

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Pentecost 17B - Proper 19B
September 15, 2024
Mark 9:14-29

Help for Unbelief

[The father said to Jesus,] "If you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." And Jesus said to him, "If you can! All things are possible for one who believes." Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:22-24 ESV)

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit,

Peter, James, and John had gone up on the mountain with Jesus and witnessed His transfiguration. For a time they were away from the craziness of the world down below and they saw things inexpressible. Today's Gospel begins as they are coming down from that mountain. Jesus, Peter, James, and John come to where the rest of the disciples were, and they find a great commotion. The Scribes and the disciples were arguing. It had to do with the other disciples' failure to heal a boy with a mute spirit.

The boy was at the mercy of a mute and wicked spirit. This spirit would inflict bodily injury upon this boy. It was a hideous sight. The father was desperate. And when the disciples were not able to help, then what?

When Jesus arrives, the father begs, "If you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." Of course, Jesus can do something! And He does. The boy was held captive. He was a prisoner. There was a purpose to this. Jesus commands the boy to be brought to Him. When the mute and wicked spirit sees Jesus, it immediately begins to convulse the boy, threw him on the ground, as the boy foamed at the mouth.

The evil and wicked spirits cannot stand to be in God's presence. Jesus' very presence conjures these spirits to show themselves. When Jesus questions the father of the boy, the father responds by saying "If you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." Jesus then says to the father, "If you can! All things are possible for one who believes." It is at this point that the father says something we need to remember for ourselves: "I believe; help my unbelief!"

We must ourselves recognize that this should be our prayer to God. "I believe; help my unbelief." Your faith is not as it should be. It's not as strong as you'd like, or even as you think it

is. Your faith wavers. But we don't like to talk like this because we don't want others to think we question the truth of Jesus or the truth of the Holy Scriptures. To admit that we need help with our faith is seen as a weakness. We don't want others to think less of us. But, the reality is our faith needs help.

Jesus answers the father's plea. Not only is this so by healing the son, but in how Jesus does it. The evidence that bolsters the faith of the disciples later in the gospel is similar to what happens here. Jesus casts the spirit out of the boy (commanding it never to return), a crowd comes running to witness, and then the boy is lifeless like a corpse. There is no movement. People even began to remark that he was in fact dead.

But, we are told, Jesus took the boy by the hand, lifted him up, and he arose. The boy was not dead, but very alive, truly alive. He was as he was before the wicked spirit had taken control of him. This healing is a sermon for all to hear. In Jesus' action and miracle He preaches to us the reason for His coming. It is just as the psalmist proclaims, "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord." (Ps. 118:17).

In this miraculous healing, we see in Jesus and by His power and authority the reality of the resurrection. Jesus, by taking the hand of the boy, lifting him up, with the boy rising to life, is the very image of what Jesus Himself will do. It is also an image of things to come for you. It becomes the Church's confession, then, that "I shall not die, but live and declare the works of the Lord." What is the work of the Lord but to restore us to the image of Adam and Eve before the fall into sin.

Are we not being reconciled to God through Jesus? Is it not true that when our Lord looks at His baptized children, He sees His beloved Son, Jesus? This gospel is meant to teach us something of a spiritual nature. Jesus even alludes to it when the disciples ask why they could not heal the boy. Jesus says, "This kind of evil spirit cannot be driven out by anything but prayer."

Why prayer? Hadn't the disciples earlier been given the authority to cast out demons? And weren't they successful at it? Well, it appears that the disciples may have been attempting to cast out this spirit by their own power. They were looking to themselves and, in doing so, they failed. Prayer takes the work off of the individual and seeks God. God must do the healing.

Translate this into the spiritual realm and what you have is Jesus saying not to rely on yourself. The father's admission that he has faith, but needs help for his unbelief, is also a statement against the power of the individual. Salvation comes through Jesus alone. Rescue from evil and death comes through Jesus alone. Resurrection must happen by Jesus alone. We need this, especially considering that we are not up on the mount of the transfiguration, but

down in the valley where there is a great commotion. Where we stand is in a world of fighting, hate, anger, sadness, and sin.

Thanks be to God that our Lord Jesus comes down from the mountain of heaven and into our midst, where we are like the father, where we are like the boy, in need of Jesus. We need Him to cast out our demons, to take us by the hand and lift us up and bring us to life, again. We need to be restored into the image that God made Adam and Eve. Jesus' coming to us happens in His holy Word and in the blessed Sacrament, but let us come humbly. Let us come in sincerity, understanding that, yes, we believe, but, dear Lord, help our unbelief.

Help make us stronger; help us to be merciful; help us to love; help us to breathe and live in a new way that is paved by Jesus and His merits, for without Jesus we are lost and dead. But with Him is the promise and the certainty of the resurrection to which the church continually looks upward and forward, rejoicing in the Lord's undying goodness. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener
Pastor

Immanuel Lutheran Church of Augsburg
1297 E 900 Ave.
Shobonier, IL 62885
church: (618) 846-8383
personal cell: 330-204-4180