

Sermon – February 21, 2021  
“All things can be done for the one who believes”  
The Rev. John C. Wright

Text: Mark 9:14-29

*Pray with me: Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Come, Holy Spirit, come, visit, fill and anoint the sharing of these words. Make them to be a blessing for your people, a blessing that leads to life eternal and fruitful labor as we tarry here on this mission field. Lord, come and astonish us with your word this day. Amen*

Good Morning! I hope that we are all enjoying this bit of winter weather. I will say I am looking forward to a bit of a warm up and some dryer weather. Last week, we talked about listening to Jesus by reading one of the Gospels, and as we read, marking the words that Jesus spoke. We are to then go back over those words and, speaking them aloud, let the Holy Spirit guide us into what those words may mean for us today. Lent started last Wednesday, so hopefully if you are going to take this challenge, you have picked out one of the Gospels and started to read a chapter or more each day. There is still time to get started. I also promised to give us a time during the service each week to share what we might be learning. Did anyone have anything they found in their reading that they would like to share? Let me give you an example from my reading this past week. I am reading Matthew's Gospel and this week I read from Matthew 21:18-22. This is the account of Jesus cursing the fig tree as he goes into Jerusalem. The last verse is where I found my interest focused as I read it aloud and tried to listen for Jesus speaking. That verse is, "Whatever you ask for in prayer with faith, you will receive." As the week progressed and I spent time listening to the Holy Spirit's guidance into what those words might mean for me, I noticed I was guided to today's passage from Mark about Jesus' descent from the transfiguration. I noticed the prayer and faith combination in this text and as the week continued, many times I found myself pointed to passages and events that discuss this connection between prayer and faith. In fact, today's sermon hopefully has this idea connected to it. This is what I am asking each of us to do: read a chapter of a Gospel, mark Jesus' words, say them aloud, let the Holy Spirit guide you into God's message for you in those words, and then, if you are willing, share some of your experience during our service. You don't have to share, but I will encourage us to do so. I would rather hear what God is speaking to us

through the scriptures and Spirit than hear me speak. Let me encourage you to give this a try. You might be astonished at what you encounter.

Let me give us some additional context for this morning's scripture. First, we need to recall that Jesus has just been transfigured on the mountain top. There, with only Peter, James and John, some of Jesus' glory has been witnessed. These three witnesses have followed Jesus back down the mountain to the valley scene we encountered. Prior to the transfiguration, Jesus had empowered the twelve disciples to go into the surrounding towns and villages and heal. This included casting out demons. The twelve have done this and returned amazed at what they have done in Jesus' name. Finally, we should also remember that in the days of the Exodus, Moses came down the mountain with Joshua and the two stone tables written on both sides with the words of the stipulations of the covenant with God. When Moses came to the people, he found them in disarray, having worshiped the golden calf they had made and celebrating in the camp, and he had to bring order to the camp. Here, Jesus comes down from the mountain to an argument raging between his disciples and scribes while the crowd looks on. In the midst of this crowd is a father who has brought his son to be healed by Jesus, and Jesus' disciples have tried to heal the boy but failed. This may be the topic of the argument with the scribes.

As Jesus arrives, he immediately acts to bring order to this scene. He asks about the topic of the argument, a question he does not receive a direct answer to. Instead, a man comes forward and speaks. The father describes the torment of his son and tells Jesus that the disciples failed to free his son from the spirit that binds the child.

Jesus' response to the father seems out of place and character for Jesus. He says, "You faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him to me." Jesus does not condemn his disciples or criticize them, but does bring the focus of the unfolding scene to a lack of faith. Jesus comes down the mountain as one full of faith but is surrounded by those with little or no faith. Jesus may be speaking to his short time that remains with his disciples and the needed teaching yet required for his disciples to learn what they need in order to continue his work effectively in his absence. Notice that Jesus' closing statement is to bring the child to him. He will act on this father's request.

As the child is brought to Jesus, the spirit manifests its control over the child. Jesus, in great compassion for the father, asks him, "How long has this been occurring?" The father's response to Jesus provides additional details, giving us greater insight into this spirit's intent.

The father tells Jesus that since childhood this spirit has attempted to cast the boy into fire and water. These are attempts by this spirit to destroy the image of God in this child. In the presence of Jesus, this spirit demonstrates its control and intention. As the father sees this manifestation, doubts about Jesus' ability to heal surface within his heart, and he tells Jesus, "If you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us." Can you catch the doubt and despair that this father has at the needs of his child that he cannot meet and his fears that Jesus also cannot help? The father's doubt shows his lack of faith. Jesus' response to this father is amazing. Jesus tells him, "If you are able!— All things can be done for the one who believes." Did we catch that? All things, not some things, not a few things, but all things for one who believes. How much do we have to believe and what do we have to believe in for all things to be done? Here is this father, whose child is desperately ill, convulsing before Jesus, and Jesus has just told him if he will believe enough that this can end. Jesus' disciples have tried and failed to heal the child, yet here is Jesus standing before the child talking to the father, telling him if he believes, all things are possible.

The father's immediate response to Jesus is, "I believe; help my unbelief!" I think this is one of those statements that we should all have marked in our Bibles. I believe; help my unbelief! This father has some belief that Jesus could help his son or he would not have brought his son to Jesus. But doubt has risen within the father's heart and he fears he lacks enough belief for healing to occur. He cries out to Jesus, admitting that he lacks complete belief, and asks for help to fill the deficit for what is needed so that his son can be healed. Can we place ourselves in this father's place? Are we seeking healing in our lives or the life of a loved one, yet we too fear we lack enough faith in Jesus that our situation may not be touched by the master? Remember the cry of this father. In his cry he is saying, "Here is all the faith I have. Help my unbelief. Somehow fill in what I lack that all things may be done."

Watch what Jesus does. Jesus hears this father's cry for help even with this admitted lack of complete faith and Jesus acts. Jesus meets this father where he is and at his admitted point of need. That is how Jesus will treat each of us if we will ask for faith. Jesus will come to us at our point of need and meet us wherever we are and act, if we will only begin to believe and ask him to help us believe more. Jesus turns to the boy, addresses the spirit and—don't miss these words that Jesus speaks—saying, "I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again!" Jesus does not call on some deity. Jesus does not call on God. Jesus is God. All the power of God is in

Jesus through the Holy Spirit. Jesus has the authority to do all things. Jesus says, “I command you.” There is no magic spell. There are no secret words. There is only Jesus commanding this spirit to come out and be gone forever from this boy. The father’s faith may fail, but Jesus is faithful. And the spirit obeys. It makes its last attempt to destroy the image of God in this child and then is gone. The crowd watching thinks the boy is dead. I suspect the scribes are busy writing down for their bosses that Jesus commanded the spirit to come out and declared himself its authority, making him equal with God. The boy is now still, like a corpse, and Jesus takes him by the hand and lifts him up. Remember the crowd at Jairus’ house that laughed at Jesus when he came to heal Jairus’ daughter because they knew she was dead? There also Jesus took her by the hand and lifted her up. This is resurrection power; all things are possible for one who believes. And the boy is able to stand. Jesus brings life. Unlike Moses, Jesus does not go back up the mountain to meet again with God. God has come down from the mountain and is among men, and where he goes, there is life.

Now when the father and son are gone and the crowds are dispersed and Jesus is alone with his disciples, they ask him the question that we also would ask: “Why did we not succeed to cast out this spirit?” Their question becomes our question, “Why can we not succeed when we pray for people to be healed?” Look at the answer Jesus gives these disciples. He does not challenge their lack of faith. He does not remind them that they tried this in their power assuming that the ability Jesus had given them earlier was now at their command to use. He tells them that they must pray to be successful. This is the same answer for us. When the moment comes and we have been asked to pray for someone, we are not to say a short prayer and expect that we will see results. We, like this father, need to realize that we have a faith deficit and that we need Jesus to meet us where we are and to act where our faith is limited and fill in our faith deficit. To fill our lack of belief, we need to pray. Not a short “Okay Jesus, now would be a good time for you to show up” prayer. The prayer Jesus describes here is one of constant communion with Jesus, with God, through the Holy Spirit. This type of prayer starts in the morning and is prayed continuously all the time. This is a daily walk with Jesus. This is communion with Jesus. This is us getting to know Jesus so that he can meet us where we are in our time of need, no matter our belief or unbelief, and act where we are. You see, those who know Jesus, not know about him, but know him at a deep level, have developed this knowledge by spending time with Jesus in

conversation, prayer, and they are able to have resurrection power flow through them to others in the name of Jesus Christ.

On the day our neighbor, sister or brother in Christ, friend, family member, child, or stranger comes and asks if this Jesus we follow is able to heal the brokenness they have inside, the pain they carry, the unremovable wound that needs to be healed, will we be ready? Yes, Jesus is able. Jesus is God in the flesh who is now seated at the right hand of God with authority over all things. Our faith may not be great, and the faith of those who come to us may not be great, but Jesus is able to meet us where we are and heal, drive out that which will not leave, and never let it return again. Will we be ready? Will we spend the time needed in communion with Jesus so that we may be ready conduits for the very power of God? We ask today this same question that the disciples asked, “Why can we not heal as Jesus healed?” Is it our lack of faith? Is it a lack of faith in those who come for healing? Jesus’ answer is the same today as it was for the disciples who failed on that day: we will be able only through prayer. What do we need to do to be able? Pray. We ask Jesus like the father here asks, “I believe; help my unbelief!” Jesus will work with that prayer. Jesus will work through us if this is our prayer to him, not once, not a couple of days in Lent, but hourly, daily, week by week, year by year, and always. We need to seek to be in communion with Jesus. So, decide to pray. Read about prayer. Take classes about prayer. Open up your Bible and read the prayers that Jesus prayed. Read the psalms and then just start talking with Jesus on a daily basis. Commune with him. All things can be done for the one who believes. Ask Jesus in prayer to help our unbelief. Are we able? This morning we are going to commune with Jesus. As we come to this time of Communion, let us seek to start fresh our prayer life with Jesus. Let us commune with Jesus here and go forth to commune with him daily, hourly, constantly through prayer, that we might be remolded like Jesus, that we might become those who are able.

*Pray with me: Come, Lord Jesus, come. Jesus, teach us to pray that we might be able on that day when the need arises in our life or the lives of those around us. Open us to the guidance of the Holy Spirit to learn to pray and to become those who pray without ceasing. Lord Jesus, come and guide us to make this place a house of prayer and shape us to be people of prayer. Lord, we ask that on that day in that moment when our faith fails that you will meet us where we are and help our unbelief so that we may be used by you to heal the wounds that have never been healed. Lord, all things are possible if we believe, help our unbelief. Come, Lord Jesus, and*

*enable us. Change us, mold us, make us like you. Form us into your image that we might be able to be the body of Christ right here, right now. Amen*