

Today we have two sayings from Jesus that seem to be unrelated. I thought that Luke may have just decided to put these two sayings here because he had them left over and did not know where to stick them and this seemed as good a place as any in the Gospel. But the more I have pondered them the more I think I see the relationship between the two. But let's look at each of them separately first.

The very first thing we hear is the disciples ask Jesus "increase our faith." Are they serious? They want to be more faithful followers of Jesus so they ask Jesus to do something to them to make them more faithful. Let's try something analogous. (Sit next to a parishioner) Mary increase my strength so that I can pick up heavy objects. I'll sit here and you make me stronger. I'm waiting. [Pause.] Maybe Mary was not a good choice. Let's try someone else.

Jim, make me smart. I won't put you on the spot here and now as that did not seem to work with Mary, but I will be waiting at home and you let me know when you have increased by intelligence.

Does anyone really think that either of these scenarios would work? Beyond being wishful thinking I might also consider it deluded. Mary can no more make me stronger or Jim make me smarter, than Jesus can increase the disciples' faith. No wonder he responds to them with a rather impossible answer.

He tells them that if they had faith a big as a mustard seed then they could do something that seems impossible; such as moving a tree to the ocean just by commanding it. [By the way, the mustard seed Jesus is talking about is not the one you buy in the grocery store. The mustard plant he is referring to has seeds no larger than a speck of dust.] In typical Jesus style he is exaggerating to the extreme.

We, like the disciples, are responsible for our fitness, knowledge, and depth of faith. We have to do the work that will result in these changes. To increase our faith we have to practice those disciplines that will result in a deeper faith. Those are prayer, Bible study, spiritual reading, spiritual discussions, meditation, retreats and the like. We can no more expect to have deeper faith through someone else's efforts than we can expect to lose weight because someone else diets and exercises on our behalf.

The second part of the reading seems much harder to understand. First of all, Jesus is talking about slaves and masters. Twenty-first century folks, especially white people in the US south, should find this scenario uncomfortable at best. But if we can get past the scenario to look at what Jesus is trying to illustrate we might get his point.

Let me use an analogy that might make the illustration easier to understand. Imagine yourself at home on a typical day. You do your chores such as taking out the trash, dusting, mowing the lawn, paying the bills and so

forth. When you are finished do you expect a standing ovation from your spouse or next door neighbor? While someone might give us a word of thanks it is certainly not going to be a high five and someone saying, “You are fantastic, I can’t believe that you did such a great job of mopping the floor and taking out the garbage.” We don’t get praise for doing our job because it is our job. It is not remarkable. We have our responsibilities and we do not expect extreme praise for taking care of them.

So it is with us and God. When we do what we are supposed to do, for example pray, go to church, study the Bible, give to the poor, God is glad that we did this but God is not going to send an angelic messenger with a vision of thanks just because we did what Jesus asks. I expect God will be pleased that we are following the commandments, but we are not going to get a text message because we made an extra donation or a present via drone because we forgave someone for hurting us.

That is where the two sayings seem to come together. If we want to increase our faith we have to do those things that increase faith. It is also our responsibility to do them. There will not be bells and whistles just because we did what we are supposed to do.

Does that mean there is not payoff? Of course not. Doing the things that deepen our faith do deepen it. That is the payoff. The aspects of the Godly life that Jesus points us to are like the mustard seed that grows through watering, fertilizer and care.

The reward we receive is a closer relationship with God, peace in your heart, and the joy of God in our life. But be careful because we do not get this deeper relationship because we **earned** it, or did the right thing and are rewarded. We have God’s love and relationship because God wants it. We are opening ourselves to what is already available through God’s love. It is odd, but that is the way love always works. The more love we give the more love we experience. Love grows by giving love away. What a great wonder that is. Grow love by loving and grow faith by being more faithful. It is simple if not easy. The rewards will be self-evident.