

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin Eden

Pentecost 17
Saturday, September 14, 2024, at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, September 15, 2024, at 9:00 a.m.

“The Power of Prayer”

Mark 9:14-29

To understand our Gospel reading, we have to put it into context. At the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, He sent His disciples out throughout all the towns and villages of Galilee. They returned amazed that they could heal the sick and even drive out demons. And they were only getting started in their education. Imagine what they would be able to do in a few years. At the beginning, they had no idea what they were doing. But God’s power worked on their behalf and miracles were performed. We have seen this as we have been moving through Mark’s Gospel this Pentecost Season.

What we read today is now three years later. Peter, James, and John have just witnessed the fullness of the glory of God on the Mount of Transfiguration. They just saw Moses and Elijah and the glory of God envelope them. It was good to be a disciple of Jesus, and Peter wanted to stay on the mountain. They are now mere days away from Palm Sunday. Jesus knows it is time to take the

training wheels off. And it is clear that the disciples still have no idea what they are doing.

Throughout His ministry, Jesus had been critical of them for their lack of faith, or “little faith,” as He described it after He calmed the storm or Peter walked on the water. But He had always been right there to rescue them or finish the job for them. The time had come for them to learn how to work within the Kingdom after Jesus departs this earth.

This is a faith issue for the disciples. This is an obvious failure because of a lack of faith which will manifest itself more fully in the days to come. Holy Week is approaching, and the pattern will repeat itself. The glory and joy of Palm Sunday will be embraced, just as the glory and joy of the Mount of Transfiguration was embraced: “Tis good Lord to be here.”

But when Jesus gets arrested and put on trial, they run away; they hide; Peter denies even knowing Jesus – three times. Even when the women come from the empty tomb and tell them Jesus is risen from the dead, they don’t believe them. Thomas refuses to believe the other 10 disciples who saw Jesus. He says, “Until I put my finger into the marks of the nails, I will never believe.

When confronted with challenges and Christ is not right there at their side, they fail. The disciples probably had the opinion that they possessed the strength to cast out the demon. They had done it before. But this time they

fail. And they ask, “Why could we not cast it out?” Jesus gives a curious answer, “This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.”

The disciples had to be thinking, “Prayer? Are you saying anybody could do this? Then why couldn’t we?” Jesus says, “All things are possible for one who believes.” “If you have the faith the size of a mustard seed and say to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’” it will happen.

If we had any mountains around Quincy, I could show you how this works (Just kidding). Time and again Jesus wants to get the disciples to understand the exocentric nature of faith. That is, He wants them to understand that faith is something which comes from outside of you. It is not something that is born out of your inner parts. That would be called mysticism.

As Luther says in the catechism, “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.” Even faith the size of a mustard seed comes from outside of you, and it is the power of God alone who can move mountains.

The disciples were under the impression that faith and the power of God were their possession. They were relying on their strength of faith, and failed to understand the source of that strength.

You possess the strength of faith to do greater feats than the moving of a mountain. Which is a greater feat, moving a mountain, or bringing life to someone who was dead? With the proper equipment purchased from Caterpillar or John Deere, you could make a dent in a mountain. But only by the power of the Gospel can you bring someone who is dead in their sins to experience the new life we have in Christ.

With the faith the size of a mustard seed, armed with the Word of God and the power of prayer, through you, the Gospel is proclaimed and the Holy Spirit does His work. If you say, "I do not have the strength or power to do these things," you are absolutely correct. However, if you say that God does not have the strength or power to do these things through you, you are absolutely wrong.

The strength of your faith comes from outside of you. The cure for "little faith" is not in whipping up within oneself a higher energy of believing. But rather, the cure comes when we turn toward the Person who is the object of our faith and say as did the father of the demon-possessed child, "I believe; help my unbelief!" And God has promised that He will always send His Holy Spirit to those who ask.

"Ask and you shall receive. Seek and you shall find. Knock and the door will be opened unto you." That is the real power of prayer. Amen.