

The gospel today has the apostles asking Jesus: "Increase our faith". This feels so relevant to our world today. We look around and see environmental degradation, increasing frequency of severe weather affecting poor communities disproportionately, extinction of species, and a sense that the world has become, well- just really selfish. Please help us increase our faith.

Jesus responds by evoking the image of the mustard seed and the mulberry tree, using them to illustrate the enormous power of faith in God, " If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea' and it would obey you".

He then goes on to weave a parable about embracing the role of servant. A servant "plows the field, [and] tends the sheep". Jesus says: "put on your apron and prepare something". It's almost like he is saying: 'get to work !' and maybe even: "get your hands dirty!"

But what does this mean for us here and now?

I admit that the image of mustard seed took over my imagination when I heard this gospel. One of the first times I actually saw a mustard seed and really thought about it was here at Boston College. A friend I knew in my nursing program had a gold necklace that actually contained mustard seeds! (I'm sure they helped propel her through our program like the mulberry tree)

A mustard seed evokes the sense of slow change. It is small and quiet. The seed does not change on its own, it must rely on other factors: soil for nutrients, water. Only then can it evolve: but very slowly. And, it evolves beautifully, like as a child growing into an adult. What a contrast to our culture today. Interestingly, Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato Si* "On Care for Our Common Home" describes a sense of "rapidification" which is "the continued acceleration of changes affecting humanity and the planet ... and an intensified pace of life and work". Can this be good for us?

So, what does it mean for us to "be an unprofitable servant, doing what we are obliged to do?" or to "get our hands dirty?" Firstly, we may consider looking to the wisdom of the mustard seed that Jesus lays before us. A call to slow down and be quiet. A call for a sacred pause, to reorient ourselves, and contemplate the goodness of God's creation, all of interdependent. And, maybe this literally means going outside and literally getting our hands dirty in a playful way- feeling the earth, the soil! Enjoying the beauty of the earth. Can we just gaze at the harvest moon? Can we realize the miracle of the food on our tables?

And with this fullness of heart, we then cannot help but feel compelled to get our hands dirty in other ways, to act and serve. Like Greta Thunberg, the astonishingly brave girl who sailed across the Atlantic Ocean from Plymouth, UK, to New York, US, in a 60 ft racing yacht equipped with solar panels and underwater turbines and then bravely confronted the 2019 United Nations Climate Summit calling out the ruthless pursue of economic growth at all costs. Of course, we can't all cross the Atlantic ocean on a sailboat, but can do other things such working to create a rooftop farm which would fill food pantry with fruits and vegetables for patients at my hospital. We can also do small things that together makes just as much difference- something as simple as having a meatless day throughout the week, or taking the Ignatian carbon challenge.

And at the end of the day, through these big and small acts of service our faith grows abundantly like the mustard seed. Until one day, we can say to the mulberry tree: "be uprooted and plant yourself in the sea" and would obey us 100 times over.