

Help my unbelief      Mark 9:14-29 17th Sunday after Pentecost Sep. 16, 2018

But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." And Jesus said to him, "If you can! All things are possible for one who believes." Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!" Mark 9 Help my unbelief

Dear friends in Christ, there is a lot of unbelief in the text today. Of course from the usual suspects, the scribes, the unbelieving crowds. But it extends further, to the disciples and even to a father seeking help to his son. Let us see unbelief, and Jesus giving something in which to believe.

We'll start with the scribes. They trust in their rules, their laws, their ways. They are not interested in Jesus and will actively oppose any seeking of him by anyone. After all, they think what they have is real. Their fathers did it that way, and they have worked their way up the ladder doing it the same way. Follow the law, at least as well as everyone else. Go to the temple. And they think they can prove that saying Jesus offers more is wrong. After all, his disciples are powerless against the unclean spirit. They'd preach stay with what is real. They don't offer any help, but they preach stay with what you can prove. Truly Jesus can call them a faithless generation.

Today we have similar people, who say that they believe only in what they can see, who accept the word of scientists, who say there is nothing more and mock those who proclaim more. A faithless generation.

Now consider the crowds. Drawn to miracles, and disappointed when they don't see one. Looking to the fight and argument, looking for entertainment, not looking to God. A faithless generation.

Today we have the same. Looking to big signs and for the spectacle, but not looking for the source. Looking on the world as entertainment, like its football or a movie, hoping to see something new. Not even looking to see God acting, much less acting among them. Who may enjoy the sermon, or criticize it, but in the same way talk about the huskers game. A faithless generation.

And his disciples aren't a lot better. They do start better, trying to drive out the unclean spirit. But when they fail, it's about recrimination and blame, defending God instead of prayer to God. A look of faith that centers on their power, their authority, that does not turn to prayer but to a claim of faith in hard times. A faithless generation.

And this one hits hard. Because my prayers are also perfunctory, often filled with doctrine but little expectation that anything will be done. Half the time I pray for strength in adversity instead of deliverance from it. I will argue points of doctrine as people suffer in need of help. I justify what I do as defending God, when God just delivered his people. A faithless generation.

Finally, a desperate father. Hurting with his son who has a deaf and mute spirit, who has thrown his son into the fire and the water to destroy him. Who is so shaken not just by the spirit but by the failure of not just the scribes and the crowd but even the disciples to help that he asks Jesus to help if he can.

Jesus strengthens weak faith. If you can, all things are possible for one who believes. And the cry of faith goes out, I believe. Help my unbelief.

There is one place the man can turn for hope for life for strength. And he doesn't have the strength to turn there himself, but seeks God to turn him. I believe, help my unbelief.

And Jesus hears his prayer, and rebukes the spirit. And the spirit convulsed him, and convulses him and leaves the boy as one dead. But Jesus takes the hand of the boy, and at Jesus touch, life returns. God helps those who cannot cry out and are like one dead. He alone is worthy of our trust. I believe, help my unbelief.

So today, quit entertaining your doubts that anything can help. Don't argue about what God can do or can't do. Proclaim his presence and healing, with heart and voice and hands. Be constant in prayer, for our Lord comes in compassion. I believe, help my unbelief.