

“Moving Mountains”

Luke 17:5-6, Matthew 17:20, 1 John 4:16-19, 2 Timothy 1:1-14 & Lamentations 3:19-26

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Our scripture explains how you can move mountains and uproot Redwood trees and toss them around. **Luke 17:5-6 NLT “The apostles said to Jesus, “Show us how to increase our faith.” The Lord answered, “If you had faith even as small as a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘May you be uprooted and be planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you!”**

Faith is God’s power, love, joy, and grace flowing in us and through us. God generously gives faith to everyone. We have a choice to suppress faith or to open ourselves to be transformed by faith and be a conduit of faith. Paul Tillich puts it this way, “Faith means being grasped by [God], a power, that is greater than we are, a power that shakes us and turns us and transforms us and heals us. Surrender to [God], this power, is faith.” We have God’s power that created the cosmos flowing in us. We have God’s power of love to defeat death, God’s power of grace to reconcile relationships and God’s power of compassion to heal, flowing in us and through us. Therefore, our faith allows God to do much more than toss around a mulberry tree. When we accept just a snippet, a mustard seed size, of God’s power we are wonderful and do spectacular things. The mulberry tree has extensive roots making it extremely hard to remove. A mustard seed of faith removes pain, fear, and hate.

The apostles thought they needed to increase their faith to heal, love, forgive, purify, and make people whole like Jesus. Jesus indicates that faith involves letting go, so you can let come God’s transforming power. Synthesis explains, “The point that Jesus makes here with such an exaggerated and unlikely promise is a reflection of the power of the free gift of faith. This faith is an openness to God and absolute trust in the Lord that is not dependent on one’s own intelligence, talents, or influence. Faith is not so much what humans do, or do not do, but what the limitless power of God accomplishes.”

My residents at workcamp were a sad, lethargic, hopeless, exhausted couple. Their son committed suicide in his bedroom in their home. It broke their hearts. Right after their son entered Life Triumphant, the father was diagnosed with a heart condition. The doctor advised no more than 5 minutes of physical activity after 30 minutes of rest. He lost his job. He could no longer serve as a volunteer firefighter. He stopped caring for his well-maintained house. He stopped going to worship. He disengaged from his family spending his time in bed or on the couch. She took up smoking in the house.

On Monday, five youth and I got a lethargic welcome. We were shown a dirty house, with dark walls. Our project was to paint the interior white. We washed, scrubbed, and cleaned and washed the walls a second time. We took down the curtains. Light flooded the rooms for the first time since the suicide. We replaced numerous burnt out light bulbs. We talked to our residents whenever we were working by the couch. On Tuesday, we got the first coat of paint on all the ceilings and the walls in one room. Our residents followed us around talking to each of us. On Wednesday, we were surprised to find the overgrown lawn mowed. Our resident got his son-in-law to help him get the riding lawn mower working. He mowed the lawn and his son-in-law did the trim and the landscaping. The beautiful charm of a house that was carefully maintained for decades emerged on the outside. We continued our painting on the inside. Our resident said he was thinking about going to talk to his pastor. On Thursday, we found the living room, which we completed the day before, arranged with furniture and beautiful paintings. The son that entered Life Triumphant was a painter. They beamed as they told the stories behind his paintings that had been hidden in the attic since his suicide. He shared his excitement that the church is going to create a service ministry for him that would not compromise his health. They shined in delight as they introduced their daughter and baby grandson. Later, out of hearing range from her parents, the

daughter thanked us for our service that inspired her parents. She said, “it was great to have her parents back again.” That day he gave us specific instructions on how to paint the stairs so the colors would pop. On Friday, he indicated that he went back to the fire station and reconnected with his friends. We finished painting the house. That evening the entire family came to our closing worship celebration all beaming with joy. He thanked me for giving him hope to see the beauty again in his son’s paintings, hope to imagine his son’s resurrection, hope to serve and love his family. He thanked the youth for giving him hope that there are joyful youth who work hard and enjoy serving the community. He thanked the youth for giving him hope that his grandson will grow up in a caring, joyful, and loving world.

Do you think the transformation of this family is grander than the tossing around of a mulberry tree? We did little in those five days, a little cleaning, a little painting, listening, and a few words of encouragement. We had faith. We let God work through us. God took the mountains of gloom, sadness, and grief off of these people. We merely let a mustard seed of God’s power flow through us.

Matthew 17:20 NLT Jesus told them. “I tell you the truth, if you had faith even as small as a mustard seed, you could say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it would move. Nothing would be impossible.” We are not to underestimate our faith, rather to claim faith, and use faith, for even the smallest grain of faith brings God’s power to transform the needs of the world. Faith is not our own but the presence of God’s reign within us. The power to transform comes by letting God work through us. Through a person’s faith, God plants seeds full of vibrant life and joyful energy in us and others. These seeds may remain in seed form until the moment they are needed to renew lives.

All of us, and almost everyone person, has faith. If one loves, they have faith. God is love, and all who live in love, live in God, and God lives in them. We love each other, because God loved us first. Faith is receiving God’s love so you can be more loving. How does one check to see if they are faithful and loving? By the amount of your fear. When you are no longer afraid, when you no longer worry, you are letting God’s love work in you and through you. **1 John 4:16-19 NLT “We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in God’s love. God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So we will not be afraid on the day of judgment, but we can face God with confidence because we live like Jesus here in this world. Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced God’s perfect love. We love each other because God loved us first.”**

In Niger, I was inspired by the love of people from other religions who were generously giving and partnering with us to educate children. Together, our love is moving a mountain that is lifting an entire country out of poverty into a joyous loving community. Faith is allowing God to love through us, to forgive, reconcile, and mend relationships with everyone. Faith is allowing God to move the mountain of division and bring all people around the world together in one joyous loving community. It has not yet happened; however, God is creating community through us. One joyful loving community will be established, therefore we come together today to celebrate world communion Sunday and give to the peacemaking offering. During this holy, mysterious meal open your imagination to perceive all people coming together, laughing, playing, embracing, and celebrating.

2 Timothy 1:1-14 NLT “This letter is from Paul, chosen by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus. I have been sent out to tell others about the life God has promised through faith in Christ Jesus. I am writing to Timothy, my dear son. May God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord give you grace, mercy, and peace. Timothy, I thank God for you—the God I serve with a clear conscience, just as my ancestors did. Night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. I long to see you again, for I remember your tears as we parted. And I will be filled with

joy when we are together again. I remember your genuine faith, for you share the faith that first filled your grandmother Lois and your mother, Eunice. And I know that same faith continues strong in you. This is why I remind you to fan into flames the spiritual gift God gave you when I laid my hands on you. For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline. So never be ashamed to tell others about our Lord. And don't be ashamed of me, either, even though I'm in prison for God. With the strength God gives you, be ready to suffer with me for the sake of the Good News. For God saved us and called us to live a holy life. God did this, not because we deserved it, but because that was God's plan from before the beginning of time—to show us God's grace through Christ Jesus. And now God has made all of this plain to us by the appearing of Christ Jesus, our Savior. God broke the power of death and illuminated the way to life and immortality through the Good News. And God chose me to be a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of this Good News. That is why I am suffering here in prison. But I am not ashamed of it, for I know the one in whom I trust, and I am sure that God is able to guard what I have entrusted to God until the day of Jesus' return. Hold on to the pattern of wholesome teaching you learned from me—a pattern shaped by the faith and love that you have in Christ Jesus. Through the power of the Holy Spirit who lives within us, carefully guard the precious truth that has been entrusted to you.”

The Apostle Paul urges us to fan into flames our faith and spiritual gifts, to think about love. Psychologist Daniel Goleman explains that science has found that the human mind focuses more of our attention on negative stories than positive stories. The media has found that fear sells more products and services; therefore, news and media feature the negative over the abundant positives. Even when we think about ourselves, our family, church, school, and community our human nature prompts us to identify and talk about the negative rather than the overwhelming positives. Goleman says, “We are missing what's right. On any day of any year, the denominator of kindness will be vastly greater than the numerator of cruelty. Kindness is everywhere. There is so much more [love] going on in any given minute than the things that make the headlines. But you see, the brain perceives it disproportionately because it's headline news.” Our brain handles and remembers the negative better than it does positive. August 1-5, 2016 the news was full of negative stories without a single mention of 6 people who had faith at workcamp allowing God to move a mountain through them so a family could rejoice again.

Lamentations 3:19-26 NLT “The thought of my suffering and homelessness is bitter beyond words. I will never forget this awful time, as I grieve over my loss. Yet I still dare to hope when I remember this: The faithful love of the Lord never ends! God's mercies never cease. Great is God's faithfulness; God's mercies begin afresh each morning. I say to myself, “The Lord is my inheritance; therefore, I will hope in God!” 2 Timothy 1:10 MSG “Since the appearance of our Savior, nothing could be plainer: death defeated, life vindicated in a steady blaze of light, all through the work of Jesus.”

If you enjoy mountains, your faith is moving mountains into your room in heaven. If you enjoy mulberry trees, your faith is moving a forest of them into your room in heaven. Your faith is doing much grandeur things than that! Your faith is overcoming every form of death and darkness with life and light. Your faith will enable you to shed your restrictive, limiting shell of a physical body so you can soar with abundant eternal life. Your faith is making earth more and more like heaven. Every moment our faith is increasing the love throughout the world. We are on a journey of faith that every moments increases the joy, love and unity of the world. We gather to celebrate our ever growing progress. We gather to dream of the day, that is coming, when the entire world rejoices together in one harmonious loving community. Amen