

Midweek Lenten Vespers 2
St. Mark 9:17-29
March 16th, 2022
Sts. Peter and Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

Jesus Rebuked the Unclean Spirit

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prior to the Gospel reading from the Evangelist St. Mark for this evening, our Lord + Jesus and Sts. Peter, James and John had been on the mountain of transfiguration with Moses and Elijah. Having come down the mountain, our Lord + Jesus meets a large crowd gathered around the other nine Apostles. One other bit that is left out of tonight's pericope is that the scribes and Pharisees were there giving their assessment of the situation. The Evangelist St. Mark writes that the scribes were "disputing" with the nine Apostles who had not gone up on the mountain with the Lord + Jesus. What they were "disputing" about is given in the reading for today.

A certain man, the father of a demon-possessed boy, had brought his son to the Apostles to have them heal the boy of his demon-possession. The Apostles were not able to do this. The scribes see this as an opportunity to impugn their Lord and Master—the Lord + Jesus. The reasoning would go like this: if the Apostles were unable to cast out this demon, then the Man + Jesus would also not be able to do it. Therefore, according to the scribes, this + Jesus of Nazareth was not the real Messiah. When our Lord + Jesus arrives He immediately addresses the scribes and Pharisees, and asks them what they are disputing about. For a moment, everyone seems to remain silent.

This is where our Gospel reading begins tonight. One man of the crowd comes to the Lord and tells him that he had brought his son to be cured of a mute spirit, but the Apostles were not strong enough to do it. There are several things to discuss about this reading.

The first thing is the demon-possession of the son. The demon is described as a "mute" spirit. It is also told to us that the evil spirit would seize the boy, and throw him down. It would cause the boy to foam at the mouth, grind his teeth, and become rigid, the Greek literally means "to dry up," that is, he withered. Now, there are many false teachers, who do not believe in demons, and would have us believe the same, that teach that this demon was really just the effects of epilepsy. Grinding of teeth and being rigid are certainly signs of an epileptic seizure, but being mute is certainly not a result of epilepsy. Furthermore, the mute spirit causes the boy to convulse, fall on the ground, foam at the mouth and wallow, when he is brought before the Lord + Jesus. That the reaction of the mute spirit is in response to being in the presence of the Lord, also shows that this is not an epileptic affliction, but demon-possession.

The second thing is the faith of the father of the demon-possessed son. This man has enough faith to bring his son to the Lord + Jesus for healing. Since the Lord + Jesus was on the mountain of transfiguration with Sts. Peter, James and John, and not there when he came, he turned to the other nine Apostles. They were not able to cure his son. Seeing the Apostles' failure surely would have cast doubts into this man. One has to understand how long he has been dealing with this affliction of his son to see just how badly he is teetering on the edge of hope and despair. When our Lord + Jesus questions him about how long the son had been like this, his reply is that he had been this way since childhood. In other words, this boy has been afflicted by this mute demon for a long time.

It would stand to reason that this man had sought other forms of help: doctors, priests, or anyone that would relieve his son. Clearly nothing he tried had worked for the son still was possessed by the mute demon. His thinking, after seeing the failure of the Apostles, was that maybe the Lord + Jesus was not able to help him; maybe the reports that this Man + Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah, were not true. The scribes and Pharisees, upon seeing the failure of the Apostles, certainly pushed that narrative; that this + Jesus of Nazareth was not the Messiah and Savior of Israel. Therefore, the father of this boy can only say, "If You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." We see both frustration and hope in this statement. "If" shows the frustration of someone who had tried many things and failed, but appealing to the Lord's compassion and mercy shows that he believes the Lord + Jesus to be compassionate.

That brings us to the third thing to point out in this Gospel reading: the faith of everyone involved in this narrative. The Apostles when they were alone with the Lord + Jesus after this healing, asked Him why they were not able to cast out the demon. Our Lord's response was that this kind could only come out with prayer and fasting. In other words, it was only the Lord + Jesus who could cure this poor soul of the mute spirit. Everyone seems to be looking to their own abilities; their own strengths. Our Lord + Jesus had sent out the Apostles to preach the Word of God, and when they returned, they boasted about their ability to drive out demons in the Lord's Name. They had forgotten that it was the Lord Who can drive out the demons.

In His questioning of this man's father, the Lord + Jesus strengthened his faith by showing him that this demon-possession had gone on for a long time, and no one else was able to help. When the Lord + Jesus casts out the demon, it would be clear to the father that this truly was the Son of God. Only He is able to drive out the evil possessing his son.

We have a tendency as humans to place our trust in earthly things, and earthly help. It is easy to place our trust in the things we see before us, medicines, doctors, and the like. When they cure us, we thank them as if the Lord God was not involved at all. And when they fail to cure us, we blame the Lord God, as if He is the One Who caused this in the first place. Sickness, pain, death, sin, all the evils of this world, are on account of our sin, and sin in this world. Satan and his devils use the consequences of sin in this world to drive us away from our trust and hope in the Lord + Jesus. They want us despairing over what they want us to believe are the Lord's failures, just as the scribes and Pharisees were doing when they witnessed the nine Apostles' inability to drive out this demon. Everyone in this pericope had forgotten to trust in the Lord, and instead looked to their own strengths and works.

The Lord + Jesus brings everyone back to full trust in Him. He is the only One Who could drive out the demon. He helps the unbelief of the father, who also confessed his belief, by casting out the demon. He taught His Apostles, and us, to look to Him—to pray to Him—and seek His help in all times when evil attacks us.

We cannot remove sin from ourselves by our own working or doing. We cannot free ourselves of the bondage of sin by our obedience to the Law of God. It is only the Lord + Jesus Who can free us from sin, death, and the power of the devil. When we are plagued by sin and evil, instead of trying to

wrestle ourselves out of our situation, we should humbly get on our knees and pray to the Lord + Jesus for help. He has promised to help us. He has come down from Heaven to live as one of us, in order to fulfill the Law on our behalf and then He suffered and died on the tree of the holy cross as a once and for all time payment for our sins. Salvation, forgiveness, life, are found only in Him and His works and merits. Go to Him in prayer, and He, interceding to the heavenly Father on our behalf, will grant us forgiveness.

Furthermore, come to Confession, and tell the pastor or deacon your sins and troubles just as if you were telling the Lord + Jesus about them. And the pastor and deacon will proclaim that your sins have been forgiven by the Lord God Himself. They will speak in the stead and by the command of the Lord + Jesus that you have forgiveness of your sins. Their forgiveness is indeed the Lord God's forgiveness.

For we are dead in our sins and trespasses. Dead men cannot do anything. They certainly cannot save themselves. This is where our Lord + Jesus finds us. He finds us as dead men; dead on account of sin dwelling within us. The boy who had been possessed by the mute spirit was left as a dead man when the demon was cast out of him. The demon had used up all this boy's strength. Then our Lord + Jesus takes him by the hand and raised him up to full life again. His strength was fully restored. He was fully healed, never to be tormented by the demon again. This is how our Lord + Jesus treats us in when we are racked with sin. He comes to us, takes us by the hand through His holy Word and Sacraments, and lifts our eyes up to see His holy cross, and by the power of the Holy Ghost, we are made new creations. We daily arise out of sin, having drowned the Old Adam, to walk as new creations full of grace and life.

Therefore, my dear friends, let us turn away from ourselves. Let us not trust in our own works, or the works of others, but in all things look to the only One Who can help us in all our trials and tribulations, our Lord + Jesus Christ, Who has come to us to redeem us from sin, death, and the power of the devil, and Who through His Holy Ghost working through the means of grace, grants to us salvation from all our enemies, forgiveness of all our sins, and eternal life with Him in Heaven. Thanks be to God! In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory! I will extol Thee, O Lord, and I will praise Thy Name forever and ever. Amen.

The Votum:

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

Soli Deo Gloria!