

Have you ever seen someone actually do that? Tell a mulberry tree, “*Be uprooted and planted in the sea,*” and then watched the tree obey that command? If I could do that, I’d have a perfect lawn. I’d be uprooting weeds with just a word of command. In First Corinthians 13, St. Paul speaks of having faith *so as to remove mountains*. But we haven’t seen that either, have we? So, what is Jesus getting at: “*If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea’...’*”?

And maybe that’s it. The disciples are crying, “*Increase our faith!*” But it’s the speck of faith, like a tiny mustard seed, that goes around uprooting trees. Perhaps they should be asking Jesus to decrease their faith.

How much faith does the tiniest baby have? The newborn infant who has just been baptized in Christ Jesus. That baptized infant has faith so as to remove mountains because that infant has, not just part of Jesus, but all of Jesus. And that infant is grafted, like a branch into the vine – into Jesus who has removed the mountain of sin, and sin’s deadly curse, from this baptized child of His.

And now we can make sense of that mulberry tree. The verbs *be uprooted* and *be planted* are not active verbs in the Greek. They are passive verbs. What does that mean? The action is not ours. It’s God’s. We have the faith, but He does the uprooting and the planting. Faith doesn’t perform miracles. It receives what God performs for you.

You are baptized into the same Jesus who removed your mountain of sin and made it His own. In your baptism, Jesus gave you that speck of mustard seed faith to receive the salvation He won for you on that tree upon which He was uprooted and was planted in the very depths of hell. And all for you.

So then, what do you and I do with our brother’s mountain? The mountain of his sin, or her sin. “*If your brother sins,*” says Jesus, “*rebuke him...and if he sins against you (even) seven times in the day, you must forgive him.*”

This is what caused His disciples to cry out, “*Increase our faith!*” We cannot remove that mountain. We have not been doing that with those who sin against us. How can we? We need more faith!

No they don’t. Nor do we. If your faith is in Jesus, and not in yourself and what you can do, then you can remove your brother’s, or sister’s, mountain of sin because it’s Jesus doing it. And you are connected to Him in your baptism. You are literally grafted into Him so that His life, His love, His mercy, His forgiveness is given to your brother through you.

But are we doing that? I don’t know about you, but I could do it a whole lot better. In fact, I’m terrible at it. Do I need more faith? Do you? What we need is genuine faith, not that fake stuff. The stuff that even the devil has. He knows the Apostles’ Creed forwards and backwards, but he doesn’t have faith in the God that it confesses.

When does faith stop being genuine faith and become just knowledge in the head about everything that Jesus did? I don't know, but it happens, maybe a lot. Is that reason for us to worry? No, but it is reason for us to fix our eyes on Jesus.

Nowhere does Scripture tell us to fix our eyes on our faith. If we do that, if we fix our eyes on our faith, we will fall into one of two ditches. We will either become proud or we will despair. We will either convince ourselves that we will never lose our faith, no matter what, even if we stay completely away from the hearing of God's Word in the Divine Service and the Communion Table. Or we will fall into the other ditch and despair that we don't have faith, that we've lost our faith and cannot get it back, no matter what, even if we do hear God's Word in the Divine Service and come up to the Communion Table.

But I can assure you of this – the one who does that faithfully will not stay very long in the ditch of despair. Because through the Divine Service, through the preaching of Christ Crucified, and His life-giving Sacraments, Jesus will take the eyes of that one off his tiny speck of faith and fix them where they belong – on His promises in the Holy Gospel.

Those promises He gives to you. He was uprooted, He was planted in that awful place that we deserve for our sins. He put the millstone that we deserve around His own neck. He wore it as a crown of thorns on His head. And He who says, "You must forgive your brother who sins against you" has forgiven you, and not just seven times, but daily and richly He forgives you of all your sins. Even if you have lost your faith, Jesus has declared you forgiven of all sin. And through His word of promise to you, He gives you the faith to believe this.

Don't be proud of your faith, and do not despair over your lack of faith. Get your eyes off yourself and put them on Jesus. Fix them on your baptism into Christ. And by whatever means necessary be faithful in hearing the Word of God in the Divine Service and coming to the Communion Table. Do this for yourselves and for the little ones in your care. They, with you, will be grateful to your Lord Jesus for all eternity. Amen.