

Midweek Lenten Vespers #2
St. Mark 9:17-29
February 28th, 2024
Sts. Peter and Paul Ev. Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

Help Thou Mine Unbelief

In Nomine Iesu!

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

Sermon Text:

“And He asked his father, ‘How long time is it since this hath come unto him?’ And he said, ‘From a child. And oft-times it hath cast him both into the fire and into the waters, to destroy him: but if thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us.’ And Jesus said unto him, ‘If thou canst! All things are possible to him that believeth.’ Straightway the father of the child cried out, and said, ‘I believe; help thou mine unbelief.’”

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.

My dear friends, this past Sunday we heard about a woman, a Canaanitish woman of Syro-Phoenician heritage, who possessed great faith. The Lord + Jesus, aware of her great faith, allowed us to see just how great her faith was by testing her with a trial. Even though the Lord rebuffed her every plea, she still clung to Him in faith. He was her only hope. She would not let Him go without helping her. Her faith was great indeed, for she persisted until her daughter, grievously vexed with a demon, was cured of the demon possession. The faith of this Canaanitish woman is something to which we should desire to emulate. This was the person our Lord helped in the Gospel reading from this past Sunday.

Today, my dear friends, we are met with a man whose faith is probably more like our own. Sure, we want to believe that in the midst of trial and persecution, like the Canaanitish woman endured, we would never fail in our faith towards the Lord + Jesus. And at times we can be! But the reality is we are often more like the father of this demon-possessed boy. Note that! Two parents, two children possessed by demons. One a daughter, the other a son. A mother pleads for her daughter, and a father pleads for his son. One has great faith, and one deals with his internal doubts that anyone could help him.

We are often like the father of this demon-possessed boy. When trial and persecution assail us, it is hard not to question the Lord and His motives. It is hard not to at least have some doubt that the Lord will help us at all. This is especially true if the trial and hardship last for a long time. Doubt begins to creep in. “Will this ever end?” we begin to say to ourselves. We find ourselves in the same situation that this father of the demon-possessed boy found himself. Consider, my friends, how long this father had to endure the pain and suffering which his son endured. This was the first question that our Lord + Jesus asks the father: “How long time is it since this hath come unto him?” The father’s answer is revealing: “From a child.” This father had been dealing with this problem for a long time. Since his son

was a child.

It would make sense that a loving father would have sought out any help that he could find. And now he finds himself before the Lord. He had come to the Lord + Jesus with his son to have him healed. However, as we learn from the context of the Gospel of the Evangelist St. Mark, the Lord was not present with the rest of his Apostles. He had been on the mountain of transfiguration with Sts. Peter, James, and John. The other Apostles who were left behind were asked by the father if they could do something about this demon-possessed son. Picture it! The father had heard about the miracles of the Lord + Jesus, how else would he have known to come to the Lord. And he had most likely heard that the Lord could cast out demons, as we will hear about in this coming Sunday's Gospel reading from the Evangelist St. Luke. So, the father who had seen the suffering of his son from youth was given a glimmer of hope.

Perhaps this + Jesus of Nazareth could heal his son. But when he arrives to where the Lord was to be found, He was not there. Only the Lord's remaining Apostles were there. And to the dismay of the father, they too were unable to cast out the demon. As it is with us when a hope we have gets snuffed out, the same is true of this father. Faith and belief are crushed because more bad things happen instead of good. How often we find ourselves in very similar situations! It causes our faith to waver and doubt.

This is especially true when we are dealing with sinfulness, either our own or the sins of our loved ones. What this demon was doing to this boy is not much different than what our sins and the sins of our loved ones do to us. What does the father say? "Oft-times it hath cast him both into the fire and into the waters, to destroy him." That is what sin does to everyone it infects. It destroys them. This is especially true when the sin is done willingly, when the sinner thumbs their nose at the Lord God and His Commandments. We who want to live in righteousness and have our loved ones to also believe on the Lord + Jesus and also live in righteousness are brought to great pain and sorrow as we watch them destroy themselves with unbelief and unrighteousness.

We find ourselves saying the same thing as this father to the Lord + Jesus, "But if Thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us." These are the words with the appearance of faith, but are really filled with doubt. "Can the Lord really help me?" we say to ourselves. Part of that is our unwillingness to turn the situation entirely over into the hands of the Lord God. We still believe that we have some power or there is some work we can do that will alter the situation. This explains the Lord + Jesus' reaction to the father's response: "If thou canst! All things are possible to him that believeth." The Lord + Jesus sees right through to the heart of this father and sees the doubt in him. And like a caring surgeon that uses a scalpel to cut out the problem of the flesh, our Lord cuts this man to the heart, and roots out his unbelief and doubt.

These words are also for our benefit! These words are meant to snap us back into great faith like the Canaanitish woman from this past Sunday's Gospel. The Lord can accomplish anything. The Lord can do all things. The Lord with these words snaps the father out of his thinking that he has to do something to fix the problem, and turns the father's hope and trust solely upon the Lord + Jesus. Our Lord would have us do the same thing. He would have us turn from our striving and working, and lay all our troubles into His caring and loving hands. For He can do all things.

These words also open up this man's eyes to see that he was not really believing that the Lord + Jesus could help him. His faith and hope had been shattered after years of disappointment; after seeing time and again that no help came. Here he stands before the Lord + Jesus, the only One Who can help him, and he is still filled with doubt. Our Lord in His loving care opens this man's eyes to see his doubt, so that he can declare, "I believe; help Thou mine unbelief." Our Lord + Jesus would have us trust Him in the same way. He would that we would hear these words to this poor father, and realize

that they are meant for us as well. Especially when we are going through trial and hardship. The Lord will help us. He will not leave us nor forsake us. He will deliver us from every trial and hardship through which we go. He desires that we see our doubt, and repent of it, and cling to Him in faith, just as this father did. He desires that we have the same faith that was found in the Canaanitish woman from this past Sunday.

The Lord + Jesus then confirms the man's faith in Him by casting out the demon from his son. Doubt turned into faith is established by the Lord fulfilling the desire of the father. He does the same thing for us. When we go through trial and hardship, it is hard for us to see the Lord's love and care. It is hard for us not to have doubts and worries. When the Lord + Jesus brings us through the trial and hardship and removes them from our midst, He then shows us how He has been with us the entire time. We see how His hand guided us so that we would come into greater faith in Him than before.

Therefore, my dear friends, let us shake off our doubt and worry, and cling in faith to the One Who can do all things. For in Him we find above all the forgiveness of our sins, even the sin of doubt and worry. He leads us to trust fully in Him by continuing to declare the words of His Gospel to us even in the midst of trial and persecution. He continues to say to us through His ministers that He can do all things, and He will deliver us by His Word, and continue to work on our loved ones with His Word, so that we, and by the Lord God's grace them, will say, "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief." On account of this faith, He will bring all those who cling to Him in faith into His heavenly home so that we may live with Him and all the saints and angels forever and ever free from trial and hardship. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Almighty God, be pleased to accompany Thy Word with Thy Holy Spirit and grant that Thy Word would increase faith in us; bring into the Way of Truth all such as have erred; turn the hearts of the unrepentant; and for sake of Thy Name grant succor to all heavy hearts and those who are heavy-laden, that they may through the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ be relieved and preserved so that they succumb not to the temptation of despair but rather that they gain the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with the Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

The Votum:

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

Soli Deo Gloria!