

A Word from Mack:

Fall 2011

**THE MYSTERY OF THE MUSTARD SEED NAMED
“LOVE”**

The year was 1879 and Leo Tolstoy turned 51 years old. He had written *Anna Karenina* and splashed *War and Peace* onto the beaches of every western world country. He was the toast of the courts of Europe and heads that wore crowns and tiaras swiveled when he passed by. He owned huge estates and feted countless mistresses. And he was miserable.

He had no joy. He began to be utterly convinced that life was meaningless. Then, as numerous humans have done from time immemorable, the little fellows and the room-filling expansive personalities alike, he fought his way through to a life of unspeakable joy and purposeful transcendent living. I will leave it to you to find his book, *A Confession*, sell your bed, and buy it. Inhale it. For in it, he details his journey in a way that leaves the word, “remarkable,” vapid by comparison.

Having read and reread this travelogue of the soul for over thirty years, I find it never far from my consciousness. And now, I am taken to his analogy of life, which he compares to a vast flowing river. Life is a river so wide, writes Tolstoy, that we cannot see the other bank. Nevertheless, we must embark to cross because our purpose is to cross and our destiny is to stand upon the far bank. We must grow as we go. The river demands it of us.

But this river has two subtle secrets. The journey across seems so interminable that our limited attention wanders from our purpose which is to cross over to the other side. We then began to get distracted from our calling by the pain of rowing in the current, we see others drift with the flow, and we invariably give undue attention to the objects drifting by. It is then that the second deadly trap is sprung. We find it easier to float. There is the illusion of movement and we can rest and “enjoy.” Our purpose blurs. Our destiny diminishes.

Awake! Seize the oars and began to row. Fight the flow and you will appropriate the strength of the river in your arms. Our purpose daily is to pull toward the far shore. Drifting doesn't conserve strength, it in perceptively sucks it away, like a weasel sucking eggs. So says Tolstoy.

I believe that we have many awakenings as we cross this soul-making flow of life. And each time we clear our heads, we find renewed power given by Purpose. Then we row with renewed vigor and we call to our fellows to row with us. And I had another “awakening” in May. I want to share it with you.

You see, we all want a better world. But to have a better world we must have better people. (Here at CRI we define a person getting “better,” by committing to growing as humans and giving themselves to others. And we have defined and detailed how to grow in “wholeness” in other writings.) Now there are two very discouraging facts about this “river” as we row.

First, the human race has never grown a dominant society that gets better and better and better. To the contrary, every one that we have grown – every one – has imploded. And this brings a second hammer blow. Everything we see decays. (I just found my high school yearbooks and I looked at me – decay!) So, why do we hope for someone or something to get better when the wailing sirens of reality have us crash our boats on the rocks of decay?

I took a long walk in our Nation's Capitol. I asked is there anything that does get better in all of the universe? Anything? Is there anything that can make me better? Anything? I found only one reality. It is a loving relationship. It has many stages. But only by entering into friendships, some that deepen into covenants, can I get better. And the only thing that is inexhaustibly growing better is a positive relationship with others. That is because we can never know all there

is to know about each other because of the fantastic dynamism of the human personality. We just grow closer and closer and it gets better and better.

A friendship is the tiniest molecule of human society. But all society is made of these molecules. Jesus of Nazareth, a peasant, Jewish carpenter, who walked the hills of Galilee in bygone days, said it this way: *The Kingdom of Heaven* (the hope of mankind: a **better** society that gets better and better and better) *is like a mustard seed. It is the tiniest of all seeds, but when it is planted, it becomes the largest of all bushes and all of the birds of the air make their nest in its branches.*

Our friendships can change our world. But we must **plant** them so that the DNA of friendship is reproduced exponentially until we fill the world. It is the mystery of the mustard seed, starting tiny but growing inexorably busting the concrete around it!! God bless you all as we together systematically plant, grow, and nourish the seeds of Community Renewal. It is who we are. It is what we do. Row on...Row on!