

“I believe; help my unbelief”

How many times have you heard someone say – or said yourself – “I look around and see that there are other much worse off than I”? That may be your thought as you hear about this father and his son here in our text – but then again, maybe not, depending on what you’re dealing with in your lives right now.

The purpose of God speaking this Word to you today is not so that you can make comparisons – but so that, regardless of your situation – He may help you who believe, in your unbelief.

Jesus, Peter, James, and John have just come down from the Mountain of Transfiguration – and they come upon this crowd of people in the midst of an argument. The question that has been raised is WHY the other disciples could not cast out the evil spirit from this boy – but the real question is whether Jesus can do anything about it.

Jesus’ response to the argument is important for a proper understanding of the text. “O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you?” You see, the problem isn’t with Jesus – it’s with them (the father, the son, the disciples, the crowds) – the problem is that they are “faithless.”

“Bring him to me,” Jesus says – and immediately the evil spirit knows that he has met his match – but the evil one doesn’t give up easily, and so he attacks again – the spirit convulses the boy and throws him down.

“How long has this been happening to him?”, Jesus asks – not because He needs to know the boy’s medical history before He can rescue him --- but because He is going to teach us that the problem at hand is faithlessness.

All of us need to pay attention to what Jesus is saying – whether we have children or not. Whether your children are battling cancer, addiction, anxiety, depression, rebellion – or they are “model children” – we are all going to learn about our history.

It’s been “from childhood” the father says. It’s been this way from his birth – the evil spirit is always throwing him into fire and water – trying to destroy him.

That is OUR history. We are born with a spirit that seeks to destroy us – to cast us into the fires of hell – casting us into the depths of the waters (which the people of Jesus' day thought was a place where the demons dwelled).

God's Word teaches us that we are all sinners from birth, from the time of our conception. Whether we are seized by a mute spirit, foaming at the mouth – or not – we are all under the possession of the evil one “from childhood.”

If we don't understand the seriousness of our natural state – then we don't realize how great a need we have for Jesus. But when we know that things are wrong – seriously wrong, like with this boy – then like the father, we bring our problems to the Lord and ask whether Jesus is able to do anything about it.

Can the Lord and Giver of life – can this recently Transfigured one do anything about it? Seriously? Yet, that's what faithless people ask.

“IF YOU CAN?” Come on man, where is your faith! “All things are possible for one who believes,” Jesus says. And then, those striking words of the father – “I believe; help my unbelief!”

Belief and unbelief? How can that be? Does this mean that the father has his own faith – but not enough – so he needs a little performance enhancing faith from Jesus? Does it mean that he WANTS to believe – but Jesus is going to have to give him something to believe in?

No. This is the confession of a desperate father – one who fears that IF the well-being of his son is dependent upon himself, on his believing – then all is lost. IF Jesus needs my help, then we're doomed.

No, this man knows that he stands before God helpless and naked. This is true for ALL OF US – as we sing in the hymn, “nothing in my hand I bring.” If there is to be any rescue, it must come from Jesus, and Him alone.

So Jesus speaks a Word that does what it says – without an assist from anyone else. His Word casts out the evil spirit – and the boy is stiff as a board. “He is dead.”

Dearly beloved, this is who you are before the Lord. Everything totally out of your hands. You are “dead” – but Jesus is not dead. He reaches out and touches the “dead” one and raises him to life.

But the lesson isn't over – there is still this matter of faithlessness. The disciples of Jesus are still wondering why they couldn't help this child. And Jesus tells them – “This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.”

Jesus is still teaching that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone on account of His work alone. He isn't telling the disciples that next time they run into a situation like this they can't forget to pray – or that they need to pray harder – and then the spirit will come out. No, the prescription is ALWAYS Jesus – and ONLY Jesus.

When Jesus speaks of prayer He is speaking of simple faith. It is the prayer of faith that confesses the solution is not found in us, but in Jesus – and that is why we call upon HIM in every trouble – knowing and believing that He is able to rescue us from all things.

Your prayer of faith confesses that you are “dead” in your trespasses and sins – and believes that Jesus rescues you and resurrects you to life. In Holy Baptism He casts out the evil spirits – His absolution sets you free – His Body and Blood resurrects you from death to life, and strengthens you to live by faith.

Regardless of how “good” or “bad” things seems to be for you, or for your children – Jesus is with you, bearing with you, bearing your sin and death – and resurrecting you with His life and salvation.

With Jesus there's no argument about IF – for all things are possible for the one who believes – all things are possible “for you,” in Christ Jesus. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.