in your strength. However small it is, keep our faith focused on you alone. Convince and comfort us with your character and promises. Help us align our will with yours. Keep us in your Word so that our faith is rooted in a firm foundation. In Jesus' name, Amen.