

“Reflections on the Journey”

Sermon Series: “The Way of Jesus”

Mark 9:14-32

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(New International Version)

The Healing of a Boy with an Evil Spirit

¹⁴When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. ¹⁵As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him.

¹⁶"What are you arguing with them about?" he asked.

¹⁷A man in the crowd answered, "Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. ¹⁸Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not."

¹⁹"O unbelieving generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me."

²⁰So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth.

²¹Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?"

"From childhood," he answered. ²²"It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us."

²³"If you can?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for him who believes."

²⁴Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

²⁵When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the evil ^[a] spirit. "You deaf and mute spirit," he said, "I command you, come out of him and never enter him again."

²⁶The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, "He's dead." ²⁷But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.

²⁸After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, "Why couldn't we drive it out?"

²⁹He replied, "This kind can come out only by prayer. ^[b]"

³⁰They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, ³¹because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise." ³²But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.

Footnotes:

- a. [Mark 9:25](#) Greek unclean
 - b. [Mark 9:29](#) Some manuscripts prayer and fasting
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We continue in our sermon series on the Gospel of Mark and today's reading comes from Mark Chapter 9, verses 14 to 32. (Reads March 9:14-32) This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Last Monday, Paul and I had the privilege of watching our oldest daughter Hannah run the 114th Boston Marathon. There were 26,735 who qualified. There were 23,126 who started the race and all but 500 finished. The winner was 21-year-old Robert Cheruiyot from the country of Kenya. Robert set a record with a time of 2 hours, 5 minutes and 52 seconds and won \$175,000 in prize money.



Well about the time that Robert was crossing the finish line, we were positioning ourselves on Beacon Street at mile 23 in hopes of catching a glimpse of Hannah – we waited and waited, studying the faces of the thousands of runners jogging by, until thankfully we managed to catch a glimpse of Hannah before she passed us. We didn't catch her coming, but we caught her going. Jessica joined her for a brief distance and she completed the race at 3 hours and 48 minutes. Well Hannah was disappointed with her time. However, we were awed by the fact that she had completed the 26.2 mile race under 4 hours. Months of training and a commitment to persevere had paid off. Our text today speaks of a different kind of challenge. Not a 26-mile marathon, but a life long journey of faith in the midst of joy & sadness, success & failure, good times & bad times.

Let us pray.

Loving God we gather this morning, so thankful for the gift of life, the gift of this day and the gift of being able to gather for worship. We thank you too for your Word. We thank you for your Holy Spirit. We pray even now that you would instruct us in the way of Jesus. That we would learn from this text of Mark, that we would learn how to be faithful followers where we are, right here and today. Lord, we pray that you would bless this time together in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Last Sunday, Mark Charbonneau preached on Mark 9:4-13, a passage that describes a transfiguration – when Jesus' garments shown with heavenly brightness and Moses and Elijah appeared to Peter, James and John and Jesus. There they experienced another reality on that mountaintop, but eventually they came down, back to the waiting crowds.

Jesus' clothing perhaps still somehow glowed so that the people full of wonder ran to greet him. Jesus, Peter, James and John reentered the valley and a world full of desperate need, full of conflict and full of failure. We discover that a father is desperately seeking help for his very, very sick son. A boy who cannot speak, who suffers from convulsions and perhaps from what we would describe as epilepsy. A boy who has been unwell for years. A boy at risk and in danger of losing his very life by being burned or drowned. The evil one was bent on destroying this boy and the father was desperate. He brought his son to Jesus' disciples and asked them to drive out the spirit. Perhaps he had heard of their healing powers. Once again he felt hope. Once again he believed healing might be available, his boy made well. However, his hopes were dashed again. The disciples could not exorcise the demon. They failed.

Coming down the mountain, Jesus encounters desperate need. He encounters the failure of the disciples and once again, He encounters the contentious scribes. In Verse 14 we read that the teachers of the law and disciples were arguing. We don't know the exact nature of their disagreement, but we can imagine that they were arguing over how to affect a successful exorcism. Sound familiar? In the midst of desperate need, arguing about policies and procedures and unable to agree.

This is life in the real world, life off the mountain. Jesus calls for the boy, but not without expressing His exasperation. Jesus says, "Oh, unbelieving generations. How long shall I stay with you and put up with you?" Have you ever felt that way? Disappointed, discouraged, not getting the kind of response you want?



Commentator Craig Evans writes, “Jesus’ outburst underscores the need for faith. A theme touched upon elsewhere in Mark. This generation is not simply a generation of skeptics, but a generation that has failed to respond to the good news of the presence of the Kingdom. A presence attested by Jesus’ power over Satan and his unholy allies. Because of a lack of faith in Jesus’ proclamation, gaining freedom from Satan’s oppression is hindered. Yes, unbelief causes Jesus to stress and even hinders His ministry. Jesus wonders how long he must put up with this unbelief, a query that may hint at his expectation of His own death.’

I wonder, does Jesus become exasperated by our unbelief? How might we limit what He could do if our faith was stronger? But Jesus persevered. He rebuked the evil spirit and healed the boy. In the face of unbelief, betrayal, suffering and ultimately even death itself, Jesus remained faithful and obedient. He finished the race.

Desperate need, conflict and failure characterized life off the mountain. Not just in the world in Jesus, but today, in the 21st century. Even as this father sought healing for his son, there are mothers and fathers right here in our congregation, right here in Austin, desperately seeking help for their children. Sons and daughters suffering from physical and mental illness, failed marriages, addiction through drugs and alcohol and sons and daughters unwilling to take responsibility for their actions. As parent, we want God’s best for them. We want to see them healed. We want to see them whole.

We can learn something from the father described in this 9th Chapter of Mark. We know that he didn’t give up seeking help for his son. We know that he sought out Jesus’ disciples and then Jesus himself. We know that he was honest, admitting his need for help to overcome his unbelief. Well God did answer his cry for healing and help with his unbelief, the boy was made well.

We can learn something too from the disciples. Faced with their inability to exorcise the demon, they asked Jesus privately, “Why couldn’t we drive it out?” Rather than giving up they too persevered. They were willing to keep learning, to keep growing – willing to keep following Jesus in midst of so much they did not understand. Willing even in the midst of His confusing talk about the trail, death and resurrection.

Two weeks ago, Kyle Key and I had the opportunity to travel to Haiti, the poorest country in the western hemisphere. This country, slightly smaller than the state of Maryland, with a population of approximately nine million people was devastated by a 7.0 magnitude earthquake on January 12, 2010. An earthquake that flattened large parts of Port Au Prince and surrounding towns and villages and claimed more than 220,000 lives.

An assessment recently compiled by the Haitian government has put the total damage from the quake at a massive 7.9 billion dollars or 120% of Haiti’s gross domestic product. According to the report, more than 70% of those losses were sustained by the private sector and 4.4 billion dollars worth of damage to schools, hospitals, roads, bridges, buildings, ports and airports. The total amount of money needed for the country’s reconstruction now stands at 11.5 billion dollars.

Well Austin pretty much feels like mountaintop experience compared to Port Au Prince. Pastor Leon of Haiti Outreach Ministries, took us on a tour of three areas where HOM has planted church communities over the past 15 years. We saw tents, tents everywhere, some provided by the Islamic Relief Agency and others just bits of plastic people had scraped together. We heard that the people were afraid to sleep inside their homes, afraid of falling concrete, afraid of another earthquake.



We visited an area known as Repatriate, an area of land given years ago for Haitians returning from work in the Dominican Republic. We saw many unfinished houses. We saw rubble everywhere. We saw collapsed buildings. The church, built only four years ago, had been destroyed by the earthquake. Desperate need comes in all shapes and sizes. It would have been easy for the father to become discouraged and to stop seeking help for his son or for the disciples to grow weary with their failure to understand to do the things that Jesus and certainly for our brothers and sisters in Haiti, to lose hope in the face of so much loss.

We too can become discouraged and weary with crying out to God for help in the face of so much suffering, struggle and pain it becomes difficult to believe. The father in our text knew he needed help. He didn't make up his mind to try harder or to do better. He knew only Jesus could give him what he needed. In humility and faith he was calling for help rather than walking away in despair. He came to Jesus saying, "I do believe everything is possible, but Lord help me overcome my unbelief."

Yes, it can be hard to keep believing but this prayer helped my unbelief is wise and true and strengthening. The story commends the father's experience to us. He didn't give up. He kept running the race. It also commends the experience of the disciples. They sought understanding. They realized they had a lot more to learn. They too kept running the race.

In the midst of the rubble in Port Au Prince, a tent has been erected for worship. On the day we visited Pastor Leon he was instructing some of the men in pouring concrete posts to better secure the tent stakes, just in case they were hit by a hurricane.

In the midst of desperate need, conflict and failure, Pastor Leon was continuing to follow Jesus and to care for his people. Everything is possible for him who believes. Lord, help my unbelief. In the same way, this woman, whose house we were rebuilding, started her day each morning reading her Bible. "Everything is possible for him who believes," said Jesus. One day she will have a home for her family. One day her sons will find work. One day life will be better.

At a Bible study that Wednesday afternoon, I had the opportunity to encourage these brothers and sisters. At first, I was reluctant. Who was I to talk about hope and faith in the midst of such adversity. But then I remembered 1Peter 3:15, a verse that says:

¹⁵But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,"

I shared with these men and living under such desperate conditions that they were teaching us. That even news stations like CNN were featuring the video clips of Haitian men and women praising God after being buried in the rubble for days. That right here in our congregation we had watched such a clip and spoken of their endurance inspired by hope in the Lord and how they were a model for us.

I don't know what challenges you might be facing this morning. I don't know the ways in which you might be losing hope. I know that our journeys are much like marathons, they are strenuous, that there are peaks and valleys, times of jubilation and times of despair. I know too that Jesus invites us to come to Him as we are, bringing our hopes, bringing concerns big and small, bringing our failure, bringing our conflicts, even bringing our unbelief. We need Jesus. We don't have to go alone. Jesus is with us.



The church in Port Au Prince featured the words of Jesus written across their back wall of their sanctuary. In French it says, "I am with you all the days." So, even there in the midst of the rubble they were reminded of Jesus presence with them.

He never did promise us a life without problems. But He did promise never, never to leave us or forsake us. May we too turn to God and reach for His help rather than turn away and give up.

I'd like to close with these verses from Hebrews Chapter 12.

¹Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. ²Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Let us pray.

Lord, you are well acquainted with the needs of each person gathered here this morning. You are well acquainted with the needs in Haiti, the needs around our world. Lord, even as you invite us to come to you as we are, I pray Lord that you would give us grace to cry like the man in this text, Lord I believe, help my unbelief. Lord, I pray for those who are on difficult spots on their marathon of life, that you would encourage them this day, that you would help them to persevere and that you would bless them with a keen awareness of Your love and presence with them. We pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.

