

“What Part of ‘All Things’ Don’t You Understand?” Mark 9:14-29

(also in Matthew 17: 14-21 and Luke 9:37-43)

TODAY we mark the words of Jesus in Mark 9:23 where he says: **"All things are possible to him who believes."**

- 14 And when they [*Jesus and the 3*] came back to the disciples, they saw a large crowd around them, and some scribes arguing with them.
- 15 And immediately, when the entire crowd saw Him, they were amazed, and began running up to greet Him.
- 16 And He asked them, "What are you discussing with them?"
- 17 And one of the crowd answered Him, "Teacher, I brought You my son, possessed with a spirit which makes him mute;
- 18 and whenever it seizes him, it dashes him to the ground and he foams at the mouth, and grinds his teeth and stiffens out. And I told Your disciples to cast it out, and they could not do it."
- 19 And He answered them and said, "O unbelieving generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him to Me!"
- 20 And they brought the boy to Him. And when he saw Him, immediately the spirit threw him into a convulsion, and falling to the ground, he began rolling about and foaming at the mouth.
- 20 And He asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood.
- 22 "It has often thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!"
- 23 And Jesus said to him, " 'If You can?' **All things are possible to him who believes.**"
- 24 Immediately the boy's father cried out and said, "I do believe; help my unbelief."
- 24 When Jesus saw that a crowd was rapidly gathering, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and do not enter him again."
- 26 After crying out and throwing him into terrible convulsions, it came out; and the boy became so much like a corpse that most of them said, "He is dead!"
- 27 But Jesus took him by the hand and raised him; and he got up.
- 28 And when He came into the house, His disciples began questioning Him privately, "Why is it that we could we not cast it out?"
- 29 And He said to them, "This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer."
[Matt. 17:20: "because of the littleness of your faith"]

1. COMPARING THE ACCOUNTS - in Matthew, Mark and Luke

a. Mark's account is by far the most detailed of the 3 synoptics

1) Mark: 16 vs, Matt: 8 vs, Luke: 7 vs.

- 2) This could be attributed to Mark's thematic emphasis on the servanthood of Jesus- and this story speaks greatly of Jesus service both the father and his boy, and the disciples
- b. Matthew adds two important additions
 - 1) the father fell on his knees before Jesus (Mt. 17:14)
 - 2) "littleness" of faith caused the ineffectiveness of the disciples (Mt. 17:20)
- c. Luke adds three important details
 - 1) this occurs "on the next day" – i.e. the day after the transfiguration (Lk. 9:37)
 - 2) this was the father's "only child" (Lk. 9:38)
 - 3) all were "amazed at the greatness of God" (Lk. 9:43)

2. OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE STORY

- a. Apparently, the (Gentile) father of the boy had come to have Jesus heal – but when Jesus was not available, he settled for the disciples to heal
- b. When the 9 disciples could not heal, apparently some Jewish scribes were "rubbing it in" and jeering the attempts of the disciples
- c. Physically speaking, the boy's problem seems to be epilepsy, with "gran mal" seizures, with the added loss of speech and hearing – noting the symptoms of foaming at the mouth, grinding of teeth, bodily seizures and stiffness.
- d. Spiritually, however, we see that there is a demon possession involved – this throws him into convulsions (v. 20) and into fire and water to destroy him (v. 22).
- e. Demon possession seems to be intensified by Jesus' presence in Israel.
- f. Jesus' frustration in v. 19 is not with the father, boy, scribes or even the demons – but with the littleness of the disciple's faith (Mt. 17:20) and their littleness of prayer (Mk 9:29)
- g. The father's passionate appeal is touching and even exemplary
 - 1) seeking out Jesus on behalf of his son
 - 2) falling at Jesus' feet (Mt. 17:14)
 - 3) asking for pity and help (v. 22)

3. 7 LESSONS LEADING UP TO THE MIRACLE

- 1) The struggles & temptations of everyday always follow the glory & strength of the mountaintop – expect it!
- 2) The world will "rub it in" (like the Scribes) when Christians appear to fail
- 3) Jesus comes into our need and asks, as it were, "what's going on?" – wanting to help. He will always rush to the defense of His disciples, despite their weaknesses
- 4) For Jesus, God is not only for the crisis – God and goodness is always relevant - Jesus was focused on saving the world, yet stops to meet a single need
- 5) We see Jesus' anguish at the lack of faith and focus – "O unbelieving generation..."

- 6) When we can't take immediate action on the bigger problem we should take immediate action on what we can – it is the surest way to avoid pessimism and despair – there is always something to be done
- 7) Like the father, sometimes we are disappointed by the church or its representatives – but we will always find spiritual courage in Jesus alone

4. SO WHAT DOES “ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE” MEAN?

a. FIRST, GOD HAS THE POWER TO DO ANYTHING

- ***Including opening a barren and aged womb***
 - *Genesis 18:14 [God to Abraham] “Is anything too difficult for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah will have a son.”*
- ***And with no restrictions***
 - *Jeremiah 32:17 [Jeremiah] Ah Lord God! Behold, you have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and by Your outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for You.*
- ***Even a virgin birth***
 - *Luke 1:37 [the angel Gabriel to Mary] “For nothing will be impossible with God.”*
- ***Even save the soul of a dirty, rotten sinner***
 - *Mark 10:27 [Jesus, responding to how hard it is to be saved] “With men it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God.”*
- ***Even in and through me, a sinner saved by grace***
 - *Philippians 4:13 [Paul to the Philippian church] I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.*

b. SECONDLY, GOD CHOOSES TO ACT THOUGH OUR FAITH AND PRAYER

- *Matthew 8:13 [Jesus to the centurion] “Go your way; let it be done to you as you have believed.”*
- *Matthew 9:22 [Jesus to the woman with hemorrhage] “Daughter, take courage; your faith has made you well.”*
- *Matthew 9:28-29 [Jesus to the 2 blind men] ...the blind men came up to Him, and Jesus said to them, “Do you believe that I am able to do this?” They said to Him, “Yes, Lord.” Then He touched their eyes, saying, “Be it done to you according to your faith.”*
- *Matthew 15:28 [Jesus to the Syrophenician woman] “O woman, your faith is great; be it done for you as you wish.”*
- *Matthew 17:20 [Jesus to the disciples at this same occasion] ... If you have faith as a mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it shall move; and nothing shall be impossible to you.*
- *Matthew 21:21-22 [Jesus, at the withering of the fig tree] “Truly I say to you, if you have faith, and do not doubt, you shall not only do what was done to the fig tree, but*

even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' it shall happen. And everything you ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive."

- Luke 7:50 [Jesus to the woman who anointed His feet] "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."
- Luke 17:19 [Jesus to the one Samaritan leper among ten who returned to thank Him] "Rise, and go your way; your faith has made you well." [implied: spiritually well]
- Luke 20:42 [Jesus entering Jericho, to the blind man, Bartimaeus] "Receive your sight; your faith has made you well."
- John 11:40 [Jesus to Martha at the resurrection of Lazarus] "Did I not say to you, if you believe, you will see the glory of God?"

c. THIRDLY, WHEN WE ASK AS JESUS WOULD ASK

- John 14:13-14 [Jesus to the disciples in the upper room] And whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in My name, I will do it.
- John 15:7 [Jesus to the disciples in the upper room] If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you.
- John 15:16 [Jesus to the disciples in the upper room] ... I chose you ... that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you.
- John 16:23-24 [Jesus to the disciples in the upper room] ... Truly, truly, I say to you, if you shall ask the Father for anything, He will give it to you in My name. Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive that your joy may be made full.
- 1 John 5:14-15 [John in his epistle] And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.

5. AS BEST I KNOW I EXERCISE FAITH, ASKING WHAT I BELIEVE WOULD BE GOD'S WILL - AND NO ANSWER. WHAT ABOUT "ALL THINGS"?

a. I might be asking for a "snake" and not know it – GOD IS PROTECTING So desire His will above all.

- Matthew 7:9-11 [Jesus to the disciples and multitude in His Sermon on the Mount] "Or what man is there among you, when his son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he shall ask for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!"
- Mark 14:36 [Jesus, in the garden of Gethsemane] "Abba, Father! All things are possible for Thee; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what Thou wilt."

b. The answer might yet be on the way – GOD IS ON HIS OWN TIMETABLE So wait and persevere!

Luke 18:1 Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart.

c. God might have a purpose in not answering beyond our understanding – GOD’S WAYS ARE ABOVE OURS. Trust!

2 Corinthians 12:8-9 PAUL: Concerning this [a “thorn in the flesh”] I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me.