

Mark 9:14-29

“*O faithless generation!*” says Jesus. To whom is He speaking? To the crowd? The boy’s father? His own disciples? Surely not to us? Yet the answer to our question is: yes, yes, yes, and yes. Jesus speaks to all; to them and to us. We are as much a faithless generation today as were the people of that day. But take heart. For with these condemnatory words Jesus is calling us to faith. We see this in our Gospel narrative. And what we see there may God also bring about with us today.

This story in Mark 9 is not flattering to anyone. The scribes and the disciples are arguing with each other. The boy’s father expresses pure unbelief. The disciples are ashamed and frustrated because they are unable to cast the demon out of the boy. There is no one here who shines. No one who is deserving of praise. They are, all of them, a faithless generation.

But are we worthy of praise? Do we never argue? Do we never express unbelief? Do we never become frustrated at our helplessness? Shame on us if we think a lot of ourselves. The one who thinks he is full of faith is an easy target for the devils, because faith never looks to itself; it looks only to Jesus. Faith does not take note of itself and measure itself. Those who have faith are those who see themselves as weak; who always want more of Jesus, not less. “*It is not the healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick.*” Woe is me if I think I am a strong Christian with a healthy faith. But blessed are those who see that they are spiritually weak, and sick, and much in need of Jesus.

Such was the boy’s father. He had been living a nightmare. The demon had been using his son as a play toy. The anguish of this father would have been simply incredible at seeing his son suffer from childhood at the hands of this demon. He brings his boy to Jesus, but the Lord is absent. So the disciples attempt to drive the demon out. Yet they fail miserably. The demon shames the disciples by refusing to leave the boy. When Jesus comes upon the scene, the father, exasperated, utters words that are plain ignorant: “*If you can do anything (Jesus), then have compassion on us and help us!*”

Oh my! That is not faith speaking, but faithlessness, unbelief. It’s how the devil speaks. “If you can, turn these stones into bread.” “If you can, come down from the cross.” Such unbelief must be rebuked. “*If you can! All things are possible for one who believes.*” With these words Jesus rebukes the father of the boy. But He does not push him away with these words. Rather He invites him to believe. He calls him to faith.

Jesus rebukes us for the same reason. To call us to faith. But when we are rebuked, by parents, by teachers, by the pastor or an elder, it’s easy for us to become defensive. We don’t like to be made to feel small; to admit that we have failed.

Yet this is where everyone in our text is at. The boy’s father and Jesus’ own disciples. They failed to cast the demon out, and the father failed to believe that Jesus could. Our text is full of failures. But it is to such failures, who have more unbelief than faith, that Jesus shows mercy and pity. He shows mercy to the boy by driving out the demon. He has pity on the boy’s father, taking his boy away from that devil and giving him back to him.

Jesus saves the day. Had He not come, nothing good would have taken place. But now everyone goes home joyfully. Except for the disciples. Can you feel their frustration? It’s eating away at

them. They didn't dare ask Jesus with the crowd all around them; they were too ashamed. But in private they approach Him: "*Why could we not cast the (demon) out?*" "*This kind,*" says Jesus, "*cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.*"

This should halt us in our tracks. We who think too much of ourselves...we who know the Scriptures so well that we have no need to read them daily and study them thoroughly...we who have enough of Jesus...we who barely spend any time at all in prayer each day - Jesus' words ought to make us shudder and repent.

Why prayer? Why does this kind of demon only come out by prayer? Because in prayer we become nothing. We become small, vulnerable, weak. Christians are not prayer warriors; there is no such thing; rather we're like the ten lepers begging Jesus to have mercy on them. In prayer we hide behind Jesus. We take refuge under His cross. We utter our prayers out from the water of our baptism.

The disciples were full of themselves. They confidently told that demon to leave the boy. Ha! The demon mocked them. Who did they think they were that they could tell this demon what to do? And who do we think we are? We are nothing but helpless sinners. We have no power over the demons. We can't even control our own life.

But we have One we can turn to: Jesus. He does not laugh at our smallness. He does not mock our failings. And He is not absent. We may absent ourselves from Him, but He is here now for you. And so it's time to pray. But what do we say? Listen to the boy's father. "*I believe; help my unbelief.*"

That's where we are at, if we are honest enough to admit it. Do you have perfect faith? The devil wants you to think you do. But no one does. Abraham didn't. King David didn't. Neither did Elijah or Elisha or any of the prophets. Nor did any of Jesus' disciples. This father is not defensive. He admits the smallness of his faith. He prays in faith, confessing that his unbelief is right there with it. That's how we should pray. Not as cocky Christians, but as those who hide behind Jesus because we're naked and ashamed.

Jesus answered this father's prayer. He drove out the demon. What demons are in your life? What addictions? What sinful urges? What is too powerful for you? It cannot be controlled. You cannot get rid of it. But you can hide behind Jesus. You can run to your baptism and stay in that water. Jesus will help you. He can, and He will. It's not about your faith; how strong it is. It's about Jesus. He is your strength. You can always fall into His arms.

It's time for us to admit that our lives have been wrong. We have showed more unbelief than faith. We have thought too much of ourselves. Friend, Jesus forgives you. He does not hold your past against you. He takes your sinful past, all your wrongs and failures, and He dies on the cross for you, and you, each and every one of you is forgiven.

And no demon can take that away from you. Nothing can change what Jesus did for you. Jesus' forgiveness for you is the greatest thing in your life. No addiction, no urge, no controlling power can stand up to it. Now go and be at peace, and live in joy, as you live hiding behind Jesus. Amen.