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**OUR SIN-FILLED LIFE
AND
GOD'S FORGIVENESS**

Rev'd Devon Dick, PhD

**Adjunct Lecturer,
Jamaica Theological
Seminary, Kingston JA**

Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you (Matt. 17: 14-20)

Recently, I read the story of a former ward of the state (Stephanie Green) who was a friend of Vanessa Wint, the sixteen year old who was suicidal. She said Vanessa Wint was a jovial, understanding, generous and well educated individual. She loved talking about

her family and her future accomplishments. Vanessa was a troubled child who would express herself through cursing, fighting and joining a gang.

The ward of the State claimed that she was molested by her step-father while her mother did nothing. Months past and she began using expletives and fighting. Becoming a ward of the state meant dealing with the situation of gangs, lesbianism, discrimination, isolation and not having the opportunity to further your education. She didn't consider it as a place of safety – it was a place of destruction. However, she was determined to further her education. She was awarded Academic Excellence for accomplishment in Mathematics, English and Food Preparation. When she was transferred to Windsor Girls Home, she heard one of the men say, "Later I'm coming for you newbies". She cried. She watched some of her friends run away, got pregnant and go home. She has now

graduated from Stony Hill HEART ACADEMY in the Customer Service field.

There are many more Vanessa Wints and other wards of the State who are hurting and feeling helpless. Are you feeling helpless in the presence of human misery and suffering not knowing what to do or say? Are you feeling hopeless in your circumstances? Why were the disciples unable to help the epileptic? Why did the disciples lack power to heal? Why are we so often unable to help persons who come to us?

Some would claim it is because some things cannot happen without fasting (v.21). The KJV has that rider; however, this addition is not in the best or oldest manuscripts of Matthew. There is a place for fasting in our lives but it is never a condition to releasing the power of God to heal.

How was this possible for the disciples not to heal this boy when Jesus in the sermon on suffering in chapter 10 said to them, 'I give you authority over unclean spirits so that you can cast them out and heal every disease and every sickness' (10:1)? The gift to the disciples of authority over unclean spirits and sickness is not for them to use as they will or without exercising faith in God and empowered by the Spirit which comes from praying to God. Often the disciples are weak and fumbling. Jesus said as much to Peter and company in Gethsemane, 'Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; *the Spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak*' (Matt. 26:41).

Jesus is disturbed, disappointed and distressed at the disciples' weak and inadequate faith. And he encouraged them to have faith the size of a mustard seed.

The mustard-seed was said to be one of the smallest of all seeds. It has been supposed by some, therefore, that he meant to say, if you have the smallest or feeblest faith that is genuine, you can accomplish much. The mustard-seed produced the largest of all herbs. The mountain is a symbol of the most difficult undertaking and most difficult obstacle.

We perceive that there are human misery, oppression, injustices, and suffering which are impossible with us to make a difference but possible through God to engage in transformation. The problem is that we are a messed up generation: 'You unbelieving and perverse generation' (v.17).

On top of the mountain Jesus experienced affirmation from God and reflected God's glory. But now at the bottom of the mountain he witnesses human misery and pain. He faces a demon-infested world, a demon-oppressed nation, and demon-influenced society. Similarly, in Jamaica evil and wicked people are roaming the land. And we live in a world gone wild; a wicked world; a wanton world. It is a sick world suffering from various diseases, and terminal illnesses. It reminds us of Moses' complaint recorded in Deut. 32:5, 20 'Perverse and crooked generation whose faults have proven that you are no children of his'. And God asked, 'How long will this people despise me? And how long will they refuse to believe in me ...?' (Num. 14:11).

This is not just a few individuals Jesus was claiming was perverse and a messed up generation but the people of Israel; indeed the whole human race. This was noticed later in an early Corinthian church which had problems of division, sexual deviant behaviour and Christian members taking each other to Law Court.

We are faced in Jamaica with the worse element of human depravity. There are students willing to kill fellow students over the simplest of things and these events are being recording as if we are watching a movie. This is not just persons missing the mark of God's expectations or falling short of God's standards but rebelling against God's will; it is fighting against God's way. It is presumptuous, bare-faced sinning. We are ecclesiastical enticers, economic exploiters and political gangsters. We are a messed up generation, a dangerous group, a gang.

There are two hallmarks of a messed up generation; two features of a messed up generation; two characteristics of a messed up generation: they are powerlessness and perversity.

POWERLESSNESS

We are powerless, faithless, useless and foolish outside of Christ. We are powerless because we fail to properly bring our needs to God. It is a prayerless life of not believing in the power of God to deliver us from the Evil one. Our problem is inadequate faith. It is negligible faith. Many Christians are not believers in God's power. We do not even have faith as small as a mustard seed. Our faith is inadequate. So we are powerless. We tend to blame our weak Christian life on our temper, sins, habits, lusts, addictions, obsessions, moods, fears, vanities or ambitions. However the real problem is our lack of faith in the *power of God*. We exercised faith to come to God as revealed in Jesus the Christ; however, we fail to exercise faith in the power of God to continue the transformation in our lives.

PERVERSTY

And in Jamaica we are engaging in perverse behaviour. We have a father who kills his two children and then himself. And a policeman

killed a twenty-eight year old fireman, Andrew Brydson, and his brother Tristan, and cousin Rupert Green who were church based in Shewsbury Westmoreland. We have a perverse, wicked, vicious and vile generation. We are engaging in self-destructive behaviour. We engage in crooked, twisted and deviant behaviour. People are suffering from addictions, that is, compulsive need for and use of a habit-forming substance (for example cocaine, nicotine, or alcohol). This persistent compulsive use of a substance is harmful physically, socially or psychologically to the user. We have obsessions, a persistent disturbing preoccupation with an often unreasonable idea or feeling such as for fortune, fame, or fetish. We are possessed and blinded by partisan politics, classism and prejudices. We are a perverse generation. And persons are given to sexual immortality with gay abandon and no regard for age of consent and no consideration for the elderly or babies. We are a perverse generation.

POWERFUL PANACEA

But God is powerful, able, and capable and with him all things are possible: 'Nothing will be impossible for you' (v.20). God is sovereign. He is Creator of all things seen and unseen. Scientists are claiming that the universe is older and fatter than originally thought but God knows the truth about the universe long time. The large black hole in the universe which scientists cannot fathom is common knowledge to God. God is able because he is powerful.

Jesus is lord over nature (he calms the storm), he is lord over the world of darkness (he confronts the demons), and he has power over sickness (he heals diseases), and pardons us from our sins by dying on our behalf (he cancels our debts).

Demons are not omnipotent or omniscient. They are not flesh and blood. We cannot touch them or see them. I know some persons talk about sex demons but I do not believe they are able to have sex with humans. What would be the products of these unions? Persons watch too much TV and see vampire having sex with women. Different gospel writings have different stories; not all stories are in all four gospels and John does not record Jesus driving out any demon apart from Jesus driving out the prince of the world because judgment had been passed (Jn. 12:31).

In this gospel, Jesus speaks and it is done. Evil is submissive to the real authority. Good triumphs over evil. The Prince of peace conquers the prince of darkness. The Mighty Saviour triumphs over the manipulative Satan. Our salvation is in the Mighty Saviour who is powerful and pure. Jesus is the pure lamb that takes away the sins of the world. He is spotless. He is blameless. He is a superior sacrifice than animal sacrifice. God offers to us his very best in Jesus the Christ.

If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move (v. 20). At first glance Jesus' recommendation of little faith seems paradoxical. Since the problem was the little faith then how can the solution be little faith as a mustard seed? The bad little faith was inadequate while the good little faith was enough to move mountains. This little faith means we have enough faith to move mountains. We tend to think that we need a mountain of faith to move a mountain. In other words, if we believe much then God will do much. We need just a little faith the size of a mustard seed. In the kingdom of God-SIZE does not matter! The power of God is available to them who have a little faith. A little faith and a prayer will be enough. We believe that we need a long prayer, repeating the request a thousand

times for it to happen. Or we believe that if a hundred persons are praying then it will be more effective than one person praying with little faith. We are not the ones moving the mountain but rather God.

Even if we are old and infirm we can exercise a little faith and pray. After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, 'Why couldn't we drive it out?' He replied, 'This kind can come out only by prayer (Mk. 9:28-29). We need faith that will lead us to pray in dependence on God.

*Just have a little talk with Jesus
Tell him about troubles
He will answer by and by.*

When Jesus connects the mustard seed with the mountain he is contrasting one of the smallest visual objects (mustard) with a largest (mountain), to say that the smallest is capable of the impossible.

Is this unrealistic? No, because Jesus entered into Jerusalem and conquered the powers of darkness. In addition, Jesus was raised from the dead and it means that the same power that raised him from the dead is there to help us pray for healing which is much easier than raising Jesus from the dead. Therefore stop feeling inadequate and start prayer expecting mountains to move through the power of the mighty Saviour.

In Mark's account of this story of healing, the father of the sick boy said, 'Lord I believe, help my unbelief' (Mk. 9:24). We do not even need to have perfect faith; instead God pardons us and accepts us on account of our small faith.

Jesus says bring the seemingly ‘unhealable’ boy to him because in Jesus’ hand the problem begins to be solved. It is a similar situation when there was inadequate resources and people were hungry in the desert, Jesus said ‘Bring them here to me’ (Matt. 14:18). Bring the five loaves and two fish which seemed insufficient and see what Jesus will do, ‘Little is much when God is in it’. Bring our sin-filled life and experience God’s forgiveness and pardon.