

Collect, Readings and Reflection for 05 October 2025, the 16th Sunday after Trinity (Harvest)

Collect (*the Church's prayer for today*):

O Lord, we beseech you mercifully to
hear the prayers
of your people who call upon you;
and grant that they may both perceive
and know
what things they ought to do,
and also may have grace and power
faithfully to fulfil them;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

Or

Lord of creation,
whose glory is around and within us:
open our eyes to your wonders,
that we may serve you with reverence
and know your peace at our lives' end,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Readings: Psalm 37:1-9; Luke 17:5-10

Today's reflection is by the Vicar, the Revd Canon Jonathan Cain.

Trust in the Lord and do good

Harvest in the Cain house this year has comprised a few raspberries and gooseberries, enough apples, pears and plums for a few crumbles, about two weeks supply of green vegetables – broccoli and courgettes – a steady supply of tomatoes and, get this, a bowl of grapes! Yes, ripe red grapes! OK, so we're hardly Tom and Barbara (I wonder who will get that reference), and we're not about to open a winery, but it is exciting to eat things that you have grown yourself. I will admit that when I look at our twiggy fruit trees in early spring, and as we plant a few vegetables in the raised beds each year, I am not confident that anything will actually grow. And yet, with sun, rain and good soil, it does. Oh, me of little faith.

Comforting to know that, in this respect, I'm in good company. Our gospel passage this morning started with the apostles, the people who left everything to follow Jesus saying to him, "Increase our faith!" I wonder what prompted this outburst. No doubt Jesus' followers had listened to and been challenged by Jesus' teaching about the kingdom of God; a kingdom of justice and righteousness and peace – a kingdom where the poor are blessed, the hungry satisfied, and the sorrowful laugh. Their first century context – military occupation, corruption among elites, stark inequality, the threat of random arrest, torture and death – bore little resemblance to the kingdom that Jesus spoke of. "Increase our faith!" is surely an understandable cry, which brings comfort to all who have wished for the same. A little more faith; a little more trust that all will be well; a little more confidence that God cares for us. We all need a little faith, or perhaps a little more faith. And this begs a question. How much faith do you need?

The apostles feel as though they need more faith to face the challenges that Jesus is placing before them and hold on to the vision and hope of the kingdom of God. So, they ask Jesus to increase their faith. They believe that to do everything that Jesus asks of them, they will need more faith. But that turns out not to be true.

When the apostles ask Jesus to increase their faith, he says something quite strange. He tells them that if they have faith the size of a mustard seed, they have more than enough. The mustard seed may not be the smallest seed that exists, but it is tiny and was possible the smallest seed that Jesus' first followers knew about. And Jesus tells them that if they have faith the size of this tiny seed, they have more than enough. It seems to me that what Jesus is saying here, to them and to us, is that if we have any faith at all, it is enough. Put another way, if we have enough faith to ask for more, then maybe we already have enough.

The apostles ask for more faith, which means they have some faith. If they have some faith – if we have some faith – then we have enough faith. Faith the size of a mustard seed is plenty, Jesus says. Why? Because it's not a question of how much faith we have – it's a question of who we put our faith in.

I'll say that again. It's not a question of how much faith we have – it's a question of who we put our faith in.

And this does not mean that we will never have doubts.

In 2005, faced with the grim global realities of terrorism, war and environmental devastation, and more domestic concerns: getting older; her mother's Alzheimer's; her son's adolescence; and the passing of friends and time, the American writer Anne Lamott wrote a book called *Plan B: Further Thoughts on Faith*. In the book she comments:

“The opposite of faith is not doubt, but certainty. Certainty is missing the point entirely. Faith includes noticing the mess, the emptiness and discomfort, and letting it be there until some light returns.”

This is the faith that Jesus speaks of. Faith that can wait in the dark and trust that light will come. To hold onto our mustard seed sized faith, and trust that it is enough. Not because of the amount of our faith, but because of who we are placing our faith in.

The result of such small but persistent faith, Jesus says, is the ability to uproot a mulberry tree and plant it in the sea. Elsewhere in the gospel accounts Jesus speaks of moving mountains. I don't think Jesus was being literal. But many of life's struggles, struggles with sickness, bereavement, unemployment can have the appearance of and can feel like a deep-rooted tree or even a mountain. Immovable, insurmountable. And yet, with small but persistent faith in God, Jesus says we will overcome. The 16th century mystic, Mother Julian, who faced her own struggles in life – her beloved father, husband and children all died in the plague – is famed for the expression, “All will be well. And all will be well. And all manner of things will be well.”

Jesus follows his statement about the mustard seed with a strange example involving a servant or slave doing what is commanded. What's the point of that example? Perhaps it is to remind us of the limits of our self-sufficiency, the limits of our knowledge, the limits of our control of events. Not being in full control can be a terrifying thought, but it can also be liberating. If we have limited control, then we don't have to have all the answers. We don't have to have everything worked out. We don't need to see the whole picture. We don't need certainty. Just like the fruit that miraculously grows in my garden, there is far more going on that I or any of us knows or understands. So, Jesus simply asks us to trust and follow him. To do what is in front of us.

If you have enough faith to ask for more, then you have enough faith already. Because it's not a matter of how much faith you have – it's a matter of who you put your faith in.

Two years ago, the community here at St James' was asked to host a community food pantry. We did not appear to have all the resources needed and we had plenty of doubts, but we did have a little faith. It was wonderful to witness the money and volunteers coming together to make the pantry a reality. Today, like other churches and schools in Horsforth, we make our harvest collection trusting that God will take our little faith and continue to use it to bless us and to bless our local community.

Increase our faith? Maybe. Or perhaps, as the psalmist has it, Trust in the Lord and do good.

Amen.

