

Date Preached	02-Oct-2022	Date Initiated	13-Sept-2022
Where Preached	SAK	Appointed Readings	Prop 22, Yr C

" [Y]ou **can** say to this mulberry tree, "Be uprooted and planted in the sea," and it **will** obey you.' "



It's not a surprise to many of you, I'm sure, that I love dwelling in details ... marinating in the *minutiae*. Recently, all the various events following Queen Elizabeth's passing sent me scurrying in a dozen different directions: how were the 142 naval ratings detailed to pull the gun carriage in processions chosen for duty?<sup>1</sup> ... who were the older gentlemen walking behind Prince William and Prince Harry?<sup>2</sup> ... why was Elizabeth now referred to as "Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth," rather than "Her Majesty the Queen"?<sup>3</sup> ... and why is the Lord Chamberlain of the Household's symbol of office a white rod?<sup>4</sup>

Thus, when Jesus says something surprising like, "If you had faith like a mustard seed,<sup>5</sup> you could say to this mulberry tree ...," my inquiring mind wants to know why: I pull out my Greek New Testament and my Greek grammar and start parsing. Jesus has just told the twelve Apostles that even if someone sins against you seven times a day, as long as she repents each time, you must forgive her. That's a pretty tall order, and the Apostles naturally begin to despair ... worry they're not up to the task: O Lord, they cry, "increase our faith."<sup>6</sup> Now, in our translation,<sup>7</sup> Jesus' response sounds rather critical—almost harsh: "if **only** you had faith so **puny** as the even tiniest mustard seed"; in effect, "Why, oh why, after following me for all these years, don't you have even [*tiny*' *gesture*] this much faith?"

A closer reading of the Greek syntax, however, reveals that this His statement is<sup>8</sup> an ordinary IF / THEN statement of fact: "If you all<sup>9</sup> have faith like a mustard seed—and you *do!*<sup>10</sup>—then you all can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey all of

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<sup>1</sup> Answer: (I couldn't find one.)

<sup>2</sup> Answer: Princess Anne's husband Sir Tim Laurence, the Queen's cousin Prince Richard, the Duke of Gloucester, and the Queen's nephew David Armstrong-Jones, the Earl of Snowdon.

<sup>3</sup> Answer: The royal style changes upon the monarch's death. The article *THE* designates only the *reigning* queen (or king). Thus, at Elizabeth's death, Charles became "the King," and her own style was altered to "Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth."

<sup>4</sup> Answer: Although merely ceremonial now, these rods (within the royal household there are many, in several colors, corresponding to various chivalric orders) may originally have been used to keep away those who should not get too close to the monarch ... or to symbolize the holder's authority so to do.

<sup>5</sup> This is a more literal translation of the Greek.

<sup>6</sup> Again, a more accurate translation would read, "add faith to us."

<sup>7</sup> *I.e.*, the NRSV.

<sup>8</sup> Or, more properly, "may be": Rendering Koine Greek conditional often involves some interpretive judgment.

<sup>9</sup> It is important that throughout this sentence, the verbs Jesus uses are in the second person plural.

<sup>10</sup> I interpret this as a consistent-with-fact (as opposed to a contrary-to-fact) conditional: *viz.*, "since I am" rather than "if I were."

you."<sup>11</sup> Jesus doesn't use this fanciful example to chide the Apostles or critique their lack of belief<sup>12</sup>; this is a not some eye-rolling, sigh-heaving moment—His wondering how He got stuck with a such bunch of knuckleheads. No, Jesus is telling the Apostles there is no limit to what their faith ... banded together and acting in concert—importantly, every single verb He uses is in the second person plural: YOU ALL ... can accomplish. The *tiniest* seed of faith ... when combined with others' tiny seeds ... is capable of doing the impossible: even planting a tree right in the middle of the sea.

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As the mailing you received this week has told you, our annual fall stewardship season has begun. The Stewardship Commission's letter and their fine brochure lift up St Andrew's mission and accomplishments; tout the gifts we offer the community; and dream of the future God has in store for us here in the 'Kent branch of the Jesus Movement,' to borrow a phrase from Michael Curry, our Presiding Bishop. Whether you are motivated to give by practicalities ... like increased expenses as a result of our 'trying on' new things, or the rising cost of just about everything due to inflation ... or whether you're excited by the rich opportunities we have to share the Good News of Christ, by word and by deed, with more and more people who hunger for His Word ... I urge you to give: to give thoughtfully, to give hopefully and to give generously.

But what captures my attention this morning, however, is not how much any *one* of us gives ... but the truly amazing things that happen when we *all* give to this parish. For our pledges to St Andrew's—the seeds of our faith ... when combined with others' ... are capable of doing truly marvelous things!

- When we harness our faith and all pull in unison, we can send volunteers to the Torrington Soup Kitchen month-after-month to feed our neighbors who are hungry ... we can donate thousands and thousands of dollars to local and regional charities who counsel and shelter and teach and assist the most vulnerable among us ... we can join with other houses of worship across lower Litchfield County to give a family of Afghan refugees a new life, in New Milford ... we can collect sneakers and coats for Sr Mary's friends in the South Bronx who are unsheltered or vulnerable  
>> With our faith, we can plant a mulberry tree right in the middle of the sea!
- When we open our wallets and bank accounts and portfolios and all give collectively, we can reopen our church school and start, once again, teaching children how much Jesus loves and dearly cares for them ... we can hold luncheons to honor and thank Kent's veterans and first responders ... we can bless animals, hold tag sales and provide visitors a shady spot to sip their coffee or eat their lunch  
>> With our faith, we can plant a mulberry tree right in the middle of the sea!
- When we band our financial resources together and all act in concert, we can make beautiful music together ... partake of sacramental grace with one another ... baptize the young (and the young-in-faith) ... celebrate the resurrection of the dead ... and love and support one another in ways no club or committee ever can

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<sup>11</sup> Cf New International Version ("If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you.").

St Matthew (17:19-21) and St Mark (11:23) use the example of moving a mountain by faith. I don't know why, but I find St Luke's account of a mulberry tree more effective (perhaps because it's on a more human scale? or it's truly impossible for a tree to live in the sea while mountains do, in fact, move, from time-to-time (God preserve us!)?).

<sup>12</sup> Although, as for all of us, their faith is a dynamic journey and not an inert status or given.

>> With our faith, we can plant a mulberry tree right in the middle of the sea!

- When we—when 'you all'!—offer up your faith-gifts in tangible, appreciable ways ... allowing them to be drawn in the same direction at the same time, like a team of 142 sailors harnessed together and moving a carriage at precisely seventy-five-paces-per-minute ... we can warmly welcome the seeker ... we can be a safe home for a nursery school and recovery and support groups ... we can host the community for concerts and readings and dramas ... we can make the corner of Bridge and Main the place to be; and hopefully ... for some ... *also* the place to find Jesus  
>> With our faith, we can plant a mulberry tree right in the middle of the sea! The *only* constraint on the **soarings** of our imagination ↓ is the generosity of our hearts.

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Jesus doesn't critique or shame His Apostles; He *encourages* them and *builds* them up. "When you all come together in faith," He tells them, "you can accomplish the most marvelous ... most miraculous ... things because you're harnessing *My* power within you."

This stewardship season, we, too, have every reason to be encouraged and built up, for before us lies the opportunity for us all to come together in faith ... spiritually and tangibly ... and accomplish the marvelous, miraculous—even the seemingly impossible—things Jesus yearns to do right here at St Andrew's. And so, let us band our seeds of faith together this stewardship season ... and, with our pledges, plant **that** mulberry tree right in the middle of the sea!



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