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by Mary M. McGlone

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"How long, O Lord! Why don't you intervene!" How many times have believers joined Habakkuk in this desperate lament? Do we not cry out for divine justice as we look at Ukraine, Syria, police brutality, untimely deaths, people who entice others into addiction, human trafficking, etc.?

The short book of Habakkuk reads like prophecy in poetry. At one point, Habakkuk says his people act like fish drifting without a leader. When caught, they watch their captor worship his net ([Habakkuk 1:15-16](#)). From God's side, we hear that when the oppressor opens his mouth, we can see the entryway into hell ([Habakkuk 2:5](#)).

Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

[October 2, 2022](#)

Habakkuk 1:2-3, 2:2-4

Psalm 95

2 Timothy 1:6-8, 13-14

Luke 17:5-10

Poetic beauty aside, God's response to Habakkuk's anguish feels lacking: "The vision still has its time." In other words, "No matter what you think, God has not forsaken you. Be patient. God's time is not the same as yours." That's fine for an eternal being; what about those who are suffering in real time?

Habakkuk is our lead-in to the apostles' entreaty, "Lord, increase our faith!" What a request! What are they really asking for? Are they requesting irrefutable proof that Jesus is worthy of their trust? Are they, like Habakkuk, begging for help to believe in God's loving care while terrible things keep happening? Are they asking for the grace of greater fidelity?

Jesus replied, "If you had faith like a grain of mustard [the Greek text doesn't say anything about size], you could uproot this mulberry tree and send it to the sea."

This is the second time that Luke's Gospel mentions a mustard seed.

The other was in [Luke 13:19](#) when Jesus said that the reign of God grows like a mustard plant. Maybe Jesus' answer addresses not the size of their faith, but rather its explosive power. Jesus wanted them to have grain-of-mustard faith, faith that spreads like weeds.

Jesus then launched into an example that seems more a riddle than an explanation: "Who among you would invite your field hands to sit down while you fixed their dinner and waited on them?" (Jesus wasn't talking about a farmer's wife.) "No," he says, "when servants finish one job, they should be ready for the next one."

What on earth does this have to do with faith, or, as the first reading asks, with prayer for divine intervention?

"Lord, increase our faith." That's what they asked. God told Habakkuk, "The vision presses on to fulfillment." Jesus told the apostles, "You're not supposed to stop before you have completed everything."

Perhaps Jesus' riddle/story means to tell us that we aren't going to grow in faith simply by asking for it. Perhaps for Jesus faith is not a noun, but a verb. One does not *have* Christlike faith; one *practices* this kind of faith. It seems that Jesus is saying that putting faith into action is the one and only way for it to grow.

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The kind of faith Jesus is talking about is a far distant cousin of dogma and theology (they are barely on speaking terms). Jesus' kind of faith becomes both visible and contagious when expressed through practices such as love of enemy and the hope that acts as if evil will never win. That's grain-of-mustard faith; it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Obviously, it's impossible to verbally uproot a mulberry tree and send it to the sea. It's also pretty useless. But Jesus is talking about a faith that approaches useful impossibilities as events in process, visions that are pressing on to fulfillment, acts of trust that will not disappoint — no matter how long it takes for them to come to fruition.

Many of us who listen to these readings are probably like Habakkuk and the apostles. We look to God for strength, for answers. In desperation we shout, "Dear God in heaven, DO SOMETHING!"

And Jesus responds, "Are you waiting for God to set the table for you? What makes you think it's time for you to sit down and for God to take over?"

Paul told Timothy, "Stir into flame the gift of God you have received." He went on, "God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather of power and love." Perhaps today's readings are telling us that the very impatience and the passion with which we plea for God's help are the signs that grain-of-mustard hope is truly alive in us; signs that we have more power than we think we have.

Perhaps today we are being invited to pray something like this: "Lord, help us! We hope for what we can't yet see, but we are acting as if it is happening among us. Now, let us hear your voice!"

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