

Sermon Proper 19 2018

September 16, 2018

Mark 9:14-29

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson previously read.

Those of you who have been attending our midweek Bible Classes on the book of Acts likely recall how there is this interesting passage in chapter 19 where these exorcists come into the picture and they try to cast out demons in the name of Jesus. Now granted, these Sons of Sceva, as they're named, they don't actually know of Jesus, they've just heard about Paul using that name to cast demons out, and they've heard that it works, so they try it to. And it doesn't work for them. Instead the evil spirit becomes that much more enraged, he overpowers them and they have to run away as it says, "naked and wounded."

So what do we see there? We see that faith is what gives us power when the evil one attacks us. And we see that here in this lesson too. Here is this man who brings his son with a demon to Jesus. And even Jesus' disciples haven't been able to cast it out. So how does Jesus respond? **"O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you?"** O ye people of faithlessness. O your faithlessness is a burden for me; it's a hardship; it weighs on my shoulders. How long am I stuck with it?!

Do you hear what He's saying? On the one hand we see Him using that word, "generation," and we think of a particular age group, like the Baby Boomers, or Gen X, or Millennials. But it seems to be more than that. You see this can also mean race. "O faithless race." "O faithless humanity! What's wrong with you? Why don't you believe? Why don't you trust me?"

Why don't we trust? Obviously because of sin. Obviously because of the fall. Obviously because rather than bearing the image of God in perfect righteousness, we bear the image of Adam, the one who fell from grace, the sinner who looked and the enticing fruit with his wife and decided this God who

had told them not eat it of surely was keeping the best stuff for Himself. Surely this God was holding something back. Surely Adam shouldn't trust Him.

And look what happened—**O faithless generation**. And now that is us, we are sinful, we bear that image of the first Adam, we don't trust God, we think He's holding something back.

In fact, as I say this, we have this example of this father bringing his child to Jesus. And you can understand if you're a parent, he's trying to find relief for the child, he's trying, you could say to do what's best for the child. And in him, we actually have a great example, right? Because what does he do that's right? He brings the child to Jesus. He trusts that this child's best care is with the Lord, the Messiah, the King of Creation.

Is that our trust as well? I ask this because I was listening to Issues etc. again this week—you know the podcast I have mentioned multiple times—and the guest was a pastor by the name of Jonathan Fisk—who I've also mentioned more than once, my apologies. Pastor Fisk has been doing a series that has been great on parenting children in our current day; as he puts it our "age of progressivism." Well in this episode, Pastor Fisk made a really interesting point. He said how often our money proves our dedications. We confess by our mouths that we would like our children to be Christians, that we want to bring them to Jesus, and that's good. But where do we dedicate our money? Often to providing the American Dream for them. We save up this money for them to go to college, and how do we guide them in determining where to go? Often we focus on the best program for their particular major, and then we look at activities they would like to be connected to, then we look at leisure activities nearby. What's missing from that picture? What about investigating if that campus has a solid Lutheran college ministry? What about making sure there is at least a quality church that they can walk to? If it takes an hour and a half to drive to the nearest Lutheran Church, they're not going to go. As we focus on these other things, what does that say about what we think is important. Where is our trust? Where is our faith?

To bring this back to the father in the lesson, here he is bringing the child to Jesus, and ultimately he makes that beautiful confession, "**Lord, I believe, help**

my unbelief.” As he makes that confession as the example that he is, all the more should we. **“Lord I believe, help my unbelief!”**

And He does. He helps us in sundry ways. First of all, He bears with us. As He said that, **“How long am I to bear with you?”**, He does bear with us. In fact, in Ephesians Paul uses the same word there telling us to bear with one another’s burdens. You know the things that bother us with other people. The things that make us crazy, in our families, with our spouses, even in the Church, we are to bear with one another in those things. Why? Because Christ has borne with us. I’ve made this point before, but think of how uncomfortable it would be for the Holy God who created the world to enter into this fallen and unholy world. It’s broken, and He’s perfect. That’s hard to bear. And yet He bears with us.

Furthermore, he helps us by not only bearing with us, but by bearing our sins on the cross. All the suffering and pain that sin deserves, He bore the punishment for it. And He rose again. All of this to help us.

In fact, look at this boy. Jesus casts out the demon, and then look at what it says: **“Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.”** They thought the boy was dead, and yet Jesus raised him up. He took him by the hand, lifted him up and he arose. That’s you. Because Jesus has helped you in bearing your sins, by His resurrection He has raised you. In His resurrection given to you in your baptism, He has reached down rebuked all of your sin, cleansed you, washed your sin into His tomb, and raised you up in His new life. He has done that for you. By His Word of absolution, He has helped you in casting out your sin. He has even reached down His hand and fed you with His body and blood. In all of this He has helped you.

You believe, yes, but you have your doubts alongside that faith. You believe, yes, but you don’t trust as you should. You believe, yes, but you haven’t prayed as you ought. You believe, yes, but you still wonder if He’s holding something back that’s better for you.

But yet He has come and helped you in His compassion. That compassion that the man asked for, Jesus shows you that. He shows it in His patience, in His

provision, in His forgiveness, life and salvation. In fact, think about how generous He is in His compassion.

And what does all of this show us? It shows us that **“all things are possible for one who believes.”** Or perhaps I should clarify further: it shows that all things are possible for THE ONE who believes. Who is that One? Who is the only One who believed perfectly? Our Lord Jesus. He has believed perfectly.

And as He has believed perfectly, all things are clearly possible for Him. I mean, we see this example of the man who comes to Jesus and wants healing for his child, and he wonders if Jesus can do it. Jesus shows His perfect faith, and He casts out the demon. But He has done so much more than that. He has overcome the Evil One, He has overcome death, and He has overcome sin itself, even for us. And He has given all of that to us. All things are possible for the One who believes.

In fact, as I mentioned that this word for generation, “O faithless generation,” meant human race, even if we apply that to our generation now, we see that He has overcome that. We have so many worries, so many demonstrations of the faithlessness of humanity in our time, and yet He is still working, still accomplishing His good. You can see it in the care that we give one another—especially as we care for one another as the Church. All the more you can see it every time someone is granted to come to faith. Sure that faith is imperfect, sure our faith is imperfect. But we cry out with that man, “I believe, help my unbelief.” And He does. The One with perfect faith does what is possible for Him. He overcomes the sin of our unbelief, and He even gives us His perfect faith in exchange: the faith by which He cast out demons, and the faith which our Heavenly Father sees when He looks at you. Yes, you are a part of this faithless generation, but the Lord Jesus has had compassion on you, helped you, and given you His perfect faith by which you live. Amen.