

BRING THEM TO JESUS**Sermon for the 16th Sunday after Pentecost, 2021****Mark 9:14-29**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is the Gospel read before, Mark 9:14-29:
¹⁴ **When they came back to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and scribes arguing with them. ¹⁵ As soon as the whole crowd saw Jesus, they were amazed and ran to Him and greeted Him.**

¹⁶ **He asked them, “What are you discussing with them?”**

¹⁷ **Someone in the crowd answered, “Teacher, I brought to You my son, who has a spirit who has robbed him of speech. ¹⁸ Wherever it takes hold of him, it throws him down, and he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked Your disciples to cast the spirit out, but they could not.”**

¹⁹ **Jesus answered them, “O faithless generation! How long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him to Me!”**

²⁰ **They brought the boy to Him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground, rolled around and foamed at the mouth.**

²¹ **Jesus asked his father, “How long has this been happening to him?” He said, “Since he has been a child. ²² It has often thrown him into fire or into water to destroy him. Nevertheless, if You are at all able, have compassion on us and help us!”**

²³ **Jesus answered him, “With reference to ‘If You are able’ — all things are possible for him who believes.”**

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²⁵ **When Jesus saw that a crowd was running together towards Him, He rebuked the unclean spirit: “You speechless and deaf spirit, I command you, ‘Come out of him and do not go into him again!’”**

²⁶ **It cried out, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy became like a corpse, so that most of them were saying, “He has died.”**

27 However, Jesus took hold of his hand and lifted him up, and he stood up.

28 After Jesus had gone into a house, His disciples asked Him privately, “Why could we not cast it out?”

29 He told them, “This kind cannot be driven out by any means except by prayer.”

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth.
Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Our text this morning gives us an honest picture of the world that we, as Christians, live in. How? Oftentimes we see our Lord’s dominion contested and His glory denied. People have no regard for Jesus, whether in His Person or His work. Living in such a society, we also struggle to overcome the evil one and his temptations to lead us astray. So today, the Holy Spirit inspired Mark to record the casting out of the demon from a child in order to remind us that we need to keep coming to Jesus for our comfort and protection if we are to survive the attacks made against us.

Mark begins, **“When they came back to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and scribes arguing with them.”** Who came back to the other disciples? It was Jesus who had just descended the mount of transfiguration with Peter, James, and John. From the heights of the transfiguration, Jesus and the three disciples descended to the realities of life with all its sin and sorrow. As they came to the nine disciples, Jesus found the scribes arguing with them in the presence of a crowd. The nine were having difficulty defending themselves against the scribes. Both sides had recognised the disciples’ inability to heal this demon-possessed boy as actually reflecting on Jesus Himself.

On the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus’ glory had shone like the sun in the sky, but here below, it was cloaked in humility. Here below, the unclean spirits have their way. Here below, the nations argue and debate and deny the power of Jesus’ words and works. Here below, many bring their own to the disciples, but the disciples fail both those approaching and their Lord.

The *boy* possessed with that unclean spirit is all our children born into this world, born in the image of Adam, born not of the Spirit but of the flesh, born under the dominion of the devil. The *father* is every father, every parent, struggling to love and care for their child in a world defiled by sin, death, and the devil. The *scribes* are all the debaters of this age, all the deniers, all the mockers, all the doubters and unbelievers who cling to their superstitions and remain distant from the Lord of Life. Then there's the *disciples*, those who wish to be faithful but struggle. And then there's *Jesus*, in the midst and chaos of it all, working His work, wielding His tongue, speaking His salvation to all who call upon His name.

We are there too: some may be the disciples, others the parents or the children, or the debaters and deniers. No one is left out of this message, for the Gospel of Jesus Christ is for all people. It's for this reason that Jesus has entered our world, for no one has been born free from original sin. No one has been born good enough to enter paradise. No one having been born of father and mother is free, but have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.¹ The apostle Paul reminds us that "*Sin has come into the world through one man, and his sin has brought death with it*" (Romans 5:12). Sin and death have come to all people who share in the works of the devil. It's for this reason that the Gospel is to be proclaimed to the whole world.

Now, on the surface, it may appear that the thrust of this text is Jesus' power over unclean spirits. To be sure, Jesus has come to undo the works of the devil², which defile us as they lead us away from the light of Christ and into the darkness of death. The continual working of such works not only can *deprive* us of the gift of salvation as they drag our hearts further and further into the abyss of our depravity but also pervert the very definition of what it means to be a human being created in the image of the Triune God. In other words, these works, the works of sin, forfeit our humanity, the very depths of our souls, to death and hell.

¹ Romans 3:23

² 1 John 3:8

But let us go a bit deeper. Let us hear and see not only what Jesus does but what Jesus *says*. At the heart of the matter is the hearts of men, women and children. Mark writes, “**As soon as the whole crowd saw Jesus, they were amazed and ran to Him and greeted Him.**

¹⁶ **He asked them, “What are you discussing with them?”**

¹⁷ **Someone in the crowd answered, “Teacher, I brought to You my son, who has a spirit who has robbed him of speech. ¹⁸ Wherever it takes hold of him, it throws him down, and he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked Your disciples to cast the spirit out, but they could not.”**

¹⁹ **Jesus answered them, “O faithless generation! How long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you?”**

The father of the demon-possessed child had brought him to Jesus’ disciples, but they could not help him. Why? Because like all who are fallen, even those who should know better, they still trust themselves. At issue is not the power of unclean spirits or the defiling of sin, but the unbelief of Jesus’ own followers. They did not bring the boy to Him. Their failure resulted in the mockery of the scribes and the scandalising of this father’s faith.

We, too, often fail our Lord by keeping our loved ones from Jesus. How often have we allowed ourselves to believe that we have done enough? How often have we deceived others by the use of pious words and well-meaning intentions? How often have we trusted in our own abilities to raise godly children, bringing them to baptism, but then faltering in our pledge to continually set before their eyes, ears, and hearts the Word and Sacraments of the Saviour? Instead, we have sugar-coated the world, told them there were no such things that go bump in the night, taught them to be more afraid of germs, or strangers, or things that can harm the body, and yet have neglected to teach them to walk in the light, to live in the light, to thirst for righteousness and hunger for the bread of life. And then we wonder why our children fall away from the church. We wonder why our culture and our nation is slouching more and more towards Gomorrah. In reality, we have failed as these disciples failed. We have not brought them to Jesus, and the world mocks us because of it.

This is why our text this morning is so important for our life of faith. In response to the disciple's failure and the father's plea, Jesus says, "**Bring him to Me!**"

We must bring our loved ones to Jesus, not just once, but continually. Bringing our loved ones to Jesus is to be an *ongoing event*. Jesus desires continual fellowship with His disciples! This is why the Lord requires Christians to worship together.³ Sure, it's not always possible. Old age and chronic illness mean some simply can no longer come to the Lord's house. But there are many who are able, *but not willing*. Holy worship is a time to come before the Lord and receive from Him divine gifts of mercy, life and salvation. Coming *once* is not continual. Coming *sporadically* is not continual. Just as the body needs daily bread, so also does the soul need the bread of life *regularly*.

The divine service is God's service to humanity. Worship is God's coming to us and our children in order to forgive our sins and strengthen our faith. Here, in this place on this day, the Holy Spirit works His wonders in the hearts of those who believe. He brings the death and resurrection of Jesus to individuals. Every baptism is a casting out of unclean spirits and uniting the person to the death and resurrection of Jesus.⁴ Every absolution is a return to God's promises once delivered in the waters of baptism and now echoed through the voice of a man. Every Lord's Supper is a receiving of Christ's body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. For the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all unrighteousness.⁵ These gifts are for us and our children. These gifts are for life – the life we need to live this life in His favour and the life we need to live forever in His presence.

And remember, none of this depends on one's own piety. None of this is null and void because of our sins. Christ has died to forgive us our sins. Christ has risen to give us eternal life. We Christians come to worship because Jesus is here delivering us from the perils of sins. We Christians seek His grace because the Saviour has taken upon Himself our uncleanness, offered Himself as a payment for our sins, and has won for us a crown of life that never fades away.⁶ These

³ Acts 2:42, 46

⁴ Romans 6:3-5

⁵ 1 John 1:7

⁶ 1 Peter 5:4

gifts are eternal, and as such, they create, sustain, feed and nourish faith in Christ.

Therefore, because we are so heavily laden with the weight of the world's defilement, our own sins, and an unclean conscience, we find ourselves in God's house. We find ourselves here today because we have received eternal life. We worship today because today is the day of salvation. We gather today because what happens here in this place is more important than anything happening anywhere else in this world. We come as individuals baptised into His name, and we come as His Church, the communion of saints who are sanctified by His life given to us, freely, by grace, received by us through faith.

And then we depart this place in the joy of His salvation. We depart this place, but that doesn't mean we do not or cannot approach His throne of grace during the week. Certainly not! In fact, because we are His baptised children, because faith has been created in our hearts, fed and nourished by His Word and Supper, we come before His throne in prayer. We pray because we believe. After Jesus had cast out the demon, **“His disciples asked Him privately, “Why could we not cast it out?”**

²⁹ He told them, “This kind cannot be driven out by any means except by prayer.”

The disciples couldn't cast out this sort of unclean spirit because they did not pray. When the disciples' first attempts had proved futile, they should have realised they needed to seek the Lord in prayer. This power was not inherent in them as it was in Jesus, who could simply say, **“I command you.”** We must not be like the disciples, but believing, we are to be praying.

And what do we pray for? We pray for those things pertaining to our own salvation and the salvation of others. In other words, we not only seek the Lord and His blessings for ourselves but also for our loved ones, our children, our neighbours, our friends and family and even our enemies. We bring them to Jesus when we pray for them. We pray for them with confidence because we trust that the Lord has inclined His ear to us as the psalmist says, *“I love the LORD, because He hears my voice, my plea for mercy. Because He has turned His ear to me, I shall call on Him all my life”* (Psalm 116:1-2).

Dear friends, we must never forget the world we live in or the daily dangers that surround us. The works of the devil are many and manifest. We see them in our world, and we feel them in our own lives. Our text this morning is a grim reminder of the depravity of our culture. Therefore, we must flee from the works that lead to destruction and hold firmly by faith the hand of Him who desires to lead us to paradise. Note well our Saviour's words and works this morning, not only His rebuke of our faithless generation but also His mercy extended to the boy with an unclean spirit. He is a compassionate Saviour, one who delights to not only set us free but also to take us by the hand and walk with us along life's way. His desire is to direct, protect and feed us from day to day. Without His grace and favour, we surely go astray. Therefore we pray – **"I believe. Help my unbelief!"** Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Heavenly Father, we worship You as the creator of all things and the preserver of our lives. In Your goodness You care for every one of Your creatures. We come before You in prayer with sincere and trusting hearts.

We thank and praise You for all Your goodness, but especially for the gift of Your only Son Jesus, whom You sent to suffer and die to rescue us from sin, and to rise again to guarantee the final crown of life for us in heaven. Through Him, we are Your children, enjoying the fullness of Your goodness and care. Give us firm faith in Your power and guidance, that we may continually trust You for all our daily needs, and carry out our daily tasks without worry about the future. No matter what may happen, give us the conviction that You direct all things in heaven and on earth by Your Word, and care especially for Your children.

Grant us Your grace that we may not live for the worthless values of this world or for the accumulation of wealth. We thank You for Jesus Christ, our most priceless treasure. Teach us to seek above everything else the blessings of Your kingdom in a life of loving obedience.

Make Christ's Word in all its richness live in our hearts and make us wise. Increase our love toward all people. Give us a special concern for those of the

family of faith, and make us eager to help one another with our burdens and weaknesses. Fill Your Church with Your Spirit, that the compassion of Christ may be evident in the love and kindness we show to the fallen, the erring, and the heavy-laden. Let us never grow tired of doing good.

Grant that we, whose ears have been opened spiritually to hear Your Gospel, may speak it plainly to those who should hear it from us. Let Your light shine among the nations, so that the very ends of the earth may see Your glory, and people everywhere may learn to worship and serve You alone.

Bless our own country. May those in positions of government and authority honour You. May Your truth hold sway in politics, business, industry, education, and the mass media. Frustrate all designs for those in positions of authority to make laws that are against Your holy will.

In every day's needs and crises, help all families with Your presence. Be with them in sorrow or joy, sickness or health, disappointment or success, and make them safe and content in Your love.

Continue to direct our lives in your loving providence. Give us opportunities to use your gifts as Your grateful stewards. Keep us in the faith by Your grace and power, that we may attain to eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

The 16th Sunday after Pentecost

Isaiah 50:4-10

⁴ “The Lord GOD has given Me the tongue of disciples, to know how to use a Word to sustain him who is tired out. He awakens Me morning after morning. He awakens My ear to listen, like those who are disciples. ⁵ The Lord GOD has opened My ear, and I Myself have not been rebellious. I have not turned back. ⁶ I have given My **back to those who struck Me** and

My cheeks to those who plucked out My beard. I have not hidden My **face** from **insults** and **spittle**. ⁷ The Lord GOD will help Me. That is why I have not been disgraced. That is why I have set My face like flint and know that I shall not be ashamed. ⁸ He who **declares Me righteous** is near. Who will contest a lawsuit against Me? Let us stand up together! Who is My accuser? Let him confront Me! ⁹ Look! The Lord GOD will come to help Me.

Who is he who **will condemn Me?** Look! **They will all wear out like a garment.** The moths will eat them.”

¹⁰ Who among you fears the LORD and obeys the voice of His Servant? Let the one who has been walking in darkness and has had no light trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God!

James 3:1-12

¹ Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow-Christians! For you know that we shall be judged more severely. ² For we all commit many sins. If anyone does not sin in what he says, he is a perfect man, who can also keep his whole body in check. ³ If we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we turn their whole bodies. ⁴ Look also at the ships. Although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, a very small rudder turns them wherever the inclination of the pilot leads him. ⁵ So also, the tongue is a small member of the body and yet it makes great boasts. See what a small fire sets such a large forest ablaze! ⁶ The tongue is also a fire. It is a world of wickedness in our members. It defiles the whole body, it sets the whole course of life aflame and is

set aflame by hell. ⁷ For every creature, from animals to birds to reptiles and to sea-creatures, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. ⁸ However, no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹ With the tongue we bless the Lord and Father and with it we curse human beings, who have been **made in God's likeness.**

¹⁰ Blessing and cursing come out of the same mouth. My fellow-Christians, these things ought not to be so. ¹¹ Surely a spring does not pour out both fresh and bitter water from the same opening? ¹² My fellow-Christians, surely a fig tree cannot produce olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

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