

WELCOME 25 February 2018 2 Lent '18 B

Mark 9:14-32 & Isaiah 53:2-12

Good morning! Welcome to worship today! It is great to have you here this morning. Please stay for morning tea after worship so we can get a chance to know one another better...

A school shooting. Combatants hidden among civilians. A vehicle intentionally driven through a crowd of pedestrians. Ethnic cleansing. The killing of the unborn. Family members used/abused or neglected. The face of evil in today's world?

The nightly news can break your heart, but so can the lives you see in the homes up and down your street...or maybe what you see in your own life/home.

But rather than explain evil away. Excuse it. Rationalize it or blame it on someone else, Jesus takes evil into himself & dies to it so that it can no longer claim this earth as its playground or you as its pawn & punching bag. And when he rises, hell itself is crushed under his feet & the gates of hell thrown down. That victory is yours in Jesus Christ alone. In Christ alone those Heartbroken by evil are granted joy in its fullness, healing toward wholeness, and the power to stand against evil with faith that can do the impossible in the sure knowledge that *"...the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world."* 1 Jn 4:4

Dying, rising & ruling over all things forever, Jesus Christ keeps that promise & by the power of his Holy Spirit within you, heals & strengthens you so that you too can be his instruments bringing hope & healing into this world.

LWKids is ON! Philippa & Hillary will lead our youngest disciples out to the verandah during the next song medley.

If you'd like to be part of that team leading our kids...see me today!

3 Lent '18 B – CREATE IN ME A CLEAN HEART: HEARTBROKEN BY EVIL

- FAITH CHAT:** 1. In the last year...What events stand out in your mind as heartbreaking?
2. Faith is fragile...Where have you struggled with unbelief in the face of evil?

In his book, *Wishful Thinking*, US Anglican priest Robert Capon makes the observation in discussing evil:

* God is all-powerful

* God is all-good

* Terrible things happen 'You can reconcile any 2 of those propositions with each other, but add the third & you have the greatest single problem ever for people of faith.' He's right. Most folks when they discuss evil never hide from #3...we just made a list... terrible horrible things happen...often more than once a day. But the inclination is to dance around #1 & #2...& end up suggesting/assuming either God is impotent or God is apathetic.

Evil is a problem. Our claim that God is good & loving & intends good & love for us is challenged often by the tragedies & traumas of life...the malicious, malignant & malevolent as well as human misadventure/misfortune. And I suspect most of us are like the father in the account we heard today. We don't want theoretical - philosophical – hypothetical or theological rabbit-chasing. We start at the point of our own pain. We begin with our own hurt & ask why *this* in my life or the life of someone I care about? Not just 'Why?' but "Why me?"

And we sometimes try to shield ourselves...we had a 3-year-old in the house on 911 – for days every newspaper, every newscast & every radio show was all 911 all the time...we tried to hide the great evil from our daughter...

The backstory here...*BIBLES*...Mark actually begins this account with Peter, James, John & Jesus up on a mountain where Jesus was transfigured changed in appearance from normaleverydayrabbiJesus into a bright shining prince of heaven. For a few moments Jesus' true image was revealed, & the 3 disciples saw it. Jesus radiated his majestic glory talking w/ Moses/Elijah. The disciples saw all this & stood there captivated by the glory of the kingdom of God & the repeated divine declaration that Jesus is God's "dearly loved Son" & in the absence of Moses/Elijah they should "Listen to him." (*Law/Prophets no longer speak with final authority. That belongs to Jesus alone.*)

But when that moment of utter rapture ended, Jesus seems to have returned to a more normal appearance & they started back down the mountain where life as we know it is far less glorious...in fact at times quite hideous. And that's what they find when they rejoin the 9. There is some sort of chaotic mob argument swirling around the disciples & a group of Jewish religious leaders. Jesus arrives demanding an explanation. "What's all this arguing about?" Can every parent in this room hear themselves in those words? Having left order he finds chaos. Having left peace he finds strife. *One of the men in the crowd spoke up & said, "Teacher, I brought my son so you could heal him. He is possessed by an evil spirit...So I asked your disciples to cast out the evil spirit, but they couldn't do it."*

The English translations can't capture the passion of the language this father uses. This isn't just pleading. This isn't just begging. This is the face/voice of desperation. He's beyond the point of lost hope. His heart has been ripped from his chest thrown to the ground stomped in the dust...lather/rinse/repeat...every time his son is tormented What parent watches their child suffer tearless? This is his son! So he has brought his son to have Jesus heal him because Jesus is the last dying gasp of hope this father has.

AN ASIDE...

We don't know...but some Biblical scholars look at the 1st century pagan world aware that children feature heavily in pagan worship. Rites, rituals, ceremonies have some aspect involving children...dedicating/offering them to the elements/gods/spirits of the pagan world. To bless through this new life...folks still do it...Google "baby naming ceremony scripts." So there is always a suggestion that perhaps this father has taken his baby boy to the local shrine & prayed for the spirits of the shrine to bless his family & his son & opened a doorway to some sort of possession/oppression by some dark force...Children are always vulnerable to the sins/brokenness of the parents...so there may also be an element of guilt/shame.

"So I asked your disciples to cast out the evil spirit, but they couldn't do it." Jesus you weren't here & the guys you've trained & commissioned for this very thing failed. This father speaks & I hear Mary & Martha...*"Lord if only you had been here my brother would not have died."* Jesus what are you doing when evil tears at the very fabric of our lives? Where are you when some madman straps a bomb to his back & blows up a nightclub? What are you thinking letting people bomb hospitals & start fires on purpose that kill people? Where were you when the School Dist., the FBI **AND** the local Sherriff ignored warning after warning & 17 children died as a result? Jesus you weren't here & everybody else failed. *"You faithless people! How long must I be with you? How long must I put up with you? Bring the boy to me."* We cannot forget that the 12 had been authorized & empowered by Jesus to do the very thing the father needs for his son.

So they brought the boy. But when the evil spirit saw Jesus, it threw the child into a violent convulsion, & he fell to the ground, writhing & foaming at the mouth. "How long has this been happening?" Jesus asked the boy's father. He replied, "Since he was a little boy. The spirit often throws him into the fire or into water, trying to kill him. Have mercy on us & help us, if you can." "What do you mean, 'If I can'?" Jesus asked. "Anything is possible if a person believes." The father instantly cried out, "I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief!" When Jesus saw that the crowd of onlookers was growing, he rebuked the evil spirit. "Listen, you spirit

that makes this boy unable to hear & speak," he said. "I command you to come out of this child & never enter him again!" Then the spirit screamed, threw the boy into another violent convulsion & left him...Afterward, when Jesus was alone in the house with his disciples, they asked him, "Why couldn't we cast out that evil spirit?" Jesus replied, "This kind can be cast out only by prayer."

What do we see? Human hands fail. Human agents falter. Human faith is fragile. But the hands & plan of God, revealed in Jesus Christ never fail or falter & are anything but fragile. Even a confrontation w/ raw evil has a greater place...a greater significance than simply what the healing demonstrates. *"When the evil spirit saw Jesus"* it got in one last good thrashing because it knew its moments were quickly ticking away. Its 15 minutes of fame were finished. In the face of God evil trembles.

AND...Remember when Jesus was told Lazarus was sick...he said what? *"Lazarus's sickness will not end in death. No, it happened for the glory of God so that the Son of God will receive glory from this."* God demonstrates the true nature of divine love...Love is doing whatever is necessary so that people experience & delight in the glory & presence of God through Jesus forever. Jesus reveals in the clearest possible way, God's intention for his whole creation...that our bondage to sin/death/forces of darkness would be broken once for all & forever. Jesus reveals in the clearest possible way, God's heart – God's character – the fullness of all God is & the fullness of what God intends for us. God's purpose is that we would see that glory (the glory the 3 disciples witnessed on the mountain of transfiguration) & be transformed by it, that we would behold the beauty & worth of life with Christ above all other things.

Where is the glory of God in Christ most visible? Where is the beauty of grace most clearly manifest? Where is the defeat of sin/death/evil demonstrated ^{b/4} the world? Here...at the cross...where Jesus takes evil into himself & dies to it so that it can no longer claim this earth as its playground or you as its pawn & punching bag. And when he rises, hell itself is crushed under his feet & the gates of hell thrown down. At the cross, evil cannot be explained away. It isn't rationalized. It isn't theoretical or metaphorical. At the cross...just like at Srebrenica, or Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School or the slave markets of Libya or SE Asia...evil is real...But at the cross...evil is finished. The cross is the assurance – the confidence that there is no evil so dark – so malicious so malignant so malevolent so obscene that God doesn't take it into himself in Jesus Christ & put it to death so that it will forever be defeated & life love hope joy peace are brought forth.

On the cross, Jesus suffers the full range of human tragedy/sorrow/evil. Doing good/He is repaid with evil. Light of the world/delivered into darkness. Giver of life/handed over to death. Incarnate love/engulfed by hate. Injustice, shame, mockery, rejection, confusion, excruciating pain, thirst, torment, abandonment & finally death. The Lion of Judah becomes the lamb of sacrifice...hands that made the world are pierced by nails. Humanity's hope of heaven descends into hell...

But what we see there is not just the perfect storm of suffering, injustice, evil, humiliation, & pain...but this: *"...it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down...we thought his troubles were a punishment from God, a punishment for his own sins! But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole; & by his wounds we are healed."* Is 53:4-5

Instead of interfering with God's saving redeeming plan, evil & suffering are woven in as crucial warp/weft for our salvation: *Christ carried our sins in his body on the cross so that freed from our sins, we could live a life that has God's approval. His wounds have healed you. – 1 Peter 2:24* In that promise of Christ's death & rez is our strength.

The disciples failed in the face of evil not because of some rote prayer they forgot to pray but because prayer is the way we experience direct intimacy with the Father. We falter in fragile faith...when we, like they, move into the strife & struggles of the day armed with the latest psychological tool, social justice weapon, or brimming self-confidence but void of Christ. Author Pastor Warren Wiersbe reminds us that we pray & live not "for" victory, but "from" victory because Jesus Christ has already defeated the evil one...so when we pray when we face evil we face it in his strength not our own, his victory not our struggle against it.

Which always takes us...back to the cross... Jesus prayed for a cup other than the cup of suffering...then he prayed, *"Your will be done."* Jesus cried out in anguish at God's absence...then he prayed, *"Father into your hands I commit my spirit."* Paul begs 3 times for God to remove his *"thorn in the flesh"* something he sees *"Satan sent to torment"* him...but endures its pain & its persistent presence in his life...How? *"Each time God said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness."*

You may well have a fragile imperfect faith. But you have an all-powerful perfect Saviour who loves you with perfect love & by his life given & restored for you gives you his victory. In Christ we have joy in its fullness, healing toward wholeness, & the power to stand against evil with faith that can do the impossible in the sure knowledge that *"...the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world."* 1 Jn 4:4 Dying, rising & ruling over all things forever, Jesus

Christ keeps that promise & by the power of his Holy Spirit within you, heals & strengthens you so that you too can be his instruments bringing hope & healing into this world.

As Jesus promises, *"Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world."*
Jn 16:33

Let's pray for his triumph over evil to again be ours today... **Lord Jesus you overcame death and destroyed the power of the evil one. Send your Holy Spirit to us today and in your Name Lord Jesus bind the forces of the enemy from among us. Set your angels as a hedge about us that no scheme of the tempter will succeed and no threat of evil may stand. Your precious blood was poured out so that light might shine perpetually upon all your saints. Bathe us in that river of light so that all the attacks of Satan may fail. Drive out all the hosts of darkness to make straight the path for your Son to dwell among us and work through us...In your powerful name Amen.**