

So you remember how a few weeks ago, everyone was talking about that \$1.8 billion lottery? Well, I have news for you all: I am not the world's newest billionaire. I know, shocking right? I mean, there would have been signs if I had won, but the truth is, I didn't play so I never really had a chance. But whether you buy a lottery ticket or not, it doesn't stop us from wondering, as I did, "What would I do with all that money?" Maybe buy a house or pay off a debt or take that once-in-a-lifetime trip – it's all on the table when you're talking about a billion dollars. You see, it's easy for us to imagine what we would do with something like money because it's an easily quantifiable thing.

But let me ask you another question: "What would you do if you had more faith?" Not as easy, is it? For starters, faith isn't something that's quantifiable. What I mean is, you can't measure faith like you can with something like money. And because of this, our imagination struggles to know what to do with a question like, "What would you do if you had more faith?" Or, conversely, what would more faith allow us to do that we can't do right now?

And I think that's the point Jesus is making. I think he's being a bit tongue-in-cheek with the disciples here. You see, he's just told them a hard truth about the world – that there is brokenness, there is suffering, and there is sin. And even being a follower of Jesus cannot shield us from these realities. What marks the disciples as different is the way they respond to these realities – with repentance, forgiveness, and as much mercy as it takes. It's in the face of these teachings that the disciples lament their lack of faith, pleading with Jesus to literally "give them more" faith.

But as we've said, this is an odd request, because faith isn't something that we can measure and even if we could, can we actually identify something we'd do that we aren't able to do now? So in response to this perplexing request, Jesus says, "Well if you had faith the size of a mustard seed" – because there is no unit of measurement for faith so we might as well make one up – "then you could uproot a mulberry tree and plant it in the ocean" – which is as equally absurd as using mustard seeds for units of measurement, because why would anyone want to plant a tree in the ocean anyway? How would a forest of mulberry trees planted in the ocean serve God's purposes for the world?

The thing is, Jesus doesn't want us to plant trees in the ocean as a testament to the greatness of our faith. He doesn't want whatever feats of power we can conjure up. That's not what faithfulness looks like. Instead, as he points out in the parable that follows, Jesus calls us to do what we've been called to do – to live as his followers in a world that is marked by brokenness and suffering and sin, and to respond to that reality as he would – with repentance, mercy, and love. Now, I'm not saying that's an easy thing to do. But it certainly feels much more manageable and purposeful than planting trees in the ocean. Still, how do we live as faithful people in a world like this?

Well, allow me to paint you a scene: Imagine a nation of people that is marred by conflict and division. The disparity between rich and poor is ever-

widening, the rule of law seems to be completely ignored or at least twisted and perverted, violence is widespread, the prospects of war feels intimately on the horizon, and there is no trust in leadership because the whole thing appears broken and even corrupt. That's the reality of Israel in the time of the prophet Habakkuk. And essentially, the entire book of Habakkuk is exploration of what faith looks like – and what it matters – in a world that is broken and suffering and marred by sin.

The book is mostly comprised of this beautiful back and forth between Habakkuk and God. Habakkuk lifts up the world's problems and laments that there appears to be no solution coming. God responds with "Wait." Habakkuk fears that a destructive end is coming. God responds with, "There is a vision, and what you see is not it." Back and forth they go, Habakkuk questioning the value of faith and God responding in ways that appear to Habakkuk as small and even insignificant in the face of such challenges. Until something, which can only be described as a mustard seed sized faith takes hold. And Habakkuk, in the face of a broke and hurting world declares, "Though the fig tree does not blossom and no fruit is on the vines; though the produce of the olive fails and the fields yield no food; though the flock is cut off from the fold and there is no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will exult in the God of my salvation. God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer and makes me tread upon the heights."

Nothing about Habakkuk's circumstances has changed. His faith hasn't resulted in a miraculous turn of fortune, where all the problems that plague the people suddenly vanish and everything is heaven on earth. The fig tree still isn't producing fruit, the olive vineyards still fail, and the flock is still cut off. The world is still broken, suffering is still widespread, and sin is very much a reality – even when we have faith. You see, the point isn't that we need more faith. The point isn't even that it's up to us to heal the brokenness of the world through faith. Rather, faith is a trust and even nonsensical hope in the promise of God to make all things new. Faith is the reliance on God's vision for the world and seeking to live into that vision today, even as the fig tree is without fruit, the olive vines don't produce, and the flock is scattered about and lost.

My friends in Christ, you are I are not being asked to make miracles happen. In the midst of their lament, Jesus is encouraging his disciples that they have the faith they need to be an active part of God's unfolding future – a future that is still unfolding even today. Faith doesn't mean that all is perfect or that if we just have enough of it, God's kingdom will finally come. But it does mean that we'll always have hope – hope that the world as we see it currently is not the world as it will be; hope that what is broken will be healed; hope that all suffering will come to an end; hope that sin and death will be finally and fully defeated. Until then, faith lead us to do what Christ has entrusted us to do: repent and forgive, show mercy and grace, and love God and love one another. No planting trees in the ocean required. Just enough faith to do what we're called to do. God's got the rest of it. Thanks be to God! Amen.