

October 5, 2025  
Proper 22C  
Season of Creation 5  
Trinity, St. Louis  
The Rev. Dr. Paul Jacobson, *Rector*

*Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4*

*Psalm 37:1-10*

*2 Timothy 1:1-14*

*Luke 17:5-10*

In the Name of the Triune God,  
in whose image we are created. Amen.

This morning, we hear the prophet Habakkuk complain to God:

O LORD, how long shall I cry for help,  
and you will not listen?

Or cry to you "Violence!"  
and you will not save?

Why do you make me see wrong-doing  
and look at trouble?

So the law becomes slack  
and justice never prevails.

Habakkuk lived six centuries before Jesus, but his words could be right out of an opinion piece in the New York Times. The question of why a loving God permits sin and suffering is as old as humanity. After a long dialog between Habakkuk and God about this mystery, God gives the prophet a vision of the future, saying

Write the vision;  
make it plain on tablets,  
so that a runner may read it.

For there is still a vision for the appointed time;  
it speaks of the end, and does not lie.

If it seems to tarry, wait for it;  
it will surely come, it will not delay.

Look at the proud!  
Their spirit is not right in them,  
but the righteous live by their faith.

I have to tell you that I find this brand of “buck up, it’ll be ok” theology a little unsatisfactory. After all, how are we to live while we wait for the appointed time, the sweet bye-and-bye? Some of us get caught up in TikTok predictions of The Rapture. Some of us get paralyzed, and say, “what can I do?” Others say, “I am personally responsible for the coming of God’s reign.” What might Habakkuk mean that, “the righteous live by their faith”?

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In Luke’s gospel, the apostles say, “Increase our faith.” I often read this passage as them asking, “Increase our certitude.” Maybe even, “Increase our comfort level.”

When you and I look at the world around us we, along with the prophet Habakkuk, might want to shout at God, “Why do you make us see wrong-doing and look at trouble?” There is no shortage of trouble to see: Shutdowns of an already dysfunctional government. A planet that is gasping for breath. War and famine around the world. Soldiers in the streets. Racism and white supremacy. “Christian” Nationalism. Antisemitism. Political violence. Queer phobia. Broken economic systems that result in untold wealth for a few and unhoused and starving children of God on our doorstep. And this is just the tip of the iceberg. Given the world in which we live, I don’t think anyone could be blamed for asking God to increase our comfort level.

Then I am reminded that I am bringing my thoughts of comfort level to the text. So, let’s look at what the text actually says.

The “faith like a mustard seed” parable is one that Luke shares with Matthew and is directed to the inner circle of Jesus’ followers, the apostles. In response to the apostles’ question, Jesus implies that the faith they already have — even if it is tiny — is enough to do everything that they should want to achieve.

Do you remember in grade school, when you took a lima bean or some such, put it on a wet paper towel, then placed it in a plastic sandwich bag? When you watched it grow, you learned that the dried bean contained everything that it needed to become a mature bean plant.

The reference to a great mulberry tree being uprooted and moved is not a hint for the apostles to get into the orchard business or for that matter to do anything spectacular – it is simply hyperbole to make the point that even a little faith can do a lot.<sup>1</sup>

This morning, I want to invite you to do something different. When you’ve received Holy Communion, I invite you, if you’d like, to come up to Altar so you can

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew McGowan, *Mustard Seeds, Mulberry Trees, and Unrelenting Masters*, September 30, 2025.

see, up close, the splendid icon of this parable. Notice how tiny the mustard seed is, and what a riot of growth it produces – a lush home for so many of God’s creatures. Don’t worry about it taking time. It’ll be worth the trip.

Maybe faith doesn’t have to be heroic – going to another country to serve as a doctor or missionary. Maybe faith doesn’t even have to be conventionally religious. Faith is simply being attentive to the needs around us and committing ourselves to doing what we can with what we’ve got, trusting that God will make use of it.

Think back to the days after the latest tornado how, in so many places, folks reached out to neighbors in need without waiting for “official” responses. Debris was moved, food and water were distributed, shelters appeared out of nowhere. People took what God had given them, giving it to those who needed it. Mother Teresa said, “Our calling is not to do great things, but to do small things with great love.”

Faith, as Jesus describes it, isn’t something from the neck up. Faith is a muscle, faith is love in action, showing up and being faithful about doing what needs doing:

- caring for those in need
- protecting the vulnerable
- befriending the friendless
- caring for the planet we all share
- contributing to the common good.

Today, as we observe the last Sunday of the Season of Creation, we honor Francis of Assisi, the thirteenth century saint whose image we see in countless statues and birdbaths. We’ve been singing a version of his Canticle of the Sun as the hymn of praise these last several weeks. And we just sang a version of his famous prayer before the gospel.

Francis was born into wealth and privilege. After a wild youth, including lots of carousing and going to war, the course of Francis’ life was profoundly changed by at least two formative experiences. On a pilgrimage to Rome, Francis saw a beggar outside of St. Peter’s Basilica. The Holy Spirit moved him to trade places with the beggar. Francis exchanged clothes with a beggar and then spent the day begging for alms. That experience of being poor shook Francis to the core.

Later, he held onto his mustard seed of faith to confront his own fears of leprosy by hugging a leper. Like trading places with the beggar in Rome, hugging a leper left a deep mark on Francis. Shaped by his experiences with the beggar and the leper, he had a strong identification with the poor. Francis cut himself off from the opulent lifestyle of his father and sought out a radically simple life.

By the time of his death, the love of God had compelled Francis to accomplish much toward rebuilding the church. He could look on thousands of lives transformed

by his call for repentance and simplicity of life. Yet, Francis of Assisi was simply a man transformed by the love of God and the joy that flowed from a deep understanding of all that God has done for us.

In writing about St. Francis, G.K. Chesterton (1874-1936), the English Roman Catholic writer who wrote the *Father Brown Mysteries*, had this to say: "Let your religion be less of a theory and more of a love affair."<sup>2</sup>

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Now, from thirteenth century Italy to twenty-first century St. Louis. This past week, several of us attended the re-naming of Eden Seminary's community garden, now known as Pat's Place, in memory of the late Pat Penelton. Among countless other community activities, Pat was the anchor of several food ministries at Centennial Christian Church in Fountain Park, where she perished in the May 16 tornado. Story after story was told about Ms. Pat and her tireless and determined faith in following Christ's call to care for the least and the lost. And in following Jesus, Ms. Pat also scattered seed after seed for the future in those she served and those she mentored.

Today, we here at Trinity mark a huge transition with the retirement of The Rev. Deacon Barbi Click as Manager of the Trinity Food Ministry. Like St. Francis and Ms. Pat, Barbi has grabbed that mustard seed of faith and transformed the way we live into our ministry in the Central West End. As a result, she has been transformed by God's love in and through the people she serves. Her motto is "Love Always, Always Love."

So, my friends in Christ, when the dark days come, when we want to shout at God in frustration and despair, remember that God calls us into living – in these days – by our faith, by our love in action, by allowing our religion to be less of a theory and more of a love affair. Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> G.K. Chesterton, *St. Francis of Assisi*, 1923.