

WELCOME 3rd March 2024 – 3rd SUNDAY IN LENT '24 B

Psalm 31:1-5 & Mark 9:14-29

Welcome! It's great to be together again today! Along with your worship order you have **Growing Praise** inserts & **Bible Study Qs...** 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 life & then introduces you to someone this week who needs to hear that word from you. We also use them for our **Zoom** Bible Study Catch-ups Friday 1p.m.

As we move into this week... "I'll do it myself!" the famous last words every parent hears before **the** mess...As desperately as we want to be & want our children to be self-reliant...there are those moments, more frequently than we often admit, when the task required is bigger, decision more complex, job more involved & the moment requires more of us than we possess.

I brought my son so you could heal him...

So I asked your disciples to cast out the evil spirit, but they couldn't do it.

Discipleship, following Jesus...being one of his very own beloved...is always lived depending on him...relying on him...constantly in conversation with him...putting strict independent self-reliance to death so that he can live through you...Living how he would deal w/ people & circumstances in your life as if he was you.

*"You unbelieving generation!...Bring the boy to **me**."*

Disciples...of every time & generation...living under & having been given the authority of Jesus...must remember, Discipleship **is** a relationship not a recipe.

Discipleship is to walk w/ Jesus such that all we are is absorbed in him...where you trust **HIS WORD** about God & about you to determine your identity & shape your life & where you walk **HIS WAY** everywhere you are every day you live; and where the battles & wars in life are overcome only through a relationship with him cultivated in a life of prayer.

Let's pray & then live God's Word together...

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 hear & put our hearts into God's Word...

FAITH CHAT:

1. Have you ever prayed for something & seemingly saw no result?
2. Have you ever prayed for something & something happened?

What was that like for you? What effect did that have on your praying?

3RD SUNDAY IN LENT '24 B – DISCIPLESHIP BEGINS WITH A “W”: WAR

I remember one of the first times a specific prayer was answered in a specific way. I was a student chaplain @ St Luke's Hospital after my 1st year of seminary. One of the floors I covered was a pediatric unit for chronically sick children. The patients were not ever expected to “get well,” but would enjoy greater/lesser times of “better” & then return to the unit again as needed...That's chronic illness...child or adult. I had been sitting on/off w/ a particular family for a few days of “this” visit for them & they were really struggling...as was their daughter. So I asked what they wanted me to pray for...relief, comfort, end to the struggle, peace...So I prayed & for the family to find some sense of God's hand in their lives now & in the days when they might grow wearier & find things more challenging...Then went to the next family.

The next morning I was asked to return to the unit to be w/ them again...their daughter had died overnight...*I was angry*...God must have misunderstood my prayer because that was not what I mean by relief, comfort, end to the struggle, peace & His hand in difficult days ahead...but they...grief-stricken as they were... WERE at peace, DID sense God's care & compassion...KNEW their daughter was restored in the hands of Christ for eternity.

I was angry then...& maybe like you disappointed almost as badly many times since when I prayed just as fervently for someone to walk out of a hospital & they didn't; for a marriage to be restored & it failed; for a child to stop fighting the world & their family & find the path alongside Jesus & they didn't, for an illness or infirmity to be banished & it wasn't...I've felt shame-faced like the 9 ¹/₄ the despairing father: *I brought my son so you could heal him...So I asked your disciples to cast out the evil spirit, but they couldn't do it.* Been there. Done that. Took the F along w/ them.

It's not every day that I think about it...but the reminder is never far away...Life is ALWAYS bigger than we are. I don't have to look hard to find a spiritual battle, human need, or an extraordinary difficulty that is just deep water & no floaties...I have no idea how to make something good happen in that space. I watch people I've known for years make the same mistakes, the same self-defeating decisions, undermine any hope of breakthrough they ever had by their own doing...One advantage of being older is you start to see patterns...Russia/Ukraine Israel/Palestine or the latest slaughter in Africa change the year or place & it's the same song different verse. Same Mess Different Year. You & I live side-by-side w/ old friends, lifelong neighbours, & blood kin who are in deep spiritual soup. I spend time w/ teachers...not just my wife...& they all weep over their students who are emotionally wounded in one way or another...beset by fears & worries that we adults have never known &

doggone sure weren't trained to address. A pastor friend & I always talk about a book we're going to write called, “*They Never Taught me THAT in Seminary!*”

The problem here...The disciples WERE taught EXACTLY what to do w/ demons. *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 Not only that...They've DONE this! *So the disciples went out, telling everyone they met to repent & turn to God. They cast out many demons & healed many sick people, anointing them with olive oil.* – Mk 6:12-13 But at this moment...all of that seems to have evaporated. Heat's on they got nothing. Why?

1st remember Life is ALWAYS bigger than we are...but 2nd Self-reliant is our default setting. We want more than anything to “stand on our own 2 feet.” We can't stand the idea that we need help. We rage at the notion that frailty just might have overtaken us. We hate our limitations & weaknesses. We fight to the death to stay in our own homes long after we're able to enjoy them, look after them, or safely remain there. Self-reliant is our default setting & for much of our lives that's good. It is good that you get up, go to work or school, earn a living, raise a family, pay your bills & taxes...But the lie of the serpent is “*your eyes will be opened & you'll be like God knowing good & evil.*” You'll see & understand fully & discern completely & be able to handle this...Self-reliant is our default setting. Anything that reminds us of our ultimate powerlessness is to be pushed aside (life is a sustained protest against death) We live trusting our own wisdom strength fortitude...that we can do anything...& dare no one meddle in our business. Watch how that plays out here...Mk 6 then Mk 9

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 *So the disciples went out, telling everyone they met to repent & turn to God. They cast out many demons & healed many sick people, anointing them with olive oil.* – Mk 6:12-13...*The apostles returned to Jesus from their ministry tour & told Jesus all they had done & taught.* – Mk 6:30 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?”* – Mk 9:28 You see it? 2 words: they – we. The problem is not the demon. It's not a super-duper extra bad demon. The problem is the disciples. Like the 7 sons of Sceva in Acts 19 they seem to be operating from merely their own & not Jesus' power. They appear to be treating his name is like some magic spell out of

Harry Potter...not the sovereign Lord of all creation who has *GIVEN THEM* the authority to live & serve in *HIS* name as he does on the authority & by the command of the Father. They're out there flying solo...working out of their own heads & nowhere close to resting in & relying on the only power greater than the evil one. I can just picture them yelling at this poor little boy & shaking their fists & kicking up dust or whatever an exorcism looked like in their minds...& Jesus says what?

"*You unbelieving generation!...Bring the boy to me.*"..."*This kind can only be cast out by prayer.*" Were they not praying? Evidently not. To have "faith" in its most basic form means to live knowing you can't do this on your own & you are persistently calling to God for help. Jesus literally calls the disciples "*people w/o faith*" because they were literally living from their own imagination & inspiration. OTOH... Discipleship, following Jesus...being one of his very own beloved...is always lived depending on him...relying on him...constantly in conversation w/ him...putting strict independent self-reliance to death so he can live through you...

Jesus knows the torment of this child, this father, this family & community...just think: Year after year - heartache & fear, always on high alert, worried about the dangers *AND* the side-eyed glances & whispers of the neighbours...what other people are thinking. The great sadness of a father for a son in torment, the helplessness/hopelessness. **AND** the compound agony of the disciples' failure...that moment when the church makes it harder not easier for someone to believe...my heart breaks every time I see that in real time...the church or me making it harder for someone to trust Jesus not easier to be drawn close. The father speaks for just such a time, "*Have mercy on us & help us, if you can.*" I love that. He has no idea if Jesus can do a blessed thing, but he's grabbing for the lifeboat 'cos the waves are over his head. He comes to Jesus w/o any preconceived notion of success & no thought of deserving. True faith is always aware of how inadequate, needy, & empty the vessel.

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!' True faith is always aware of how inadequate, needy, & empty the vessel. What have we said? Life is always bigger than we are...Self-reliant is our default setting...God-dependent is the **goal** because Discipleship is a relationship not a **recipe**. Discipleship is to walk w/ Jesus such that all we are is absorbed in him...where you trust *HIS WORD* about God & about you to determine your identity & shape your life & where you walk *HIS WAY* everywhere you are every day you live; and where the battles & wars in life are overcome only through a relationship with him cultivated in a life of prayer. You see real spiritual warfare is Jesus slowly/surely conquering me...my heart...my unfaith...my self-reliant soul...to bring all of me completely into obedient relationship w/ him...

Dutch priest, Henri Nouwen wrote: "prayer is a way of being empty & useless in the presence of God & so proclaiming our basic belief that all is grace & nothing is simply the result of hard **work**." But in this place of complete humility emptiness & dependence is precisely where God works best in us! Prayer is less about getting an answer than it is assuring yourself that the Father craves the conversation...Prayer-less living is the rough equivalent of idolatry dethroning God & putting trust in our strength & technique & tactics alone...self-reliant instead of God-dependent. *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 wild request"...but every cry heard, every prayer answered, every blessing ours & even the impossible made possible according to the Father's desires for our lives & the work he has yet to complete in each of us. **NB:** Jesus only ever issued one call... *Follow me*...

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 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. Particularly the stubborn unfaith that lingers deep in here...so that our daily prayer echoes the psalmist... *Lord, I have come to you for protection; don't let me be disgraced. Save me, for you do what is right...I entrust my spirit into your hand. Rescue me, Lord, for you are a faithful God. real spiritual warfare is Jesus slowly/surely conquering me*...my heart...my unfaith...my self-reliant soul...to bring all of me completely into obedient relationship w/ him...

TAKE IT HOME - *As you leave today, be specific & share w/ your neighbour...*

Where in your life are you more self-reliant than God-dependent?

How will you relinquish your "unfaith" in that area so that Jesus can make the impossible possible in you?

Let's pray for his triumph to again be ours today...Jesus promises, "*Here on earth you will have many trials & sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.*" - **Jn 16:33** Lord Jesus you overcame death & destroyed the power of the evil one. Send your Holy Spirit to us today & in your Name Lord Jesus bind the forces of the enemy from among us. Set your angels as a hedge about us so no scheme of the tempter will succeed & no threat of evil may stand. Your precious blood was poured out so 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 the hosts of darkness to make straight the path for your Son to dwell among us & work through us for the salvation of those whom you call...In your powerful name...Amen.