

17 S. after Pentecost 9/15/24
Mark 9:14-29 19B

“IMMEDIATELY THE FATHER OF THE CHILD CRIED OUT AND SAID, ‘I BELIEVE; HELP MY UNBELIEF!’”

If you have an emergency, you can call 911. If you need travel information, you call 511 to find out which roads are under construction or weather conditions. If you plan to do some digging, you call 811 to find where underground lines are buried. And, we now have a mental health crisis hotline, which you can reach by dialing 988.

But, what happens when you call to God in faith, and He doesn't seem to answer? *“Call upon me in the day of trouble, I will deliver you,”* God promises us (Ps 50:15). So, we do. We do call upon God in the day of trouble. And often, it seems to our human reason, the emotion of the moment, that far from delivering us, God is silent to our cries. This Sunday we learn, **FAITH ALWAYS TRUSTS IN JESUS FOR HELP IN TIME OF TROUBLE!**

The father in our lesson had trouble. He had but one son and his 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.

I. When our heart is heavy with grief and helplessness, we doubt that God is there; that He even cares. Perhaps, we even think that God is punishing us.

The demon-possession of his son caused the father in our lesson to see 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. So I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able” (v. 18). His grief and troubles caused him to see his helplessness so that he could but cry, “I believe, help my unbelief” (v.24).

Demon-possession as we see in Jesus’ day is not as common and widespread in our world today. But, we don’t need demon possession to see our helplessness.

Have you ever stood at the grave of a loved one and mourned? That’s a hard question, isn’t it? Death, our own mortality, illness and infirmity in our mortal body, accidents, seeing your loved one lying on the hospital bed, a marriage hanging by a thread, children who have left the light of God’s path for the darkness of sin, the evil acts of sinful men, and the injustice of a world dead in sin **shake** our faith. God has promised to wipe all the tears from our eyes in heaven, but He has not promised us a rose garden on this side of heaven. Our griefs and helplessness drive us to knees to plead through tear-filled eyes, “I believe; help my unbelief!”

God was there for this father of this demon-possessed son. Jesus spoke, *“I command you, come out of him and never enter him again,”* and the demon had no choice, it had to come out (v. 25).

II. God was there for this father in Jesus and He is there for us in Jesus. Jesus was born of virgin mother and became a man to bear all our griefs and trouble. He had no sin of His own but took on your sin and the sin of all the world. *God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us,* is how the Bible says it (2 Co 5:21). Jesus took on our griefs, all of our troubles, all the wages of our sin as his very own and carried them to Calvary’s cross. Upon that cross, in untold agony, He cried, *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken -- abandoned -- me” (Mt 27:46).* The Good News of the

Gospel is this: God the Father abandoned His only-begotten Son to the death of the cross as punishment for our sin. And because the Father abandoned His Son, Jesus has endured all the anger of God, all the punishment, all the death of our sin so that now God will never, ever abandon you, Dear Child of God.

Jesus' blood was shed so that it would cleanse you from all your sin, even your sin of doubt and distrust. And by His cross, Jesus crushed the head of the devil. He has completely conquered the devil, so he can no longer accuse you of any sin and you can resist his temptations to doubt and despair, especially in the hour of trial.

III. In our sorrows and troubles, faith trusts in Jesus. In the book of Hebrews, we read this,

Let us throw off everything that hinders, and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (He 12:1-2).

Jesus is the author of our faith. In the water and Word of our baptism, God the Holy Spirit works faith in us so that, in faith, we are one with Jesus. We died to sin in Jesus and have been raised to new spiritual life in Jesus so that we walk, not by our doubts and weaknesses, not by our reason and the emotions of the moment, but by faith.

But, no one needs to tell you, Dear Child of God, that it is not always easy to walk by faith. The father who came to Jesus had faith; but that faith was shaken to its very core. In his weakness and helplessness, he cried, *"If you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us" (v. 22).*

Jesus rebuked the weakness of his faith, *"All things are possible for the one*

who believes!” Immediately, the man recognized his weakness, saw his sin and repented in faith, *“I believe; help my unbelief”* (v. 24).

Faith knows its weakness. Faith sorrows over weakness. But, faith always trust, always hopes, always finds comfort that Christ is with you even in your dark hours, your weak minutes, your days and night of anxious thought.

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” (*Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation, pp. 19-20*).

When it seems to us that God is silent, then we must all the more with confidence draw near to His throne of grace, *that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (He 4:16)*.” Trusting in faith, we hold God to His promise, *“Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you”*. “Ask,” Jesus says, *“and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you”* (Mt 7:7).

We have this confidence and assurance because Jesus is not only the author of our faith; He is the finisher of our faith. He began the good work of our faith in us at our baptism, and He is with us always. Through the Word of the Gospel and the eating and drinking of Christ’s body and blood, God continues to feed the faith He began at our baptism that truly we may cry to Him in faith and walk by faith.

Dear Saints of God, if you ever find yourself saying, “If only I had a stronger faith,” if you are weakening under the weight of the cross, if sorrows surround you, then remember your baptism, go back to the Word of God, come to the Lord’s Table to feast upon His Body and Blood. The sorrows and troubles God permits in our lives help us to see the weakness

of our faith and drive us back to God's Word so that we may grow like Christ and unbelief be driven away.

Christ has promised to be with you and, through His Word, will cause your faith to grow and strengthen, just as He did St. Paul. Paul himself tells us of his thorn in the flesh, *a messenger of Satan to harass me*, he calls us. Three times Paul pleaded with the Lord to remove it, but God, in His wisdom, didn't. Instead, God answered Paul, *"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness"* (2 Co 12:9).

God's grace is sufficient for us. Recall the words of the Psalmist, *goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life* (23:6). This is we cry in faith to Him, for the strength, assurance, comfort and peace that only God can give. And, if you find yourself struggling to believe that is true, just as the Father who once had a deaf and mute son.