

Pentecost 17 9/16/18
Mark 9:14-29 19B

“BUT 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!”

In his Small Catechism, Luther teaches us,

“God tenderly invites us to believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father.”

So ... what happens when you call to God in faith, and He doesn't seem to answer? With all boldness and confidence, we ask, we seek, we knock. And often, it seems to our human reason, the emotion of the moment, that God is silent to our cries. This Sunday we learn, FAITH ALWAYS TRUSTS IN JESUS FOR HELP IN TIME OF WEAKNESS!

The father in our lesson had trouble. He had but one son and this dearly beloved boy was unable to hear or speak because of the demon's possession. This evil spirit would seize the boy and throw him down. At times, the spirit had thrown the boy into fire or water trying to destroy his life. This Father's heart was heavy with grief and helplessness.

In his wrestling with the demon that possessed his son, this father knew his helplessness. “Teacher, I brought my son to You, for he has a spirit that makes him mute. And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid (Mk 9).” His sorrows and troubles caused him to see his helplessness so that he could but cry, “I believe, help my unbelief.”

What is true of this father in our lesson is true of us. The words of Jesus forever ring true in our ears, “In the world you will have tribulation”

(Jn 16:33). We don't typically encounter demon-possession in our day as in our Gospel lesson. However, the demon that possessed this boy is one of the Devil's evil spirits and they still fill our world today. They are real and they are dangerous. They are many and powerful. They hate God and seek to destroy everything that is good, especially faith in Christ. St. Paul warns us, "We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places," Paul reminds us (Eph 6:12).

And, wrestling with those demons, those cosmic powers of this present age, the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places, causes us to see our helplessness. So, like the father of the demon-possessed boy, we run to Jesus and, boldly and with confidence, we ask, and seek, and knock, because it is what Jesus Himself commanded us to do. You know how it is. Your mom or dad or spouse is sick, so you've prayed that God would heal them; that they would make a full recovery. You've prayed that God would save your marriage. Your child, your pride and joy, the one you brought to the font of baptism and heard confess Christ the day of their confirmation, now rejects that faith and wants nothing to do with it. You've prayed that your job would not be the one eliminated. You've prayed. You've fallen to your knees. You've cried, "Lord, I'm asking, I'm seeking, I'm knocking, and ... nothing happens. I'm still stuck in the same place before I cried in faith, and this trouble persists, and persists, and persists."

And, it's not long before you find wondering, "Does Jesus really care? Can Jesus help me? Does He even want to help?" You find yourself like that father looking at Jesus and say, "If you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us" (v. 22).

And Jesus says -- did you happen to catch what Jesus said to the father? My Norwegian grandmother had a saying, "Uff da!" I will translate that for you. "Uff da" is the Norwegian way of saying, "If I've told you once, I've told you a thousand times." I translate those words for you so that you understand Jesus' reply. Jesus replies, "Uff da!" "If I can? Really? Have you not seen and heard of the miracles I do -- the eyes of the blind are opened, the ears of the deaf unstopped, the lame leap for joy, and the tongue of the mute shout in joy. I can do these things because I am the Messiah, God with you. All things are possible for the one who believes" (v. 23). And you believe that, despite what your human reason tells you; your emotions of the moment; even when nothing seems to be happening.

Our Gospel lesson teaches us Jesus can and does help. With the Father by His side, He goes over to the boy, "He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, 'You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.' And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, 'He is dead.' But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose" (vv.25-27).

What He did for that boy is that He does for you, Dear Child of God.

When He went to Calvary, He crushed the head of the devil, the one who has the demons under his command. When He died on that cross, He won the victory for you over all the evil spirits and over the devil himself. For you see, when He went to Calvary, He goes there carrying your griefs, your sorrows, your burdens, your diseases, your sicknesses, your troubles, your worries, carrying all your sins. Jesus takes all that to Calvary's cross and there He bleeds and dies and the 3rd day He rises again to give you

victory not only over the devil, but also over all the troubles and sorrow and worries that bring you down.

What a great day for the family of Concordia this is. Today, in the new birth of Holy Baptism, Steve and Savannah's child became God's own child. And, Mack's father in heaven has given him the victory of Christ's death and Easter resurrection to be his very own.

That same victory is yours, Dear Child of God, and you can be certain of it because He has given it to you by means of the water and the Word of your baptism, and the bread and wine and body and blood of Holy Communion, and the words of eternal life that go into your ears. That victory is yours, not matter what you are experiencing in life this very day. It belongs to you.

Take a look at that boy. The demon left him, rigid, looking like he was dead. And what did Jesus do? He reached down, took the boy's hand and lifted him up and the boy arose.

So, when you are in the midst of suffering, contending with whatever it may be, struggling under the weight of the cross, shaking with fear in the darkness of the valley of the shadow of death, Jesus, by means of His Word and Sacrament, comes and reaches down to you and pulls you up and lifts you up into the victory that is yours in Him. And, He does His work in you, giving you peace, patience, strength, hope for the facing of this hour.

And, He points your heart to the greater day to come – the day that give us hope in the midst of all our suffering. The day is coming when Jesus will come again in glory and on that day, He will reach into the grave itself and pull you out and say, "Arise." And you will be raised in a resurrected, glorified body to live a life that is free from conflict, and

suffering, worry and fear, tears and tension, pain and death itself, to live a life that is filled with Christ, and the Father, and of the Holy Spirit forever and ever, without end.

That's how Christ can and does help us.