

## ***“The Power of Prayer”***

You’ve heard the phrase before – “The Power of Prayer.” That seems to be the issue at hand in our text for today – when the disciples were not able to cast out the spirit from the man’s son. And when they asked why they could not do it – Jesus says to the disciples – “this kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.”

So, what’s the problem? Were His disciples not praying – not praying hard enough – not praying right? Why couldn’t they cast out this spirit that caused such great affliction for this man’s son?

And while we’re at it – why can’t you cast out the demons in your life. Why doesn’t the cancer leave when you pray for healing? Why doesn’t your child get back together with their spouse when you pray for their marriage? Why can’t you break your addictions?

Is prayer really powerful?

To answer these questions, it’s helpful if we look at our text for today within it’s context. This account comes right on the heels of the Transfiguration of Jesus. Jesus has been up on the mountain with Peter, James and John – while the other disciples waited at the foot of the mountain – and failing to cast out this spirit.

Standing by the mountain, it’s helpful to remember another important mountain in Holy Scripture – Mt. Sinai. You remember how Moses lead the people of Israel out of captivity in Egypt and they came to Mt. Sinai – where the Lord called Moses up on the mountain, as the people stayed at the foot of the mountain.

In the Book of Exodus we are told that Moses is “delayed” – and the people say – “we don’t know what has become of him.” Moses is with the Lord up there – but we’re down here, on our own.

Do you recall what happened next? The people took matters into their own hands – crafting a golden calf and worshipping it – saying, “this is our god who brought us up out of the land of Egypt.”

Overlay that with out text for today – where Jesus and three of His disciples are up on the mountain – and the other nine are left to deal with the crowds of people. A man brings his son to them – asking them to heal him. What are they to do?

Jesus seems to be delayed on the mountain – and we don't know what has become of Him – and so they take the matter into their own hands. They can handle this. After all, they're Jesus' chosen disciples --- but they cannot cast out the spirit.

When Moses came down from Sinai and saw the Israelites worshipping the gold calf – he burned with anger – he took the golden calf and burned it, ground it into powder, scattered it on the water, and made the people drink it.

Is that what Jesus does when He comes down the mountain and sees what's going on? The text simply says that He inquires about the argument they are having – and when told of the situation, He says, “O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you?” How long am I to bear with you?”

He says nothing about prayer – rather, He speaks of faithlessness. That's the problem! They are like Israel of old who have taken matters into their own hands. They don't know what Jesus is up to – so they attempt to handle the situation – and you see what the work of their own hands gets them --- nothing!

Whatever rituals or ceremonies these nine disciples might have performed – whatever prayers they might have uttered – were “faithless.” And that's the problem. They looked to themselves – and the result is that they are reminded of how weak and powerless they are. Their faith did not look to Jesus – who alone has the power and authority to cast out this spirit and heal the son.

And so it is with “faithless” attempts today – with pastors who preach as if Jesus has gone away – who baptized as if they don't know what has happened to this Jesus – who distribute the Lord's Supper as if Jesus is far, far away, on some distant mountain top --- who, in their faithlessness, take matters into their own hands.

It's no wonder then, that the people struggle with unbelief. We live as if God has left us to fend for ourselves – and so in our time of trouble – we look elsewhere for our help – and end up in despair when Jesus is delayed in coming to our rescue.

But Jesus has not abandoned us. He is not far, far away. He is not delayed. He comes to us – He is with us – bearing with us as we struggle with unbelief – and even bearing us up, literally, and carrying us to our heavenly home.

Jesus comes today to crush our idolatry – our attempts to take matters into our own hands – all false worship that fails to look to Him for help. He comes with words of promise – pouring out the Holy Spirit upon us – to fill our faithlessness with hope and trust.

Dearly beloved – who struggle with the spirits that afflict you and will not leave you alone or give you a moment of peace – Jesus has indeed ascended into heaven, and the cloud has hidden Him from your sight, but He has not abandoned you and left you alone.

“I will be with you always” is His promise – and continues to be at work in the midst of His people, and for their good – through His called, ordained, authorized ministers – at work through the means of grace He has given to the Church.

As you struggle with your many afflictions – as you struggle with unbelief – He speaks His Words into your ears – so that you may hear His promises, and so faith may live as if the promise is as good as done.

In the midst of afflictions that seek to destroy you – Jesus gives His own Body and Blood into your mouth – and with it, the forgiveness of all your sin – a release from the bondage of sin. And with His Body and Blood and Word of promise – He resurrects faith where once only faithlessness reigned – and brings forth prayers of faith.

THAT'S the “power of prayer” – faith in the Lord Jesus Christ – faith that takes refuge in Him as an ever-present help in trouble – faith that trusts Him even when your afflictions continue – faith that knows that all things are possibly with Jesus – faith that says, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!” Amen.

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