

## HOW TO DEVELOP YOUR INNER LIFE

So I can see a few of you are reading the gospel story again trying to maybe make sense of it. On the one hand Jesus is talking about mustard seeds and the power of faith and the next He's talking about servants. So there are many interpretations of this and since you came here today, and my job is to give you an interpretation of what might be going on here. I'll give you my take on what's going on in Luke, in a verse that I think would be pretty confusing at first glance. I think what Jesus is talking about is answering the question: how do we achieve faith and how do we have the power in our lives to actually bring Heaven to Earth? How do we transform the world? Where do we get that from? How can we have more faith to do that which we were asked to do? And I think Jesus' answer is this: 1. First of all you already have it; you already have it within you. You have the power, you're not tapping into it. You're being blocked, it's not of use yet. If you had just this much, this tiny little bit of faith, you could move mountains. You have much more. And as we know the disciples turn out to having a lot more right. Later they end up creating the early church so they do go on to great things, they did have more than the faith of a mustard seed. Many people interpret that as a criticism of the disciples and I think Jesus is saying you have it, it's within you, you have the power.

What about the whole thing about the servants at the table and should your servants serve and what's Jesus talking about there? I don't think that's a critique on slavery or servant-hood I think what He's saying there is when you show up in life, when you do good and you don't commit murder and you stop stealing and you stop being evil, you don't get points for that, not just showing up. But you also don't get points for just showing up in general. You can't check a box in your life and say "I did this, I showed up, look at all the things I'm doing." Really it comes

back to that mustard seed, that faith, that deep, deep spiritual desire to love your neighbor and to love God that's coming out.

One of my dirty pleasures I guess is I like mafia movies. I don't know why I'm embarrassed to admit it. I guess ministers shouldn't like mafia movies. I love the Sopranos, I love the Godfather. What I'm always struck with in those movies though, I think that I'm fascinated because they're dealing with deep evil right? I'm always fascinated with how much they love their family and I'm also fascinated by what good citizens they often are. They were often very liked in the community. They gave to charity and they really treasured their family. And so when we say things like "Well I take care of my family and I'm a good citizen and I give to charity," we're no different really than these criminals that do these same things. Just checking the box without the motivation of love is useless. And so I asked myself when I read this "Okay so if we have this incredible power within us, the power to move mountains, what's stopping us? And I would suggest that that is the purpose of our lives, is to uncover that answer. That we are constantly in a state of re-growth, evolution, regeneration whatever word you want use, we're constantly everyday being challenged to push ourselves to that next level, to unleash just the power of a mustard seed that could actually move mountains, in our terms could actually change the world.

Recently we had a dinner here at the church for thirty, under thirties and we talked about spirituality and faith and it was really fascinating and one thing became very clear to me after the night was over as I walked home, I realized "Wow, there are very few places in our culture to develop your inner life." Where do you go? If it's not church, which used to play that role and it's not the community organizations of which we used to be a part of, where do you go to grow internally? Our culture today is focused on that external growth, particularly here in Washington. Do you check the right box? Have you worked for an administration-check; have you worked for an agency-check; Are you politically powerful-check. Washington is the city where people don't

say "Where do you live or how much you make." They say "Who do you work for?" And once I learn that I'll decide if I'm going to continue the conversation because we're really, for a variety of reasons a city of externals, accomplishing achievement and attracting. But what about the inner life? Where do we grow the inner life? So I'm going to offer three suggestions of what we could do to grow that inner life, to develop our interiors, to bring out that mustard seed of faith and let it grow and move mountains. The first is, and everything I'm sharing are things I'm working on; that's how I have any sense of them. So this is not like I'm telling you because I have the answers. And the first is: we've got to listen, we've got to be aware, we've got to wake up. For the most part most of us are asleep. We've got to wake up.

A friend of mine, longtime friend of mine, Andrew Sullivan just wrote a piece for the New Yorker where he talked about creating the first real political blog: 'The Daily Dish' years ago and he said "Every morning I get up and I type my thoughts, I'd read everything, type, read script. And he eventually talked about having to go to a retreat, a spiritual retreat, where they took your phone and you dropped your phone in the offering plate to get in and people just were like this "I can't do that. I can't, No, I can't give that up. I can't give up the phone." And he said I had a twinge and it took him days of being at the silent retreat to get back in touch with that interior again that could be so cut off. We, not only is it hard to listen throughout all of history but today with me with my iPad, my iPhone and my television or screens, it's very hard to listen. Only in listening can we discern the voices and this is the part where I'm going to say stuff that may sound a little unusual, certainly not contemporary, not very modern, but I do believe we do have hellish voices in our lives and Heavenly voices. And I think it's a cacophony in our heads. And the way, when we're quiet and alone and listening, whether it's starting with a prayer, reading the 23rd Psalm, doing the Our Father, reading the scripture, playing some meditative music, however you get there, if you can take five minutes a day that would be a great start. We hear the voices. I'll speak for myself, I hear the voices and I'm not sure which one is which but then when

I think about it the voices that say "You're good, you're on the path, keep working, I forgive you, you're not perfect, of course you're not perfect, I love you," those are the voices from God. The voices that say "It's never going to work, you're really an idiot, people are laughing at you, what a failure, you are a disgrace and the things you do in your life, if people really knew who you were they would never respect you," those are from hell. God would never say these other voices. The problem in our daily life is they're going like this. And remember those ICBM Missiles that would shoot up and then the other would shoot it down. When we have those soaring thoughts about love and our purpose and goodness, very often the hellish voices try to knock it down. And I think the more good, the more aggressive those other voices can come in. When we're worried a lot, those are usually the voices and in my life they're always the voices hellish voices; they're not heavenly voices. So listening and discerning I think, between the voices. What next after that? We've listened, we've been awake, we've tried to awaken ourselves, my advice is to focus on one thing.

They say when you're dealing with debt, you ever dealt with debt? I've dealt with debt. I think we've all - we live in a debt culture. And they always say if you're dealing with debt, focus on one of the elements. Don't get overwhelmed by everything. Start with one project, pay off one credit card. I know when I do coaching with people they say "I want to do everything. This is everything and I want to get it done in three months." And I always say pick one thing. Pick one thing, it's the difference between praying "God, make me an instrument of your peace," the general prayer, it's fine, but another prayer would be "God help me to deal with Sally, help me to forgive Bob, help me to forgive myself." Whatever it is, make it focused and make it specific and try one thing. And then the third is to reflect back on it. And once there is some reflection and listening, when you start a project, very often we never look back to see what worked and what didn't work. In the military they call it 'After action review,' which I think is a good phrase. How are things going? How am I doing How am I doing? What did I learn? What voices came to me

in that prayer moment and how did I react to it? The best ways I find for that are keeping a journal; writing a journal even you know a couple paragraphs: This is what I'm working on, this is what I thought, have a conversation with yourself. If you really want to get deeper, and you can do this, I encourage you to keep a dream journal. I believe our dreams are full of what we can call correspondences or symbol of things that are actually quite strategic and can open us up. So journaling, dream journal, getting in a group of other people and sharing what you're all working on.

One of the great success' of Alcoholics Anonymous is that we hold each other accountable within it. People get there they say "How are you doing? What's going on, you sponsor people, it's the most successful spiritual organization in a country and one of its key elements is holding each other accountable. So we could do that with each other, see what works. And then you're going to make mistakes. Some things are going to work, some things aren't going to work, but just trust in the flow. You have the power to change the world. You already have the faith of a mustard seed that could literally move mountains on this earth. We have it here. The challenge this week: find five minutes a day and find time to listen, find time to act on one specific thing and then reflect back. If we do that we can unleash this power, this power of the mustard seed and we too can move mountains. Amen.