

## **EVENING WORSHIP**

**\*Call to Worship**

**\*Prayer of Invocation**

**\*Hymn of Praise** TPH 28 “To You, O LORD, I Cry”

**Psalms and Hymns**

**Scripture Reading** Mark 9:14-29

**Sermon** “How Jesus Prompts His Disciples to Pray”

Pastor Joel Irvin

1) *Jesus Meets Us in the Faithless Valley* (vv. 14-19)

2) *A Mixed-up Prayer of Faith & Unbelief Results in a Resurrection* (vv. 20-27)

3) *The Problem of Our Prayerlessness* (vv. 28-29)

**Congregational Prayer**

**\*Apostles' Creed** (p 851)

**Lord's Supper**

**\*Hymn of Praise** TPH 520 “What a Friend We Have in Jesus”

**\*Benediction**

Last week I called up a dear sister facing a serious health problem  
Being her pastor, it is my privilege & duty to encourage the saints,  
but as is so often the case when I attempt to do this w/ a seasoned saint,  
she turned the table & I found myself the one encouraged as I hung up.

She even gave me a quote that she found comforting, being that she was regular in prayer  
The quote was “If you only pray when you are in trouble, then you are in trouble!”  
So let’s heed her advice & stay out of trouble! Let’s pray before we look to God’s Word!

## **READ MARK 9:14-29**

There is quite the contrast btw what we just read, and the scene that precedes this one

Previously, Jesus took 3 disciples up on the mountaintop where He was transfigured,  
the veil was ripped back & Peter, James, and John saw the immensity of Jesus’ glory!  
And Peter loved this mountaintop experience so much he didn’t want to ever leave,  
He said “Jesus, lets pitch tents and stay right here!”

And we see in tonight’s text why Peter didn’t want to return... → *This world is a big mess!*

The famous Renaissance artist Raphael attempted to juxtapose these scenes,  
in the last oil painting he ever did called, “the Transfiguration.”  
The top half of Raphael’s painting is the mountaintop, glorious & bright!  
The bottom half is very dark, where you find a mass of distressed folk

All their fuss centers on this wide-eyed boy standing with 1 hand raised in agony,  
the other hand pointed downward & tensed up as though he’s expecting to collapse.

In fact, all you need to do is look at all the hands to get how bad it is in the dark valley,  
You see hands raised in exasperation, hands w/ fingers pointing accusingly,  
the father’s hands cling to his son, disciples’ hands indicating Jesus is on the mountain,  
one disciple clutches a book in his hand in hopes of finding answers

The dark half of this painting really does capture the scene our text describes quite well.

It is a busy scene of chaos filled w/ a lot of actors

You have the failing disciples, the arguing scribes, a crowd chasing the action,  
a father looking for help, the tormented boy & even an unclean spirit

And all this busyness fits Mark’s Gospel (1 of Mark’s favorite words is “immediately”)

A word we find 3 times in this passage, but there’s something interesting to this scene

**Mark puts the brakes on!**

Mark’s busy scene suddenly goes slow motion on us right in the middle

The father calls out to Jesus & describes in great detail his son's condition  
And when the boy is brought to Jesus,  
Time really slows it down so we see the graphic nature of this evil at work  
'Immediately' the spirit throws him to the ground & begins convulsing him,  
& we're left to imagine him rolling about while foaming at the mouth

You'd think that Jesus would see this & we'd get another one of Mark's 'immediatlys'  
& Jesus would hop to helping this poor, suffering child.  
But instead, Jesus pauses & begins acting like a doctor needing further info to make a diagnosis

A boy is writhing on the ground & Jesus turns to dad & says,  
"How long has this been happening to him?"  
***What!!! Jesus, this is entirely unnecessary!***  
***Why don't you just get on w/ helping him!***

Jesus! You cast a whole legion of demons out of a man back in ch. 5.  
And here is this single spirit tossing this poor child around like a rag doll  
& you are acting like we need to slow down & think about this situation

(PAUSE.....)

***And we do... Friends, we need to slow down & think about our situation!***

We need to pause & face up to the awfulness of evil in our world  
and really take in how powerless we are in it.

And then, we need to turn & invite Jesus to enter into that situation!  
We need to turn & invite Jesus into the awfulness of a world that we cannot fix...

Recognizing the evil in this world is not hard.  
We know we are in an environment filled w/ stress, depression, pain, & brokenness  
We turn on the news daily, we meet tragedy as we go through life  
but to really take in our helplessness in the face of evil is hard to do.

We are tempted to busy hands → (It is not idle hands that are the devil's workshop in our day)  
we try to fix the problem, or we post it to social media & leave it at that

Or if we do see we're helpless, we might simply shrug at the problem & move on.  
& the pace of our hectic lives, & our distracted minds work against us, don't they?

But Friends, we need to slow down & think about our situation,  
We need to see our complete inadequacy to do life, and that we have but one recourse  
***To invite Jesus into our situation, to invite Jesus into every life situation,***  
***believing He has come to do what is impossible for us.***

***Because what is impossible for you in this dark valley is possible for Jesus!*** (PAUSE)

That is why Jesus comes down from the mountaintop,  
and that descent of Jesus from that glory into our dark valley  
is a picture of the Incarnation, Jesus leaving His heavenly throne  
& coming to dwell with sinful man  
because He knows that there is a big mess down here that no man can fix but Him

And that is exactly what Jesus finds, a big mess, when He arrives in the valley  
In v. 14 he finds the other 9 disciples surrounded by a big crowd,  
and there are some scribes who are arguing with them...

Now we can put 2 and 2 together from what the father says in v. 18  
The father did what any of you parents would if your child had been hijacked by pure evil  
He came looking for help, for Jesus, only to find Jesus was on the mountain top  
but that was all right, b/c Jesus' disciples were here

Remember back in ch. 6, Jesus had given the disciples authority over unclean spirits,  
and they went throughout the region in 6 groups casting out demons everywhere...

So the disciples would have said to dad, "No problem, bring your boy here. We got this!"  
But then they got humiliated b/c the 9 of them together were powerless against 1 spirit.  
And some nearby scribes saw this, and jumped all over them!

The last time we heard about the scribes was in ch. 8  
when Jesus announced the scribes were going to reject & kill Him,  
Jesus said the scribes' purpose is to help get Him to the cross.

And we see Jesus is right b/c the scribes see this bigtime failure  
and they begin to publicly discredit Jesus' disciples, which attracted a big crowd!

But then Jesus walks into this mess, & the crowd immediately runs up to him,  
b/c v. 15 says that they were greatly amazed by Him,  
and this Greek word for amazed communicates just that... (wonder, marveling)  
Jesus' descent recalls the scene when Moses came down Mount Sinai,  
and Moses' face was shining & the wilderness generation was amazed

Now we aren't told whether Jesus was glowing or not, but notice all the arguing stops  
All the big talkers got nothing to say when Jesus says,  
"What are you arguing about with them?"

The only one w/ nerve to speak up is the most desperate person there...  
This poor father whose hopes have been crushed

He says, "Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him  
mute. <sup>18</sup>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.**"

***The disciples were not able.*** → Do you hear his disappointment?

The man came, bringing his tormented son to Jesus,  
and Jesus' disciples confidently stepped up even though they had nothing for him!

Jesus disciples must have been like, "Sorry to disappoint you man, we'd like to help you out,  
but it turns out that your boy has really got it bad, far worse than what we thought."

And Jesus responds to hearing the father's disappointment w/ His own in v. 19

<sup>19</sup>And he answered them, "O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me."

Jesus quotes from the song Moses gave the wilderness generation,  
where God articulates His frustration over Israel's unbelief

Deuteronomy 32:20 → And he said, '*I will hide my face from them; I will see what their end will be, for they are a perverse generation, children in whom is no faithfulness.*

God says the 12 tribes' problem was lack of faith in Him...

God called His son out of the valley of Egypt to be a light to the nations.

And He showed them His power by parting the Red Sea,  
conquering Israel's enemies, providing for them in the desert

And despite all God's mighty deeds, they still had no faith!

And Jesus looks at these 12 disciples & sees nothing has changed

And Jesus says "How long must I bear with you, faithless generation?" (PAUSE)

→ And the Church needs to hear Jesus' rebuke too...

You need to hear our unbelief & lack of trust, disappoints our God!

& we need to hear this in light of the context of Jesus up on the mountain

& someone looking for Jesus and → ***turning to the disciples***

Because that is where Jesus is right now, up in heaven, in glory

but Jesus is still at work drawing folks to Himself → through His Church

Folks will come to **us** looking for Jesus & His help,

and we will disappoint **them**, & we will disappoint **God** if our words & actions  
are not the fruit of our faith in Jesus Christ

\*(And if you have come to the Church in the past looking for Jesus & His help,

and you have been disappointed, it is not Jesus' fault. It is ours! Forgive us our unbelief)

This father heard about the mighty deeds of Jesus & came to Jesus' disciples,  
only to find that they could not help b/c of they didn't believe...

And Jesus' rebuke tells the Church that we ought not be like that!

We ought not be saying we are His disciples in this world  
while living as though we don't believe in His power

And we cannot get off the hook by saying that we don't have power like these disciples did!

***Do you know who are the most powerful people on this planet today? → Christians!!!***

We have what the disciples don't, b/c Pentecost hasn't come for them yet.

Christians have been given the Holy Spirit, God Almighty dwelling in us  
the Person who connects us on earth to the mighty Christ above!

So people running around looking for help in this dark mess of our world  
ought to see that we believe in Christ when we face evil...

And yet how often do troubles come, and we stop trusting God,  
and people see we are no help to anyone b/c we don't really believe!

We shrug our shoulders when we can't fix it & move on!

And we deserve it when modern day scribes jump on us for our hypocrisy!

But there is good news for the Church! → Jesus' rebuke is not the end of the story!

No! There is gospel in v. 19 because Jesus doesn't rebuke these faithless disciples  
& then head back up the mountain to hang out w/ Elijah & Moses,  
while the scribes deal the knockout blow

The gospel tells us tonight that Jesus doesn't turn His face away and leave us in our mess

No! → Jesus says, "Bring your son to me! Let me have a look at this situation!"

The good news of the gospel is mighty Jesus came & is concerned about our situation,  
even after we have gone and made a big mess into a really big mess!

***Is that not the delightful to hear? Praise God for Jesus' compassion***

Can you imagine the father's delight to hear Jesus is still concerned?

And so they bring his tortured boy to Jesus,

and seeing the mighty Christ, this unclean spirit knows his time is about up,  
so he begins to attack this child while he still can...

And we see here both how badly Satan wants to destroy us  
and how powerless we are against the forces of darkness.

And dad sees this happening again, and he looks w/ hope that Jesus will do something,  
but instead, Jesus thinks it is time to have a conversation...

He asks dad to recall his boy's whole awful life story,

a life in bondage to a spirit so evil that it doesn't just torture him bodily,  
but emotionally too, as he cannot even talk to his father,

this spirit has this boy's tongue stuck in a vise so he cannot even express his pain!

Why does Jesus do this, allowing this crisis to develop in front of him,  
while pushing dad to give voice to the immensity of this evil?

**Jesus does it for dad's sake, b/c he too needs to be rescued!**

And dad asked to be a disciple, when he came to Jesus calling Him “Teacher.”  
Jesus loves this newest disciple as much as He loves his boy,  
and dad needs to see he is bound up too, equally helpless in the face of such evil.  
He needs to come to the end of himself & take hold of Jesus

And you see he begins to move towards Jesus as he recalls his son’s lifetime of affliction,  
and then he moves towards Jesus, expressing belief that Jesus cares, saying  
But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.”

Notice first the man says, “Help us!” which shows that he acknowledges he is likewise needy,  
and next notice that he does not doubt that Jesus has compassion for them,  
he only doubts that Jesus has the power...

There are folks who look at the problem of evil in our world,  
and some conclude that God has power, but does not have compassion for men,  
and others conclude that God has compassion, but doesn’t have the power,  
like this man does here...

And Jesus challenges his skepticism by extending the promise of God for him to grab  
V23 “If you can! All things are possible for one who believes.”

(PAUSE) Do you see at this moment, everything is at stake for this dad.  
He stands there completely helpless, yet knows it somehow depends on him to reach out  
Inside him wages a war btw faith & doubt over the truth of Jesus’ promise  
Jesus has prompted a response, and everything hinges on it!

& with astounding honesty, he grabs hold of Jesus’ promise in one hand  
and in the other holds out what is going on in the dark valley of his soul  
He cries out, “I believe, help my unbelief!”

I want us to see 2 things here.

- 1) 1<sup>st</sup>, this is a 5 word prayer inviting Jesus not just to rescue his son,  
but to enter into the deepest recesses of his own soul to solve the riddle of his heart

He came believing, but the evil of this world now just seems too much,  
he sees he is only half-hearted at best, and ever prone to turn away  
so he says “Jesus, help me just as I am, a poor miserable doubter!”

→ And a glorious light beams forth here in the dark valley of the faithless  
Faith wins as a stake is driven through his doubt as he condemns his unbelief

2) Secondly, Jesus prompted him to believe by means of a crisis

And so often this is what it takes to get us there...

By crisis Jesus pushes us to the point where we can major in helplessness,  
so that we might finally begin to minor in faithfulness

And friends, this needs to be our 1<sup>st</sup> thought, our 1<sup>st</sup> thought, when crisis comes our way

Consider it a necessary mercy that God sends trials to shake us from our delusions

awakening us from the reality that we lack the resources to do life in this age.

Trials are wonderful mercies helping us to come to the end of ourselves

so we might grab hold of the saving Christ

All we need to access Jesus is to acknowledge our helplessness,

and come with all the faith that we have at hand, whether it is big faith or baby faith,

devoted faith or distracted faith,... so long as it is faith in X, faith gets the victory

b/c it is not the size of our faith, but the Subject of our faith

Faith is simply us in all our weakness trusting Jesus' promise,

knowing it is through our weakness that the perfect power of God is realized.

As God told Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:9

*"My grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in weakness"*

When you come to believing Jesus in your time of weakness,

you are asking for the glory of the mountaintop to descend into your dark valley

And then we discover that Christ doesn't lack power to save us

Oh, friends, take encouragement from this promise of Jesus

that all things are possible for Him who believes.

As we see in v. 25 as Jesus now speaks & acts to rescue the son. "You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again." <sup>26</sup> 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." <sup>27</sup> But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.

Here we see the believing Son of God say, "I command you" and the spirit leaves...

leaving the boy like a corpse, b/c the Son has to die 1<sup>st</sup> before he can be raised.

Jesus takes him by the hand and raises him from the dead

The word for arose is the same Jesus uses in v. 31 for His own resurrection.

Mark may well be hinting that this here is a gospel preview

A grieving Father, the death of beloved Son who opens not His mouth, and resurrection power!

But the more immediate thing for us to see is how the imperfect faith of this dad,

is the catalyst for the salvation of one this one he loves



And we know faith in God to save is the point

b/c of what happens in the last scene where the disciples don't get it!

<sup>28</sup> And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" <sup>29</sup> And he said to them, "This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer."

The disciples have not figured out why they were not able,  
which is why they ask Jesus what went wrong for them  
and Jesus says, "This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer!"

And by "this kind," Jesus doesn't mean that this was a super-demon, of a special class  
No, Jesus is saying that unclean spirits in general belong to the supernatural realm  
Demons are of a type that cannot be tackled by human strength

Which means we ought to be dumbfounded by the disciples' audacity!

**They didn't pray! They didn't pray! They didn't pray!**

The whole time they were there trying to cast it out, not once did they stop to pray!  
9 disciples going at it for who knows how long, and to a man not one of them said  
"Hold on guys! We might need God's help here! We should stop & pray!"

As they took turns failing again & again to the dismay of this poor father,  
not once did they stop to think that their Teacher, the Mighty Jesus,  
had been a Man of prayer from chapter 1 on... "Maybe we should pray for help!"

Even after watching Jesus push that father to the crisis point so that he would pray "Help me!"  
it still has not occurred to them that their failing comes down to their pride!

In fact, they still don't get it b/c in 5 vv. they'll be arguing about who is the greatest

Do you know that the main reason you don't pray is b/c you are proud, afraid to be helpless!  
And it is insanity, b/c we have no power of ourselves in a dark, evil world.

And we see here that there are powerful cosmic forces that want to destroy us.

And I have become convinced that Satan may not be that worried about anything we do...  
**except praying...**

I came to that conclusion a few years back when I visited a place posing as a church,  
and the Head Wolf walked up to me out of the blue, snapped his fingers in my face,  
and repeatedly yelled at me to "Stop praying" with genuine fear in his eyes!  
(PAUSE) I had a light bulb moment as it dawned on me  
that I don't take seriously enough the power of prayer!

That each and every day Satan is at work mobilizing everything he can to keep us from praying.  
b/c he knows that his situation gets worse the moment you start talking to Jesus...

This is why the unclean spirit reacted the way it did when dad invited Jesus into his situation  
It knew its time was up!

Jesus was telling his disciples they need to understand the problem of being prayerless!  
And he is giving them this lesson right after descending down the mountain  
b/c Jesus is on His way to the cross & has called them to deny self & follow Him

To this point, it has been relatively easy for them,  
but as they continue to follow Jesus being a disciple is going to get harder,  
demons get tougher, temptations get tougher, trials get tougher,  
so they need to become more & more a people of prayer!

And the same is true for us...

Coming to Christ is often a glorious high, but life doesn't get easier...  
Rather, you are going to find all the more need to pray,  
as God calls you to do what you cannot possibly do on your own.

That is what Jesus was preparing the disciples for! After the Cross,  
these eleven were being called to confront the greatest empire in the world,  
along with all the remaining spiritual forces of darkness

But Jesus gave them the Holy Spirit so that they could have immediate access to Him,  
the memory of a scene when He said "All things are possible for one who believes,"  
and a reminder to see prayer as a weapon that would make them invincible!

Prayer is a weapon of such power it is no wonder it makes the enemy tremble!  
It is a weapon that at the mere drop of a believers' knees can advance the Kingdom,  
and bring all its power to bear on anything God lays on your heart.

Prayer has power independent of space,  
as you can invite Christ to lay His hands on people in China or in South Bend,  
Prayer has power independent of time,  
as you can pray for an Elkhart Church located at the corner of  
"Imaginary Ave" & "Not Yet" Blvd

& this weapon of enormous power cannot be employed for anything  
but Jesus' glory & our good

So we need to be constant in using it, praying without ceasing as Paul says  
Which means we need to slow down & think about the situations of life,  
resist our prideful tendencies and admit our complete inadequacy to do life,  
and be regularly inviting Jesus into each and every situation,  
believing that He can do what is impossible for us

So how do we start if we have not been regular in prayer?

Well, the way to learn how to pray is by praying.

Start bringing to God all the situations you face in a dangerous world...

*“Father, have mercy on me as I head out into a culture that rages against Your Son...*

*Lord Jesus, help me not to be rude to my parents when they ask me to do chores*

*Lord God, set my heart free of wrongful desires for what is not mine!”*

And also set yourself to praying for others.

You can help people more by praying for them, than you ever could otherwise

It is really remarkable when you get in the habit of doing this

Perhaps you know someone who gets stressed out regularly,

You know, that person who comes up & just lets go with all their issues of the day

and as they walk away you feel like you have just been thrown up on.

Do yourself & that person a favor & stop them & say, “I’m so sorry! Let’s pray right now!”

→& do it on the spot! Don’t say “I’ll pray for you” even if you really will!

Because most people don’t believe you when you say that...

After the waitress or waiter brings your food,

tell them that you are going to pray for your food

& you would like to know if there is anything that they would like you to pray for

I am no prayer warrior, but I have begun to find that it is pretty amazing

when you start praying regularly, things start to happen that you wouldn’t expect

Whatever you do, just start praying even if you find it difficult...

b/c you don’t have what it takes to get through life on your own.

And don’t say you are too busy to pray. That is the enemy’s tactic in our day

Think of it exactly the opposite.

Martin Luther said that if he had much to do, it meant he had to pray more!

Remember Jesus is the resurrected Lord who can & will bring light & life into our world,

and He is simply waiting for us to stop & come to Him w/ all our mess! Amen?

