

# Faith like a Mustard Seed



*Luke 17:5-10*  
*Year C Proper 22*

copyright © 2014  
 Freeman Ng  
 www.AuthorFreeman.com

## Parts by scene

■ = large part   ▲ = medium sized part   ● = small part

		1	2
▲	<b>Thomas</b> - the skeptic, who really wants to believe because of his emotional bond with the others, but can't simply ignore his doubts	▲	▲
▲	<b>James</b> - the most officious disciple, often the most frustrated with Jesus' unconventional decisions (such as his allowing women to join the group)	■	
▲	<b>Peter</b> - the most headstrong disciple, and the least afraid of a fight, but never the smartest person in the room	▲	
▲	<b>Joanna</b> - a wealthy woman with a perceptive and agile intellect who abandons her life as the co-manager of King Herod's household to follow Jesus	▲	
●	<b>Judas</b> - possibly the deepest thinker and best organizer, the one who usually sees the big picture most clearly, and also the disciple with the best sense of humor	▲	
■	<b>Jesus</b>	▲	▲
▲	<b>John</b> - the gentlest and most caring of the disciples		▲
●	<b>Mary Magdalene</b> - a 'fallen woman' who became the first female disciple, the humblest member of the group due to her shame about her past		▲
▲	<b>Phillip</b> - one of the youngest disciples, always well-meaning and honestly curious, sometimes lacking in confidence		▲
▲	<b>Matthew</b> - a former tax collector (i.e. a agent of the Roman occupation of his own people) who in his repentance from that past life is the most religiously fervent of the disciples		▲

## Scene 1

**James , Jesus , Joanna , Judas , Peter , Thomas**

**Thomas**    *[to James, with admiration]* I have to admit it, you were right again!

**James**      *[in good humor]* I hear your words, but I don't see any coin!

**Thomas**    *[laughing]* All right, all right!

*{Thomas hands some money over to James as Peter enters.}*

**Peter** What's this?

**Thomas** Remember when the rabbi said to expect over a hundred at last night's sermon?

**Peter** Yeah, it was pretty outrageous. I don't think that even John believed we would get that many.

**James** Well, one person did believe: me!

**Peter** *[skeptically]* Yeah, right!

**James** You don't think I have as much or more faith than John? Don't forget, I was the one who first decided to follow the rabbi. He just tagged along.

**Peter** *[dismissively]* All right, whatever you say.

**James** *[smugly to Thomas]* Tell him.

**Thomas** We made a bet about the crowd and James won. He bet it would be more than a hundred.

**Peter** *[genuinely impressed]* Dude! Good for you! But what's the rabbi going to say when he finds out you took advantage of the guy with the least faith out of all of us to win a bet? *[to Thomas]* Nothing personal.

**James** *[still smug]* Let's find out. *[calling]* Rabbi! Judas! Could you come over here?

*{Jesus and Judas enter, along with Joanna.}*

**Joanna** *[aware that James doesn't like her]* Is it okay if I come, too?

**James** *[surprisingly civil to her]* Of course! *[to Judas]* Judas, I'd like to present you with this donation to our treasury.

*{James hands Judas the money he won from Thomas.}*

**Judas** Wow, this is great!

**Peter** *[upset that James seems to be hiding the fact that he won it from Thomas]* Wait a minute -

**James** *[cheerfully interrupting Peter, as planned all along]* It actually comes from Thomas. I'm just the middle man.

**Jesus** Thomas, thank you! You know, you seem to do and give quite a lot for someone who isn't sure he believes in any of this yet.

**Thomas** The one thing I'm sure about is that I want to be with you all. I just wish I could fit in better.

**Joanna** Thomas, you fit in fine. Just look at us! We came from different places, and in different ways, and we differ not only in how strongly we believe, but, I would venture say, in *what* we believe. You're as much a part of us as anybody.

**Thomas** Thanks, but I still wish I could be more certain about some things. *[a sudden thought]* Rabbi! Can you give me more faith?

**Jesus** Give you what?

**Thomas** More faith! Can you perform a miracle and increase my faith?

**Jesus** *[cautiously]* Do you know what you're asking?

**James** *[enthusiastically]* Thomas, that's a great idea! *[to Jesus]* It would be just like a healing. Just as you've restored sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf. Thomas's faith is damaged or stunted just like eyes or ears or an arm or a leg might be. He's "faith impaired"! You could totally heal that, couldn't you?

**Jesus** *[after a pause]* I could...but why? *[to Thomas]* Why would you want that? *[to Peter]* Would you?

**Peter** *[uncomfortably]* Well...if you ordered me to accept it, of course I would.

**Jesus** But if I didn't? If I left it totally up to you?

**Peter** *[awkwardly]* I'd just as soon not.

**Jesus** See?

**James** But that's crazy! Why wouldn't you want more faith? I'd take it in a minute.

**Thomas** But you already have more faith than anybody.

**James** *[in proud pleasure at the thought]* Well, maybe! *[suddenly sober]* But you know, it's only about mundane things like the crowds and the money and the travel times. Remember when we sent out the Seventy, and they came back reporting that they performed all these miracles and saw all these wonders? Well, that hasn't happened in a long time, and I don't understand why. *[to Jesus]* Is it because we don't have as much faith as those guys did?

**Jesus** How much faith do you think you have?

**James** *[carefully]* Well...not the most of anybody, to be sure, but maybe about average, or a little above average?

**Jesus** *[to Thomas]* And how about you?

**Thomas** I don't think I have *any*.

**Jesus** *[firmly]* Everybody has faith.

**Thomas** Well, then mine is about as small as a mustard seed!

**Jesus** *[solemnly to everybody]* Truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you can *[pauses as he looks for a good example]* tell that mulberry tree to be pulled up by the roots and planted in the sea, and it would come to pass.

**Joanna** Are you joking with us?

**Judas** If what you say is true, why haven't we been able to perform any miracles like that?

**Jesus** Maybe you haven't tried.

**Peter** *[half in humor and half seriously]* Okay, here goes! *[facing the tree]* You! Tree! Be plucked up by your roots and tossed into the sea!

*{Everybody stops to watch the tree, but nothing happens.}*

**James** Ha! Mr. "Tried To Walk On Water" has less faith than Thomas!

**Peter** *[in fun]* That's Mr. "Walked Three Paces On Water" to you!

**Jesus** Who's next? How about you, Thomas?

**Joanna** Is this going to be one those "last shall be first" things where the person who thought he had the least faith turns out to have the most?

**Jesus** We'll know in a moment.

**Thomas** *[to Joanna]* Believe me, it's not! *[to the tree]* Okay, tree. I know I don't have the faith to move you, but maybe it's not about how much I believe, but how much God can do. *[lifting his eyes in prayer]* Dear God, please move this tree. Not for me, but for the rabbi, who promised that we could do it.

*{Everyone waits again, but nothing happens.}*

**Joanna** *[to Thomas]* That was a good try.

**Jesus** Judas, would you like to go next?

**Judas** *[flatly]* No thanks.

**James** *[teasing/challenging him good-naturedly]* What's the matter? You don't think you can do it?

**Judas** *[seriously trying to make a point]* No, I'm sure I could, and this is how I'd do it: I'd gather a group of fellow laborers and a few shovels, and we'd have that tree uprooted in an hour.

**Peter** *[thinking Judas is joking]* That wouldn't be a miracle at all!

**Judas** *[quietly]* I suppose not, depending on how you want to define "miracle", but it would accomplish the task just as surely.

**Peter** *[maintaining the spirit of fun and games]* All right. Be that way. It's down to James or Joanna!

**Joanna** Do you want to go next, or should I?

**James** *[nervously]* Look, I don't think we should be treating this like a game. And we've all got chores to do, or I do anyway, so I suggest we -

**Peter** *[keeping up the good-natured taunting between them]* What's the matter, James? Afraid you're going to lose to a woman?

**James** No, no! It's just that...we shouldn't be joking about something like this.

**Jesus**      *[firmly and solemnly]* I'm not joking. If anyone has faith the size of a mustard seed, he - or she - will be able command that tree to be plucked up the roots and cast into the sea! *[after a pause, in a lighter tone]* Joanna, why don't you go next?

**Joanna**      *[suddenly serious and meek]* Yes, rabbi. *[softly to the tree]* At the request of the rabbi, through the power of our collective faith and friendship, and if you wouldn't mind (if you have thoughts and feelings of your own): rise up from ground!

*{Nothing happens.}*

**Peter**      And Joanna goes down as well!

**Judas**      *[whispers to Joanna]* I liked "collective faith and friendship."

**Joanna**      *[whispers back to Judas]* Thanks, but I liked your answer even better.

**Peter**      Ladies and gentlemen, it's all up to James now! Will our hero come through?

**James**      *[crossly to Peter]* Shut up! *[nervously]* All right, here goes. *[to the tree in a loud voice]* In the name of Jesus the Messiah, be thou moved! *[nothing happens for a while]* I command you! *[another pause, during which nothing happens, and then to everybody almost in relief]* I guess none of us had enough faith.

**Jesus**      Of course, not everyone has tried yet.

## Scene 2

Jesus , John , Mary , Matthew , Phillip , Thomas

*{More of the disciples are called over to try.}*

**John**      *[to Jesus]* Let me get this straight. You want me to ask God to uproot that tree?

**Jesus**      That's what we're doing.

**John**      *[in simple obedience]* Very well.

*{Instead of commanding the tree out loud, John knees and prays silently.}*

**Thomas**      Shouldn't we ask him to pray out loud so we can hear how he tries it?

**Jesus** Some people don't pray in words at all.

**John** *[to Jesus, rising and seeing the tree is still there]* I'm sorry.

**Thomas** Don't worry, nobody's been able to do it so far.

**Jesus** Mary, would you like to try next?

**Mary** I couldn't!

**Thomas** There's nothing to be afraid of. It doesn't hurt to try, right? And maybe you'll be the one to succeed! Maybe Joanna was right about that "last shall be first" thing, only it won't be the person with the least faith but the last person in another way: a woman!

**Mary** I just couldn't! *[to Jesus]* Do I have to? Please don't make me!

**Jesus** Your faith needs no testing. Phillip? Will you go next?

**Phillip** I don't want to, either! Can I take a pass, too?

**Jesus** I think you should try.

**Phillip** But it's not my place. Talk about "the last"! I'm definitely the last. I'm just a kid!

**Matthew** If you're really the "last", and if the last shall indeed be first, that means you might be the one to achieve this!

**Phillip** *[in a small voice, suddenly very earnest, having been cornered into revealing his true reason]* That's exactly what I'm afraid of.

**John** *[tenderly]* You know, that's exactly why I think you should try this. You've never thought of yourself as an equal member of the group, but you are. You do the same work, you take the same risks, and it's just as likely that you'll be called upon to perform great deeds for the Kingdom. Come on! Join us in this.

**Phillip** All right. I will. *[to the tree, speaking super fast to get it out as quickly as possible]* Tree, be-uprooted-and-tossed-into-the-sea! *[shuts his eyes in apprehension, then slowly opens them to discover that nothing has happened]* Whew!

**John** *[to Phillip]* Welcome to the crew!

**Jesus** Matthew's turn.

**Matthew** Yes, rabbi. *[confidently to the tree]* As Gideon commanded the sun to stand still in the sky, as Moses parted the Red Sea, as the rabbi himself turned water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana, so I command you by the same power of God to be plucked up by the roots and planted in the sea! *[another pause while waiting for something to happen]* Alas! We've all failed!

**Jesus** Not yet. There's still one more turn to take.

**Mary** Oh! Do you mean I have to do it, after all?

**Jesus** I was talking about someone else. *[turning to the tree]* I command you to be plucked up by the roots and cast into the sea!

*{Everybody takes in a breath in anticipation, but long moments pass and nothing happens.}*

**Matthew** What?

**John** Was...this a joke, after all?

**Thomas** Oh, I know! *[to Jesus]* You were trying to make me feel better all the time, weren't you? Well, thanks. I do feel better.

**Jesus** I'm glad you do, but no, I was serious. If any of us had had faith the size of a mustard seed, that tree would be in the sea right now.

**Phillip** Then what does all this mean? Why couldn't you do it?

**Jesus** *[going into sermonizing mode]* Hear the word of God! Which of you, if you had servants, would tell them, "Come and sit at the table with me, and I'll serve you"? Wouldn't you instead command them to serve *you*? And once they had served you, would you give them a special commendation for just doing their normal jobs? The word of God.

*{A long pause while everybody tries to figure out what that had to do with faith and the mulberry tree.}*

**John** I'm sorry, rabbi, but I don't understand the lesson.

**Phillip** If we're supposed to command the servants, then shouldn't we be able to command the tree?



- Matthew** In the parable, the master commands the servants to do their normal jobs, to serve dinner, as opposed to something outlandish and unnatural like be served dinner. Therefore, we shouldn't be asking mulberry trees to fly, but instead should be commanding them to perform their natural duties, like bearing fruit.
- Thomas** But it's not a miracle at all to command a tree to bear fruit. It's going to do it anyway.
- Jesus** Actually, in the parable, we're not the master, but the servants. The servants should not be trying to act like masters, commanding this and commanding that. Rather, the servants should do their jobs.
- John** What does this have to do with faith?
- Jesus** If we need no faith to fully accept all that we are called to, we haven't fully understood the call.
- Mary** You keep saying "we", as if the parable applied as much to you as to us. But you're our master. It's your place to command, and ours to obey.
- Jesus** *[solemnly]* No, Mary. I came not to command and enact, but to learn obedience to that which rules us all.
- Thomas** And what is that?
- Jesus** *[fearfully]* Our fates. *[in sudden pain and sorrow]* Truly I say to you, on that Day, the Son of Man will be sorely tempted to command his fate to depart from him! Will he have the faith to resist?
- {There is a long silence while the disciples puzzle over the strange moods of Jesus, and nobody knows what to say to comfort him. Then Mary summons her courage.}*
- Mary** Rabbi? I want to take my turn, after all.
- Jesus** *[distracted from his sudden melancholy by surprise]* Do you? Very well!
- Mary** *[with deep feeling, looking into his eyes]* Sadness, be thou plucked up by the roots - at least for a little while - and cast into the sea!
- Jesus** *[laughing]* Behold, a woman of great faith! For so it has come to pass!
-

*You can read my thoughts about this play and respond with your own at  
[www.WineskinProject.net/blog/mustard-seed](http://www.WineskinProject.net/blog/mustard-seed)*

Copyright © 2014 by Freeman Ng and the Wineskin Project

Freeman Ng is a writer, poet, and Google software engineer living in Oakland, California. He's also the author of:

- *Joan* - a novelization of the life of Joan of Arc
- *Who Am I?* - a personalizable picture book
- **Haiku Diem** - a daily haiku feed that's been going since July, 2010

**[www.AuthorFreeman.com](http://www.AuthorFreeman.com)**