

## WELCOME 14<sup>th</sup> March 2021 – 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent '21 B

Mark 9:14-32

Welcome! It's great to be together again. Delighted you are here.

As has become our custom there are Group Study & Discussion resources in your hands. *The goal is for worship to be an all-week experience as God leads you into the fullness of His word & his work in your lives & then introduces you to someone this week who needs to hear the good news from you.* We are still doing those things we need to maintain a level of safety: Sign in. Hand sanitizer. **Masks**...No morning tea just yet. Offering. Communion. Also will spend a few minutes with younger saints...so be ready for that! Philippa may have something special out the back too.

**As we move into this week:** Being spread too thin is a reality for many of us. Competing demands. Overwhelming needs. High or unreachable expectations. Not enough hours in the day.

When the margins are gone & you're running on empty, the "demons" just won't budge. It's difficult to live "in-between" success & failure, certainty & doubt, faith & unbelief...that razor's edge where fragile faith becomes desperate faith.

But in all things, Jesus doesn't leave us "in-between." He walks with us through the noise of desperation to hearing the sure voice of the One who gives himself for us so that we are assured every cry is heard, every prayer answered, every freedom is ours & even the impossible becomes possible.

In walking with Jesus, we experience less noise & more hearing & by his power our desperation is transformed into security & *"Anything is possible if a person believes...I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief!"* becomes our daily experience.

We'll explore & experience that together. Let's pray...then we'll get stuck into it.

## **PRAYER OF THE DAY:**

*Father, through your Son you bring your children home to you. By the power of love & grace you reconcile this sinful creation & restore what the evil one has destroyed or distorted. Still the noise of this life so that at all times we respond in obedience & joy to your call & offer to others what we have received...In Jesus' name...Amen.*

Let's sing & then we'll hear God's Word...

## **FAITH CHAT:**

1. Have you ever been given a "job" you weren't qualified to perform?
2. Think of someone you perceive to have "strong faith." **WITHOUT NAMING THEM**, what do you see in them that gives you that impression?
3. When you pray, what do you think happens?

#### 4 Lent – '21 B – ADDITION BY SUBTRACTION: LESS NOISE – MORE HEARING

My 1<sup>st</sup> job as a teenager was as a busboy in a Sizzler Family Steakhouse. I cleaned tables & toilets 5-9p.m. 2 nights/wk & Sat mornings. Great job while it lasted. I got that job & was fired from it trying to be helpful...My 2 cousins worked there & one Fri night someone didn't show up for their shift & the restaurant was packed...like the Riverina Hotel Tues...so one of my cousins (cook) suggested the mgr ring me & I was hired because I could show up, clean up a mess & push the little cart around w/o running over anyone...Didn't seem to matter I was only 14. I cleaned toilets & tables & my paychecks worked like everyone else's.

A couple months into the job, one of the front of house staff quit & a crush of customers drove the asst mgr to get me to stand at the head of the line & take orders. Typically that also meant putting salads & soft drinks on a tray & pushing that down to the next person who took the \$\$ & gave their steak order to the cooks. We also served beer & at one point the franchise owner walked through to see the 14-yr-old busboy not only doing salads/soft drinks but pulling beers. I was in so far over my head I didn't even know that was illegal...trying to be helpful.

We just made lists of times we were entrusted w/ responsibility & weren't sure we could handle it. Babysitting gig. Or oldest keeping an eye on the siblings. Helping w/ an infirm/aging relative...guardian/custodial family member. I'm on a hiring panel as P & C rep @ WWHS...deep water no lifejacket!

As Mark recounts the gospel...the disciples are in that spot...over their heads that famous creek & no paddle...but it shouldn't be like that...This is one they trained for. *Jesus went up on a mountain & called out the ones he wanted to go with him. They came to him & he appointed twelve of them & called them his apostles. They were to accompany him, & he would send them out to preach, **giving them authority to cast out demons.** – Mk 3:13-15 Then Jesus went from village to village, teaching the people. He called his twelve disciples together & began sending them out two by two, **giving them authority to cast out evil spirits.** – Mk 6:7 It's something they've done <sup>b/4</sup> So the disciples went out, telling everyone they met to repent of their sins & turn to God. **They cast out many demons & healed many sick people**, anointing them with olive oil. – Mk 6:12-13 But at that moment...all of that seems to have gone walkabout. Why?*

What's in play here? Remember...Jesus Peter James & John have been up on the mountain as Jesus is transfigured... Jesus' whole being becomes radiant w/ his godly glory. Moses & Elijah are part of this vision of divine revelation looked at this last week & as M/E Lawgiver/Prophet depart, God shouts over Jesus *"This is my dearly loved Son.*

*Listen to him."* Nothing else matters any more but relating to Jesus GPS lock on Jesus...Got questions? Jesus. But they can't stay up there forever so they return to find the 9 in a heated argument w/ religious bigshots. *When they returned to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd surrounding them, & some teachers of religious law were arguing with them.* This isn't some random religious scrap...there's a point to the squabble: *"What's all this arguing about?" Jesus asked. One of the men in the crowd spoke up, "Teacher, I brought my son **so you could heal him.** He is possessed by an **evil spirit** that won't let him talk. Whenever this **spirit** seizes him it throws him violently to the ground. He foams at the mouth & grinds his teeth & becomes rigid. **So I asked your disciples to cast out the evil spirit, but they couldn't do it.**"*

I came to you...but you weren't here. So I did the next best thing & asked your guys but they failed. What they had authority to do <sup>b/4</sup> & had done <sup>b/4</sup> they can't do now. Why? What's different now?

Look...I don't know about you...but it seems almost daily I encounter a spiritual battle, human need, or an extraordinary difficulty that is just above my pay grade... beyond my capacity to understand or address effectively. Those guys are representatives of Jesus...just like me/you. They operate out of his authority. Just like me/you. Everything they need to do what he's asked of them...they have in abundance at the ready...just like me/you. (Jn 20:21) But I am regularly reminded of the limited result/impact I have in this world. Once in a while I stop in the middle of everything & say, "Jesus you're asking the impossible."

People I have known since I set foot in this town 16 yrs ago...shared my faith w/ relentlessly, served as best I can, lived as transparently & w/ as much integrity as I have...have not turned their lives over to Christ. I look at our city & lament the missed opportunities & antagonisms that persist. I sense the rampant fear in our world & those who deliberately stoke it. I see so much power so clustered in the hands of so few & know it is not being used for greater good...If you haven't been overwhelmed by the needs around you lately, take another look...they're enormous. We live every day cheek by jowl w/ people who are in spiritual emotional bondage; (fish vs coke can) people w/ crippling mental illnesses; marriages in shambles... children living in impossible situations; people shackled by addiction...violent abusive circumstances. I see those w/ enormous wealth & privilege telling me they're victims. Global media empires not only lie but cut off all disagreement from what they approve as acceptable. Some days "demons" just won't budge.

We may struggle w/ understanding this particular event from the life of Jesus fully, but Scripture is clear & our eyes & hearts know it: Evil. Does. Exist. Satan is intent on stealing, killing & destroying & w/ great delight does so daily. This boy has been bashed about his entire life. He has never known a moment's peace & his father has suffered every minute w/ him. They live on that razor's edge where fragile faith becomes desperate faith...& I'd bet every one of us in this room gets it because we've been there....maybe there today...

I brought my boy to you...but you weren't here. So I did the next best thing & asked your guys but they failed. What they had authority to do b/4 & had done b/4 they can't do now. Why? I want to point to something I only alluded to 2 wks ago... *Then Jesus went from village to village, teaching the people. He called his twelve disciples together & began sending them out two by two, giving them authority to cast out evil spirits...The apostles returned to Jesus from their ministry tour & told him all **they** had done & taught...That was then this is now...Afterward, when Jesus was alone in the house with his disciples, they asked him, "Why couldn't **we** cast out that evil spirit?" 2 words: **they – we**. Jesus said to them, "You faithless people! How long must I be with you? How long must I put up with you? Bring the boy to me."*

The problem is not the demon. The problem is the disciples. Jesus is not cheesed off at the demon. He's not frustrated yet w/ the father. He's concerned about the boy. But he is royally honked off at the disciples. They were trying to wrangle this one on their own. They completely overestimated their own ability & underestimated their dependence on Jesus' power in all things. *Why couldn't we...? Who's we kemosabe? Out there flying solo...pulling beers at 14...working out of their own heads & nowhere close to calling on the only power greater than the evil one. Guilty as charged?*

For how many years has the church as we know it relied more heavily on program, technique, method, or performance...& less on prayer...compassion...relationship honesty accountability generosity love...How often do we tell ourselves that Jesus blesses the self-reliant & slick & strategic & the super-organized? That if we can just get this part right...

I love the dad...he's got none of that. *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!"* He doesn't even know if JESUS is big enough for this one...but he's willing to give Jesus a fair whack at it 'cos he's got nothing. True faith is always aware of how inadequate it is. Or as Henri Nouwen writes: "prayer is a way of being empty & useless in the presence of

God & so of proclaiming our basic belief that all is grace & nothing is simply the result of hard work." Empty & useless b/4 God...How about that on your tombstone? But in this place of complete humility emptiness & dependence is precisely where God works best in us!

What did Jesus tell Paul who 3x begged for a "thorn" to be taken away? *"My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness."* So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. - 2 Cor 12:9 Prayer is less about getting an answer than it is assuring yourself that you have an audience w/ the Father...Prayer-less living is the rough equivalent of idolatry dethroning God & putting trust in our strength & technique & tactics alone...self-reliant instead of God-reliant. *This is the confidence (boldness) we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.* - 1 Jn 5:14 Not "he says 'yes' to every tom-fool request" ...but every cry is heard, every prayer answered, every freedom is ours & even the impossible becomes possible according to the Father's desires for our lives & the work he has yet to complete in each of us.

*Leaving that region, they traveled through Galilee. Jesus didn't want anyone to know he was there, for he wanted to spend more time with his disciples & teach them. He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of his enemies. He will be killed, but three days later he will rise from the dead."* They didn't understand what he was saying, however, & they were afraid to ask him what he meant. This victory over evil was a skirmish...the battle was not yet won. But in his death & resurrection, Christ assures us of that final ultimate triumph of his love his life his power over every evil. In all things, Jesus doesn't leave us "in-between." He walks with us through the noise of desperation to hearing the sure voice of the One who gives himself for us to take us to the Father who grieves our sin our brokenness our bondage...and pays the price for our freedom.

Before we pray...remember we've added a piece...If we're going to be deliberate about our discipleship...let's be deliberate...

**Take it home**... How'd you go on your commitment from last week? What seemingly impossible problem/situation will you bring to God in prayer this week? maybe "again this week" but perhaps with a new attitude? 30 secs...**Go**...

Let's pray... **Psalm 121** – **Sue, please print all 8 verses of Ps 121 from NLT**