

Luke 17: 5-11

(Lectionary Year C, Pentecost 20)

By Beth Barnett

<p>More, more more? Two characters explore the culture of “more” and greed in relation to faith, referencing Luke 17:5-11 and the Apostles’ greed for More Faith</p>	
<p>You will need:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two presenters: one in fair-ground spruiker character (A); one as themselves (B) • Mustard seeds • Test for Luke 17:5-11 (either on screen or printed and distributed among the gathering) • Artwork “Faith as small as mustard” by Chris Booth (optional extra: postcards of artwork)
<p>Time required:</p>	<p>10 minutes</p>

Note on the text: This is one of only a few times Jesus’ companions are referred to as ‘Apostles’ in the gospels. Matthew, Mark and John only have a couple of uses each, and Luke has 6. The title of Apostle really belongs to the book of Acts. The term ‘Apostles’ is associated with Jesus sending his followers out to proclaim the kingdom. As Jesus sends the ‘apostles’ he tells them not to take anything extra with them –they are not to hoard resources, or have ‘More’ of anything. The life of the apostle is one of faith and simplicity, of living with less, and making oneself empty, not great.

In this text, Jesus directly addresses the risk that apostles might think of faith as a possession, and a status indicator in which More faith is a ‘credit’ to them. Not so says Jesus. Small faith is good faith. After all, it’s all God’s faith, not ours, anyhow.

Script: More, More, More?

Enter Character B – no costume or characterisation - confident, straight talking, warm and engaging manner.

Character B: Hello friends in the community of faith. Today we are going to read a part of the Bible together in which Jesus talks about how much faith we need to have. I wonder if you already can guess?
Is it this much [*hands out about 30cm apart*]
Or this much [*arms out a metre apart*]
Or this much? [*arms stretched out as far as possible*]
(*take suggestions*)

Or this much? [*reaches into pocket and pulls out a mustard seed*]

This is a mustard seed. A tiny seed. And Jesus says that we only need a tiny amount of faith. So to remind us of this there is a mustard seed for everyone.

(*Helpers begin to distribute mustard seeds*) -

Enter Character A – ‘Snake oil salesman type’; smart suit; bowtie; larger than life personality; soundtrack of carnival music while he enters and sets up a stand and a sign, and begins spruiking.

Character A: Ladies and Gentlemen, boys and girls, lasses and lads, snakes and ladders, climbers and crawlers, bringers and borrowers, Followers and Philosophers, gather round, come one, come all, because I know what you need! You know what you need! You need More. You need More, I need More, we need More.

You Sir (*entering the crowd*), you need More don't you?

And Madam, I know what you're thinking – you're thinking (*uses femme voice*) 'I want More too!' Well, yes, Ma'am you're absolutely right. You need More!

It's what we all need, More!!!! More More! Even More! extra More! totally More! even More than totally More...

I know you want More. In fact, I know you want More of this More, and More of that More – you just want More More.

More – More and More and More and More – doesn't matter what else you've got – you need More, and then you need More More. So Roll up and get More!



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Character B: (Puts up hand in crowd) Excuse me...

Character A: Yes! Yes! I can see that you want More!

Character B: Well, that's my question. More? More what?

Character A: Ah – well you see that's the beauty of More – it's so flexible and adaptable. Whatever it is that you have – you can always want More! More this, More that, More Anything!

Character B: Really? More of anything?

Character A: Sure! What is it that you have here?

Character B: Well, funny you should ask that... this is a church. We're followers of Jesus. This is a community of faith.

Character A: Faith! You have faith!

Character B: Yes, but...

Character A: Then you need More. More Faith – how fabulous!!! More and More faith. More faith for you and More faith for you. I told you – More works with anything!! Who wouldn't want More faith?

Character B: Actually, no offence, but I don't think we do want More faith.

Character A: Are you kidding??? Faith is awesome!!! So of course you want More of it!!!! More faith, More and More faith, even More faith, extra More faith, totally More faith, even More than totally More faith...

Character B: (*breaking in*) Listen, listen. Stop it. You don't seem to understand what faith is! Faith isn't a thing that you can have More or less of – it's not a thing, but a way of living in the bigger life of God. And with life in the bigger life of God, there is no 'More, More, extra More, even More...'

Character A: What!??? You can't get More faith? I'm pretty sure I've heard people say they want More faith, need More faith, I'm sure there's a market for More faith...

Character B: Ah – yes! People do say that sometimes. But then people say all kinds of things... Look, let's crack open the Bible, where we'll see some of Jesus' followers asked for More faith as well.

Character A: I knew I was right! Of course Jesus followers wanted More faith and you should too – More More, More faith (*breaking off*)...hang on, opening the Bible, isn't that dangerous?



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Character B: Oh yes, for sure...Let's get into it! Here we are in Luke 17:5-11.
(display Luke 17:5-11 on screen – or direct to printed copies of text provided)

“The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!” “

Character A: See! I knew it! They want More! More More! Even More, Extra More! Even totally extra More faith. And good on them I say!

Character B: Yes they do: they want More – More faith. The word here ‘increase’ means ‘add to’. “Add More to our faith” they say. You’re right they want More. But let’s keep reading...

The Lord replied, “If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.

Character A: Sure, sure, that’s impressive, faith the size of a mustard seed throws mulberry trees into the sea...but imagine if you had MORE faith – you could throw massive red gum trees in the ocean – or even mountains. Wow! Think what More faith could do? With More faith you could wipe out buildings, cities even! That would be a super faith – so impressive, so powerful, so mighty -

Character B: - So useless.

Character A: (*genuinely taken aback*) What do you mean?

Character B: Throwing cities and buildings into the sea? Destroying communities? That’s not what faith is for. Faith is for bringing hope and justice and love and forgiveness; for not giving up on broken things, or people. Faith is never a thing that makes us mighty or powerful or destructive. It makes us human, human-sized, humble and hopeful, as we trust that God hangs on to us.

We’ll see what Jesus means as we read a bit More...

Character A: Read More? More? I like the sound of that...

Character B: Jesus says ‘

“Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field, ‘Come here at once and take your place at the table’?

Would you not rather say to him, ‘Prepare supper for me, put on your apron and serve me while I eat and drink; later you may eat and drink’?

Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded?



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So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, 'We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!'"

Character A: That's harsh...

Character B: No – it's just exactly what you'd expect for the life of a slave, a worker in the time of Jesus. And Jesus is saying that to have faith, to be an apostle, a sent with the good news person, to follow him, is no great position of privilege. It's just a humble day in day out life of faith. No awards, no privileges, no special treatment. Nothing More than life – but good life – whole life – faithful life with God hanging on to us.

Character A: Really? Isn't there More? Like More blessing?

Character B: No – God's generosity is already and always for everyone.

Character A: Isn't there More? Like More power?

Character B: No, we are called to give up our power, as Jesus did and serve others.

Character A: What about love? Isn't there More love?

Character B: More love? God's love is for the entire cosmos – the whole world. It fills everything – how could there be More?

Character A: So...I really can't interest you any More More? Hmmm. So what about if I had mustard seeds (begins exiting)...mustard seeds to plant! Mustard seed mustard spread, English mustard, French mustard...

Character B: Friends, here we are in the community of faith. We have all that we need to live the life of the kingdom that God calls us to – we have God's Spirit, we have one another – all with many gifts to share, and we have a God who is endlessly faithful. We do not need More faith. We have faith a plenty in young and old, those who are robust and those who are struggling, those who are weak and those who are strong, those with much and those with little – faith is all ours with plenty to share.



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In this piece of art, there are two kinds of faith being shown.

One is a big, noisy, powerful faith. The other is the quiet, small, mustard seed faith that Jesus talks about. Maybe someone in this picture reminds you of the kind of faith you see in our community or the kind of behaviour you see in other places.

If you saw this piece of art, before hearing Jesus' story about faith, which of the two people would you guess to be an example of faith?

In our community we have people with mustard seed faith, the kind that Jesus values – can you tell who they are?

Can you use this piece of art to retell Jesus' teaching about faith and mulberry trees and mustard seeds?



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