

Is our work too hard? (Luke 17:5-10)

Jesus doesn't seem to think so.

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When I was in college, I went to charismatic prayer meetings. We would sit around in a circle and sing songs and pray together.

There was a sense of community but also a sense of the Spirit's active presence. We had the expectation that God could, and would, do anything among us. We expected miracles, even healing. I remember many of these evening prayer meetings with fondness.

Except for the weeks when I had headaches. I had been having headaches off and on for a couple of years. They were bothersome, but they weren't debilitating—except on Sunday nights, when people asked if anyone needed prayers for healing, and I confessed that I had a headache.

My headaches were never healed. In fact, sometimes the feeling of everyone's hands on my head made me feel worse, so that I would tell everyone I was feeling better just to get them to stop. And then I would feel a different kind of bad: everyone was thinking that their prayers had been successful, but I was thinking that I wasn't healed because I didn't have enough faith.

The apostles' request, "Increase our faith!" seems to come out of nowhere. I know how they feel. Not because I feel guilty that my headaches aren't healed, but because it still seems like a reasonable request. These days I'm thinking more about our earnest prayers and desires for action in the face of mass shootings, Christian

nationalism, racism, and mental health crises. Any apostle might feel justified in thinking more faith is the answer, or at least that it couldn't hurt. The mission seems too big and too hard for us.

And yet, Jesus doesn't seem to think so. A mustard seed can do things we cannot even imagine, like uproot a mulberry tree. You don't need more. There's no measuring.

What is the answer—except to admit the truth that indeed, the mission is too big and too hard for us. And we keep going anyway: because mustard seeds and the Spirit exist, and they are enough.