**For Those Who Believe**

Mark 9:14-29

Key verse Mark 9:23-24 – *““‘If you can’?” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for one who believes.” Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!””*

Last week, we attended a wonderful conference, all centred around Jesus’ amazing love for us and, as His disciples, our response should be to love Him and love others with the same love that Jesus lavishes upon us. We studied John Chapter 14 where Jesus comforts His disciples in their distress over Jesus’ imminent departure by encouraging them to trust in Him and to trust in the Father. Jesus promises them another Advocate, the Holy Spirit who would be with them always. And we studied Chapter 15, learning we need a personal love relationship with Jesus to sustain our entire being just as a branch depends on everything from the vine. I pray what we learned and experienced from the conference may richly dwell in our hearts as we near the new semester and resume our Mark’s Bible Study.

When we last left off, Jesus had been transfigured before Peter, James and John. They saw Jesus in all His heavenly splendour; His clothes dazzling white and flanked on either side by two of God’s great servants, Moses and Elijah. It was such an awe-inspiring and wonderful spectacle that Peter expressed his immense joy for being a witness to this and his strong desire to remain there. This was a sharp contrast to the same Peter who rebuked Jesus for predicting His death in Mark 8:32 and the general fear and malaise that clung to the disciples for another six days. Indeed, as the three disciples saw the Transfigured Jesus, all their fears and sorrows were vanquished as their hearts were filled with the great joy that comes in Jesus.

Sadly for the rest of the disciples, they did not get to experience any of this. By the time Jesus made His way back to them, He found them engaged in a heated argument with the teachers of the law while a large crowd intently observed. What exactly were they arguing over? How the disciples lacked spiritual knowledge? Who they hung out with? Their shabby appearance? Possibly. However, this particular argument stemmed not from a great religious debate but from the desperate cry for help of one man for his son. Verses 17 and 18 say, **“A man in the crowd answered, “Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. Whenever 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.””** This man had brought his demon-possessed son to the disciples in hopes that they could heal him. Mark 6:12-13 remind us that the disciples had already driven out many demons and healed the sick before so they may have thought it a great opportunity to re-establish themselves as useful disciples. Phillip, the more vocal of the bunch, may have gone first doing things the same way as when Jesus first sent him out. To his dismay, this did not work. So another stepped up. He could not drive the demon out either. One by one they tried and with each successive failure, the terror and despair grew all the more.

In life are many challenges. Whether it is family, friends, school, work or personal, there are always obstacles in our way and all we want to do is overcome them. But some are like impassable mountains, so great there seems to be no possible way through them. Others are smaller in scale but constantly linger with us like a winding and hilly road with no end in sight. And finally, there are those where we thought we overcome in the past but return many times worse than before. Nevertheless, our response in all these situations is the same; we feel anxious, frustrated, lost, angry, fearful and worst of all, hopeless. The disciples must have felt this, the crowd felt this but the one who must have felt this the most was the father.

So, how did Jesus respond to this father’s heart-wrenching story? Verse 19 says, **““You unbelieving generation,” Jesus replied, “how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.””** For Jesus, the main issue at hand was not the exorcising of an evil spirit. It was the collective lack of faith not just from the parties present but all mankind. Ever since man first sinned and our relationship with God was broken, our faith and trust in Him suffered immensely as a result. So whenever troubles arise, we forget all about our God who delivers us through them, just focusing on the problem itself and who is to blame. To the people observing this event, it may have been tempting to take sides and to place blame. One could blame the disciples for their failure in exorcism. One could blame the father for his poor parenting skills. One could blame the boy for his corrupted inner desires. One could blame the teachers of the law for their selfishness, lack of compassion, poor Bible study, powerless messages, lack of prayer, and so on. However, Jesus lamented over the unbelief of the entire generation. Jesus wanted everyone to repent instead of blaming others. We encounter the bizarre and shocking behavior of troubled people every day. It is easy to analyze the situation and blame on them. But we must realize that their problems are our own problems. Jesus wants us to pray for them and to cast all these burdens to Him. So Jesus asks for the boy to be brought to Him but as this was being done,”… the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth.” The problem just got worse. Satan’s method to keep us from the Lord has always been to rule use through fear of death. And now the son’s turn-for-the-worse would immediately plant sheer fear into the hearts of all those present.

Even though the father subsequently gives a very humble plea in verse 22b, it reveals signs of uncertainty and faithlessness. In saying **“But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us,”** the father appears to settle for pity and assistance instead of the full healing he desperately sought after for his son. This is not an attack on the father. Rather we are very familiar with when even our heartfelt pleas seem to be ignored and we just settle for any kind of non-specific blessing from God. For the father, he had to take care of his son and his condition from childhood; being shunned from society, the dirty looks from the neighbours, having someone always watching his son, safe-proofing the home, tending to every wound, burn and the son’s attempts to kill himself every single day. Who knows how much this cost him monetarily let alone spiritually and emotionally? The father had very deep wounds in his heart. To a certain extent, we all bear such problems whether they be our own or those of others and often involves our own sinful nature. Even though we struggle with every ounce of strength we can muster, we sadly reach our limitations. We may even cry out to God but our cries feel as if they are falling on deaf ears and our situation actually worsens. Because of this, we become discouraged, pessimistic, lose our confidence in God and even place our own limitations on God just as the father placed on Jesus.

How does Jesus respond to the father’s plea for help? Look at verse 23, **“‘If you can?’ said Jesus, ‘Everything is possible for him who believes.’”** Before healing the boy, Jesus wanted to heal the father by challenging him to believe. After allowing the father to share every terrible detail of his son’s condition, Jesus wanted to heal the father of all his wounds through repentance and belief. But we wonder what should the father believe in? We ask ourselves what are we to believe in? Where should our faith be placed in? Modern culture really emphasizes belief in one’s self. We see and hear so many messages telling us if we really believe in ourselves, we can achieve anything our hearts desire. Indeed, having self-confidence is important in life but self-confidence will only carry you so far. Others put their faith in other people, health, wealth, science, politics, luck, karma and so many other things but all these are always changing and will all eventually perish.

There is only one answer. Let us remember the words spoken to disciples at the start of John 14; **“"Do not let your hearts be troubled.** **Trust** **in God****;** **trust also in me.”** The most recent NIV says, “You believe in God; believe also in me.” The only cure for whatever troubles and ails our hearts is Jesus Christ. Only Jesus has the power to conquer the power of sin and death which He accomplished through His crucifixion and resurrection. Only Jesus gives us the spiritual resources to overcome whatever Satan puts forth to shake our faith. Only Jesus provides us with shelter in the midst of life’s harshest storms. And only through Jesus can our hearts be bound in love, joy and peace even when everything else around us falls apart. Jesus wanted the father to entrust his son and the entire situation to Him. Jesus wanted the father to put his faith in Him. And Jesus calls each and every one of us to do the same. Jesus asks us to entrust Him with every aspect of our lives and assures us that this trust will never be in vain.

The father responds in verse 24; **“I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!””** In his response, the father honestly confesses before Jesus how he believes in spite of some level of doubt still residing in his heart. Nonetheless, the father puts his hope in Jesus to help him overcome his doubt and uncertainty. This is what faith in Jesus looks like. Despite everything else that happened, the father made that one step toward Jesus... and Jesus cherishes such faith and works powerfully through it as a result. Look at verses 25-27**, “When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the impure spirit. “You deaf and mute spirit,” he said, “I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.” The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, “He’s dead.” But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.”**

[Remember the guest speaker]

When Jesus was with His disciples in private, they asked Him why they had failed to free the boy of the evil spirit. Jesus answers by saying that this kind could only come out through prayer (and in the footnote, through prayer and fasting). Even though Jesus did not pray as He restored the boy, we know Jesus prayed everyday to God. Even though Jesus has everything, He still always sought God and to fulfill the will of God. Through this, we can see Jesus’ absolute trust and reliance on God. How much more so should we trust, rely, believe and put our faith in Him too! Prayer and our prayer life are a reflection of how much we trust in God. As we depend on God for everything, we should be spending A LOT of our being in prayer as well. And when we pray, we need an attitude like what Jesus describes in Mark 11:24, **“Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”** I myself pray very little for I am so full of doubt of uncertainties in my life. I had high hopes of working as a cytologist once I passed my exam and acquired my license. (Unique job, pays well and something I can “wow” other people with). But after all the resume-sending, scant job postings and being told you told have enough experience to qualify, it has been very hard to be hopeful for a job, let alone in a competitive place like Toronto. So whenever someone asks about how it’s going, I get really uncomfortable, defensive and give every possible reason as to why it just isn’t working out for me. In my heart, I have already considered defeat and am feel like I should just whatever I can get as the student loans’ people will be calling very soon. So I’m secretly happy to be leaving for the next few weeks so I can have another excuse for my situation. But the truth is, I have little faith in Jesus and my expectations of Him aren’t that great. I’m really afraid to make that step towards Jesus because I’m afraid of what He has in store for me and that I will not like those plans. From this passage, I hope to honestly confess to the Lord to help me overcome my unbelief through prayer. I pray my faith in Him may grow and trust in the great things He has in store for me. And I pray we may all deepen our faith in Jesus through such times.