

I guess everyone feels inadequate once in a while, but I never thought I'd be intimidated by eggwhites. I was cleaning out our food cupboard recently and discovered we had a mix for lemon merangue pie. I thought, "No problem. I've never made this before, but I can follow instructions." It all went fine until I tried the merangue. No matter how much I beat those eggwhites, they still looked like spit. My visions of heady merangue dissipated as I poured this stringy liquid on top of the pie. If Julia Child had walked into my kitchen at that point, I would have said, "Julia, I am afraid of eggwhites. Give me courage. I am inadequate."

The Apostles come to Jesus today with a complaint not about the kitchen, but about their faith. "Lord," they say, "we feel inadequate. Increase our faith. We can't work the miracles you do. We can't pray the way you do. Increase our faith."

Maybe we've prayed this way. "Lord, I can't handle suffering the way my neighbor does. I can't believe in you the way my spouse does. I can't open up to you the way my children do. Lord, increase my faith. I am inadequate."

At first, what Jesus says sounds like a putdown: "All you need is faith the size of a mustard seed, and you can do everything." It sounds like a putdown; it sounds like, "I knew my faith was tiny, but I didn't know it was that tiny."

But, I think Jesus would not put us down, I think he would build us up. I think he means increasing faith is not the solution. We don't need to increase our faith. Faith the size of a mustard seed is large enough. We don't need to have more faith, we need to act on it. We need to say to the sycamore, "Be uprooted and transplanted into the sea," and all will be well.

All too often we make excuses for not acting on our faith. We make moral decisions all the time: What comes first, Christian ethics or profits in the marketplace? What comes first, love of self or love of neighbor? Who comes first, me or God? Those questions call us to think and to pray. But we make excuses. We say, "Lord, I don't have faith. I am inadequate. Increase my faith." And Jesus responds, "No, you have the faith you need. Now you need to act on what you believe. Let faith be a part of your life, a part of your decisions."

I suppose Julia Child would tell me I have everything I need: fresh eggs, at room temperature, and the will to go on. But until we practice what we know, we're a long way from what making merangue. Faith the size of a mustard seed is faith enough if we act on what we believe.