

LWML Sunday 10/6/19  
"Moving Mulberry Trees"  
Luke 17:6

AND THE LORD SAID, "IF YOU HAD FAITH LIKE A GRAIN OF A MUSTARD SEED, YOU COULD SAY TO THIS MULBERRY TREE, 'BE UPROOTED AND PLANTED IN THE DEEA,' AND IT WOULD OBEY YOU."

It is difficult to be a Christian today. It seems the world has changed. Our nation has changed. Increasingly, people are walking away from the church or choosing never to attend because we are seen as irrelevant, judgmental, or hypocritical. The more secularized we become as a nation, the less impact we Christians seem to have.

I. All this talk about the challenges of living in "a post-Christian world" can lead to timid, fearful, even doubtful disciples of Jesus Christ. It may seem to us that the world is changing, but honestly, truthfully, our world is not that different from the world of Jesus' first disciples.

The world is watching us. One of my favorite quotes is from St. Francis of Assisi, "Preach the Gospel. If necessary, use words." Now, there is some argument if St. Francis really said that, but those words speak the truth – we have an impact on the world and our neighbor by the way we live. Our everyday life means everything to the way the world sees Jesus Christ.

Look at what was happening with Jesus and His first disciples in Luke 17. Jesus was constantly teaching. Here, He tells His disciples that they would need to forgive others, even if they had been wronged, seven times in a single day. He was talking about a way of life. He was referring to the simple, but challenging, act of confronting your neighbor with their sin and forgiving them.

It's hard to confront, though, isn't it? And, it's even harder to forgive. The roots of bitterness run deep and last long, like tree roots — like mulberry tree roots, stubborn and strong. No wonder the disciples responded to Jesus' challenge to forgive with the words, "Increase our faith" (v. 5). They could have said, "What! You expect us to forgive like that and that often? No way! We need greater faith to do that."

It was one of those teaching moments. So, when His disciples said, "Increase our faith!" Jesus did not say, "Sure, abracadabra, you have greater faith!" What He said was, "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."

With just a little faith, Jesus is saying — faith as small as a mustard seed — you can uproot a thirty-foot mulberry tree and plant it at the bottom of the sea. Can you imagine a mulberry tree flying out of the ground to its new home, 4000 feet below sea level!

You can relate to the request of the disciples, "Increase our faith," can't you, Dear Child of God? Their plea was "Jesus, give us more faith, heroic faith, enough faith to do the hard thing in hard times." You've been there, done that, haven't you? "If only I had enough faith!" "If I could just believe enough!" Or, negatively, we say, "I guess I just don't have enough faith!" Notice how the weight of those statements is on us. Can we believe enough? Can we trust enough? Do we have enough faith to make things happen?

**II.** Yes, you do, for you have Christ, or better, Christ has you! He is the One who came and died for your sin of doubt, despair, weakness; for all of your sins. He is one the One who broke the grave's bond and came to life

the 3<sup>rd</sup> morning. He is the One who gave you forgiveness and life and salvation in the waters of your Baptism and made you His own child.

III. “Faith like a grain of mustard seed” is simply trust in Him, a trust that abides in Him, depends on Him, and lives every day in Him. It is only in Christ that we move mulberry trees, even the deep ones like bitterness or a lack of forgiveness. That is possible only as Christ lives in us and we live in Christ.

So “faith like a grain of mustard seed” says that I can forgive not so much because I have enough faith to do it but rather because I live, and move, and have my being in Christ Jesus who does in work in me, so that He can do His work through me. “Faith like a grain of mustard seed” says I already have what I need to live my Christian life and witness: you have Jesus.

So, in Christ, I confront the person who has wronged me, and offer forgiveness. I do the hard thing and share my faith with my neighbor. I drop a quarter in an LWML mite box, believing it will make a difference. I hold the hand of a neighbor in the hospital. I phone a friend or relative who has become distant.

So, in Christ, our congregation of Concordia {Zion} gladly and willingly does the work Christ would have us to. That means seeing our community and neighbors not as the enemy, but as our mission field. And underneath it all, you hear mulberry trees moving — hard things, seemingly impossible things, happening because Christ lives within me, because Christ lives within us!

The Lutheran Women’s Missionary League has always lived by mustard seed faith. Little gifts, mites, combined across our synod, make big things happen in mission across the world. Christ has been moving

mulberry trees through the LWML since 1942. What a model they are for Christian discipleship! The women of our church have taught us what it means to move mulberry trees with just a little faith.

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus talks about moving mountains with mustard seed faith. Here, it is the mulberry tree that gets moved. Either way, the message is the same. In our relationship with Jesus, we have what is necessary to do difficult, even seemingly impossible, things. Christ is with us, and He forgives and renews us as we gladly hear and learn His Word and eat His life-giving Body and Blood in Holy Communion. We can say with St. Paul, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me (Ph 4:13)." And why should that be so hard to believe? He has moved us from death to life, from being orphans to being His own children, from guilt to cleansing, from conflict to reconciliation.

The story if is told of a lepidopterist who went out with his net one sunny afternoon. I suppose I should clarify that a lepidopterist is a person who collects butterflies, so there is he was out in the meadow collecting butterflies, when a big, ol' bear spotted him. And you know what that bear was thinkin', don't ya? "Lord, for this food we about to receive, we give you thanks..." Well about the time the bear spotted him, that lepidopterist spotted the bear and off he went, without net or butterfly, that bear in hot pursuit. Off in the distance, he happened to see a gnarly, crooked tree, with but a single branch. He knew his only chance not to end up as meals on wheels for that bear was to get to that branch, so he stoked the furnace with coal and beat feet even faster. But, the faster he went, the faster that bear went, until he could feel that critter's hot breath breathing down his neck. In the throes of desperation, he made one gigantic leap for that

single branch with all the strength and vigor his legs could muster. And, he missed it. But, he got it on the way down.

My Dear Friends in Christ, May that be our attitude the next time we say that it is difficult to follow Christ. What appears to be hard, and even impossible, may be just the thing we need to do as we live with Christ day-in and day-out. And because Christ abides with us, the difficult thing can be done with joy. It may not be easy, but it is possible in Christ. May it be said of us, "Those were the days when Christians moved mulberry trees!" Amen.