

**Julian, Jesus and the Mustard Seed**  
*David Schilling, 10/5/2025*  
*The Old Meeting House, East Montpelier VT*  
*Focus text: [Luke 17:5-10 \(NIV\)](#)*

All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.

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Who finds that hard to believe these days? Why? (*people called out Chicago, violence, greed, ICE, Gaza, genocide, others*)

In a world where peace can seem like a cruel joke, an echo of a distant past or a hallucination of an unattainable future, it sounds like an empty, sugarcoated promise. In a nation edging closer to authoritarianism than any of us have experienced in our lifetime, it seems almost laughable.

These words, first written by Julian of Norwich, whose name was not Julian, and was probably not from Norwich, are anything but a simple assurance that everything in life will turn out just fine.

At the time, they were revolutionally, bordering on heretical.

We don't know Julian's real name, but we do know that she was born in 1342, most likely to a relatively wealthy family. When she was in her early thirties, she contracted a disease so serious that it was documented that with her parish priest at her bedside, her mother had closed her eyes, thinking she was already gone.

While she was in the midst of her illness, Julian experienced 16 visions, which she originally considered to be delirium, but came to strongly believe were actually true messages from God.

These visions were strong enough to convince Julian to devote her life to her faith.

She became an anchoress, agreeing to a monastic lifestyle consisting of voluntary lifelong imprisonment in a cell attached to St. Julian's Church, by which name she became known. She was allowed visitors to her outside window, discussing religion with those who passed by on the street, and attended church services through her inside window. This lifestyle would continue for the last 40 years of her life.

Julian's visions, ranging from a vivid image of Christ's bloody suffering on the cross to a complex parable carried messages of Christ's compassion, the motherhood and tenderness of God, the unity of creation in divine love, and the ultimate assurance that "all shall be well".

She wrote two separate accounts of these visions, ultimately becoming the first identifiably female writer in the English language. Her writings came at a time when the clear message from the church was that of a God whose angry wrath burned against sin and sinners.

A church that blamed a lack of faith for the black plague raging outside of Julian's window.

A church whose conviction that unworthy souls would burn for all eternity in hell, a very real place.

This theistic view contradicted God's statement in one of Julian's visions that God would do something at the end of time so that all that was not well shall be made well.

A God whose grace will turn all sin to glory.

And if Julian's teachings could be a perspective that survived and flourished for 633 years, it's reasonable to think that a still-speaking God might extend us the same grace today, recognizing that once again, we live in tough and demanding times. Times in which we have been so preconditioned to hear, in Jesus' response to the disciples **“try harder, obviously you don't even have faith as small as a mustard seed”**.

After all, that's the dangerous message of the prosperity gospel, the well-funded, fundamentalist preachers who would have us believe that when things go wrong, it's because we are not worthy.

We didn't pray hard enough.

We didn't believe well enough.

God wants us to be successful, wealthy and happy.

In the words of the late Reverend John Buchanan, “the prosperity gospel would have us believe that God can be recruited to the project of helping us accomplish our goals”. The opposite is true. God is not recruited for our projects, whatever they are, God recruits us in ways we can't begin to understand, and they're not always shiny and prosperous.

It's the dangerous message of a perfection-loving culture, in which our kids are pushed to present perfect images of themselves, the stress of being judged and graded in schools only surpassed by being judged and degraded in the comment section of any popular public-facing app.

As of this morning, there are 43.8 million posts on TikTok starting with “I know I'm chopped but” which means “I know I'm ugly, but please give me a chance to try to share one redeeming quality?” 43.8 million.

A recent study of anxiety and depression in school considered to be high achieving showed a clear connection between the pressure to be perfect and our ongoing mental health crisis in both youth and parents.

The survey found that 73% of respondents agreed that parents in their community believed getting into a selective college is one of the most important ingredients to later life success. 83% percent agreed that their children's academic success is a reflection of their parenting.

Yet 87% wished that childhood was less stressful for their kids.

While there's absolutely nothing wrong with a strong desire to succeed, too much pressure to get ahead, or to fit an unrealistic mold of perfection can be damaging. And those pressures are certainly increasing.

The study went on to look at kids in high-achieving communities who were doing well emotionally

despite these pressures, and the data pointed to a surprising outcome.

**Those who were most resilient reported that they simply mattered.**

They had found communities and social groups where they mattered not for what they achieved, but simply for who they were. They still bombed tests, experienced rejection from top choice schools, found themselves alienated by peers, but the feeling of being valued to loved ones and communities, regardless of external judgements of success was enough to make the same setbacks as everyone else faced just that.

Setbacks.

This is why it's so important to build *this* church community up as a reflection of unconditional love. Not as a reflection of the rest of the world, but a sanctuary from it.

A place where our youth and adults alike matter simply because of who we are.

Even when our sermons are sometimes long and make no sense.

Or when we miss a note.

Or when we plan an amazing event, and three people show up.

Or when we step on each other's toes.

After all, All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.

And maybe that is the message that Jesus brings us through today's reading. Not that the inability to feel like the world is miraculous is a result of a lack of faith, but a lack of recognition that it only takes a tiny bit to set us on the right path. A recognition not that we are unworthy for a lack of faith, but that we are all servants to a greater power, simply doing what is required of us, as opposed to recruiting God for our projects and seeking recognition of our perfection.

After all, isn't that in line with the behavior of one who would go on to say "I am among you as one who serves", one who knelt before each of the disciples on the night of his arrest and washed their feet?

Increase our faith, the disciples said, and Jesus answered "You already have plenty. After all, it only takes a tiny bit, the size of a mustard seed. Now stop asking for more and fulfill the purpose of what you have.

Go live it.

All shall be well,

and all shall be well,

and all manner of things shall be well.