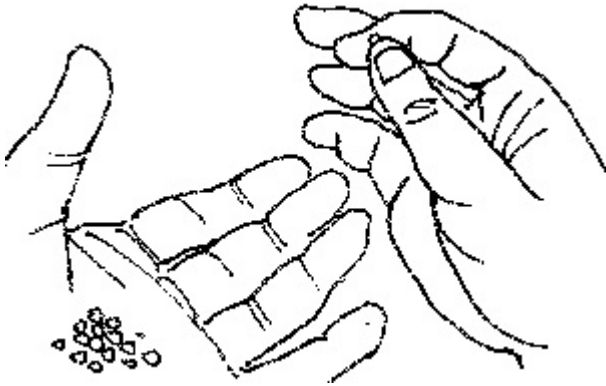


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“The vision still has its time, presses on to fulfillment, and will not disappoint”
(Habakkuk 2:3).

The prophet Habakkuk lamented the terrible state of affairs around him and God's apparent silence in the face of crisis. He is told to trust the vision and wait for its fulfillment. For many in our own time, global crises seem insurmountable and our own efforts small and ineffective. This Sunday's readings speak to us with reassurance and force.

When his followers asked Jesus to increase their faith, he told them the parable of the mustard seed. Though it was the smallest of seeds, once sown the mustard plant sprang up and spread rapidly. The parable's metaphor about small things having a large impact encourages us to do our part, no matter how little it seems, and to trust that God will bless and multiply our effort.

The examples are many. People despair of real political reform, so they don't bother to vote, and unqualified candidates win close elections and legislate poor public policy. A grieving mother who loses a child to a drunk driver starts a national coalition of other mothers against drunk driving (MADD). A Swedish girl calls for a student strike to protest inaction on climate change, and millions of young people support her worldwide. A child gives up his lunch of fish and bread, and a crowd of 5,000 is fed.

If we don't try to change the world, if we withhold our mustard seed, nothing happens or, worse, poisonous weeds proliferate and choke off genuine growth. Jesus' parable promotes a whole world of values based on the idea that small things and ordinary people can overcome huge obstacles and influence major changes. "Faith the size of a mustard seed," he said, "can move mountains and uproot mulberry trees and cast them into the sea." So why are we of so little faith?

There is more to the parable, of course, and if we step back and look at it in its larger context, we see that Jesus was also being ironic and even subversive. The Kingdom of God he preached was not the restoration of the fabled kingdom of David and Solomon, whose regal symbol was the mighty Cedar of Lebanon. No, Jesus' kingdom was the humble but prolific mustard bush that, once planted, took over the soil like kudzu, a vine known to swallow up telephone poles and cover highways in the southeastern part of the United States.

Jesus' Kingdom was of the poor, the meek, the persecuted and outcast, who, once rooted in love and nourished by grace, were unstoppable. In God's vision, the last will be first and first last. Greatness resides in humble service and ordinary virtue.

The meek will inherit the earth. God's love is a revolution of the heart that will confound the proud and the powerful by turning history upside down with truth, justice and peace-making.

This is the vision Habakkuk was instructed to cling to with faith. This is the future we are called to sow our hopes in, however small and inconsequential they may seem, for God intends to make of us a Beloved Community. But we must want the revolution and believe in it for it to take root in us. God has given each of us seeds to sow, gifts to use, love to share, and he waits for us to believe it, pray for insight and courage, then join in the joyful harvest that is the plan and purpose of history.

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