

The Gospel of Mark

Mark 9.14-29

November 2, 2014

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Introduction

- This story has a compelling central moment and is highly relatable, most notably the father's words to Jesus.
- His statement in the middle of the story "I believe, but help my unbelief!" is honest and refreshing and it's true.
- This man's cry is refreshing. His shout, even in his parental desperation, connects with us in an almost primal way:
 - *God, I want to trust you. To believe, to have faith. And I do! But there are times, places, moments where I just don't. There are parts of me that hold back. There are parts of me that need help.*
- What's encouraging is Jesus' response to this father's honesty and desperation, and his reaction to the little bit of faith he can muster, especially in a dreadful situation.
- He has compassion. He casts the evil out of the boy. He does something big, with a little bit of trust and faith. That should be comforting to us.

Jesus and the past.

- Mark's story is rooted in Israel's story. Jesus is bringing about a New Exodus. As God led the Israelites out of captivity in Egypt, Jesus is delivering humanity from the bondage of sin and death. God's liberation is not just for the Israel, it's for everyone!
- Last week we looked at when Jesus climbed up a mountain with Peter, James and John, this reminds us of when Moses goes up Mount Sinai to converse with God.
 - Jesus is then "transfigured", which means that he shines from the inside out.. Moses and Elijah appear and speak with him, and then we

hear a voice from a cloud, God's voice, saying "this is my son, listen to him."

- Jesus' divinity is confirmed in grand fashion, Peter, James and John don't quite know what to do with themselves, and they head down the mountain.
- Jesus is better than Moses and Elijah. He is much, much more. This is where we ended last week.
- Exodus 34.29-35. As Moses descends the mountain he finds that the people have taken matters into their own hands and have built an idol. They build an idol they can control, not wait on a God that they can't.
- When Jesus comes down the mountain, what does he find?

The people, the disciples and our present struggle.

- v. 14-15 the people run to Jesus, in hopes of a solution to their problem. In Exodus the people avoid Moses because they're afraid of him (his face is shining with God's glory) but here the people run *to* Jesus.
- There is an argument surrounding a need. Jesus' disciples can't solve the problem. The problem of demon possessed boy that his disciples have not been able to deliver or liberate.
 - What does Jesus find? Like Moses, Jesus finds unbelief, a lack of faith, and the people in a tizzy.
 - There's a lack of leadership at Sinai and a lack of leadership at the foot of the mount of transfiguration, too.
 - Both the scribes and the disciples are at a loss, fighting with one another. The struggle for belief continues for the disciples. They understand, but only in part.
- When Moses comes down Sinai, he loses it. What about Jesus?
 - *"O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me."*

- Despite how disheartened Jesus might have felt he still steps in, converses with the father, and does the healing. The boy is liberated. Jesus proves his power over darkness, yet again.
- How does Jesus do this? How is his victorious when his disciples have only failed up till this part?
 - In verse v. 28 we read the disciples failed because of a lack of prayer. What does Jesus mean by this?
 - Prayer, as we search the Scriptures, is not about saying the words “abracadabra” right. It’s not about working up enough spiritual air miles to bend God’s arm. It’s not even about showing God how earnest you are.
 - “Prayer gets us un on what God is doing” - Peterson
 - It is a deepened trust and reliance on God. The disciples failed because their efforts were in their own strength.
 - Prayer is the alignment with God and his kingdom (“kingdom come” Matthew 6.10). It would seem that in this scenario, the disciples are out of alignment.
 - Peter’s words in 8.31-32 (when he tells Jesus off about talking about crucifixion and death), and on the mount of transfiguration, and the disciples later squabbling about who was the greatest in 9.33-37.
 - These examples show that they had yet to operate in faith and trust in Jesus, the cross-bearing Messiah.
 - Jesus’ way is about following, trust and reliance on God as demonstrated in his words in 8.31-38. The disciples are still struggling to grasp this.
 - When they come up against the darkness, they’re not going to be affective. “In the name of Andrew/Philip, etc, come out!” may not have been their mouths, but it was in their hearts.
 - It’s easy to give the disciples a hard time but we can get wrapped up in ego, self-promotion and selfishness, too.

- If Jesus' willingness to do a lot of good with a little bit of faith should comfort us, our insistent decisions to place faith in ourselves, or focus on ourselves should humble us.

The father and a future promise.

- The difference between the father in this story and the disciples is that he's aware of his great need. His son is demon-possessed. This produces a desperate plea. The disciples may not be aware of the demonic-darkness of pride that lurks inside of them.
 - Are we aware of our great need?
- v. 23 "if I can?.....all things are possible for one who believes." - this is the glimmer of hope – that things can be different. That the world can change. The need may be great, but the need can be met.
 - The future hope is that if we're aware of our need, and express it to Jesus, if we show a little bit of faith, he can do a lot with it.
 - This means dying to self. This means not relying on ourselves, but submitting to God. It means say, "I need you, and my own efforts aren't working."
- As we consider the life Jesus calls us into, we see that Jesus isn't the only one who will carry a cross. But he's also not the only one who will be transfigured (Ephesians 2.19-22).

*...you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, **20** built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. **21** In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. **22** And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.*

- The future hope is that we don't have to struggle in failure. God's intention is the to do his work and reveal his glory through us.
 - We can only do this, however, if we follow Jesus humbly, but following him, dying to self and aligning with God's kingdom and will.
 - Jesus is inaugurating a God's kingdom on earth. He's starting something, with hope of it continuing on through us.
 - We can't shine the light and dispel the darkness if we're set on being our own power source. We must align with the Light-maker.

Communion – the past, the present, the future

- A word about the past: the past is covered by the cross.
- A word about the present: There may be a current struggle to follow Jesus. There is grace in the growth. God only needs a little bit of trust to do a lot.
- A word about the future: The future has a bright hope. Trust that a transfiguration is happening.

Discussion Questions

1. What stands out, interests you about this passage? What questions does it raise for you?
2. Why is the darkness of pride so dangerous? Is all pride bad?
3. What does prayer look like when we consider it as Jesus does, as alignment with God? How is it expressed and engaged in when we look at it this way?
4. How do you think you have been aligned with God and his Kingdom this week?