

Lent

The Old Testament Lesson (read responsively) Psalm 42

The Gospel Lesson Mark 9:13-29

THE MEDITATION 'Surprising Stories of Forgiveness – The Doubting Father'

Psalm 42 1 As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. 2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? 3 My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long, "Where is your God?" 4 These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng. 5 Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and 6 my God. My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon-- from Mount Mizar. 7 Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me. 8 By day the LORD directs his love, at night his song is with me-- a prayer to the God of my life. 9 I say to God my Rock, "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?" 10 My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, "Where is your God?" 11 Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

Mark 9:14-29

14 When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. 15 As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him.

16 "What are you arguing with them about?" he asked.

17 A man in the crowd answered, "Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. 18 Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not."

19 "O unbelieving generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me." 20 So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth.

21 Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?" "From childhood," he answered. 22 "It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us."

23 "If you can?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for him who believes."

24 Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

25 When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the evil spirit. "You deaf and mute spirit," he said, "I command you, come out of him

and never enter him again." 26 The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, "He's dead." 27 But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.

28 After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" 29 He replied, "This kind can come out only by prayer."

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(Before Sermon)

(Man dumping himself into a chair and slumping, head in his hands)

Richard: I give up.

Jennifer: What do you mean, Richard?

Richard: (Looks at her, sighing, shaking his head) I'm drained . . . (Pause) and defeated. Jenny, I've done all I can. The doctors have done all they can. I've prayed as hard and long as I ever have. . . but Drew is still sick. The doctors think he's dying.

Jennifer: I know. But there's always hope.

Richard: Hope? What hope?! I've given up hope.

Jennifer: God is there, Richard. He's here for us. With God there is always hope.

Richard: I thought that was the case, Jenny. But . . . well Drew is not getting any better. I can't do it, and I'm not sure God can either. If God can help, why isn't He?

Jennifer: I'm hurting too, Richard. But, no matter what happens I know God is there to help.

Richard: It's good you believe that, Jenny. But, my hope and trust has been trampled. I'm overwhelmed. I've . . . I think I've lost hope in God.

INTRO - I read a story the other day about a husband and wife. It seems the wife saw a ring she wanted. It was expensive, but she really wanted it and told her husband. Her birthday was coming up, and her husband had hinted that he had something special for her. But, on her birthday she saw a gift that was not the right size, and it weighed too much. She opened the present and found a Bible. She was so angry that she left - for good. Years later the husband died and left his estate to his wife. She went back and in the home she found the Bible, right where she had thrown it. She picked it up and in a pocket in the cover was a package, the ring she had wanted. The husband had loved his wife, but she doubted his love, over something that really wasn't that important, a ring. Imagine how hurt the husband was at the wife's doubting that he loved her.

I. In our lesson for today we have a man who cannot help but pour doubt out of his mouth.

A. This man's son was ill, demon possessed.

1. His son had been ill for a long time.
2. The dad had done all he could but he had gotten to the point where all he could do was protect his son, protect him from the fire, protect him from the water.

B. But, now there was hope. Jesus was coming to town.

1. Word on the street said that Jesus had performed healings and cast out demons.
2. People were saying this might even be the Messiah.
3. So the man brought his son to Jesus. But, it was only Jesus' disciples . . . and still no help.

C. So, finally when Jesus arrived, coming down from His transfiguration, he found the man, his son, and also Jesus' disciples.

1. When the man explained to Jesus what was happening, he asked Jesus for help. **if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us."**
2. Did you see Jesus' quick reply? **23 "If you can'?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for him who believes."**
3. Here Jesus is, the Son of God Himself, in this world to save sinners, and this man doubts Jesus ability to help.
4. In some ways the man's doubt is understandable. But, in other ways, doubting God was a sin.
5. Obviously, there is an extent to which this man's doubting hurt our Lord, His God, who was doing so much to save him and help him

II. Faith is always a struggle.

A. Hebrews 11 says, **"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."**

1. But, it is always easier to be certain of what I see than what I don't see.

2. What I see in this world is pain and loss and suffering. We see hatred and greed and corruption.
 3. No wonder it is easy to doubt.
- B. But, when we see the evil, it does not take away the reality of God.
1. So, is the world God created not here, is that why I doubt? It is here, isn't it?
 2. Did Jesus not die for me, is that why I doubt? He did die, didn't he?
 3. Is my life not full of blessings, Is that why I doubt? I am blessed aren't I?
 4. But, still there are doubts that hurt our Lord, and hurt us.
- C. While doubt is understandable in our life, do you see how our doubt hurts God?
1. Our doubt ignores the reality of His creative love.
 2. Our doubt ignores the presence of God in life's struggles.
 3. Our doubt denies the eternal life God has waiting for us.
 4. It is amazing that God can and does have patience with us.

III. In the account in our lesson, the story changed quickly, because of Jesus' patient forgiveness.

- A. **24 Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" 25 When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the evil spirit. "You deaf and mute spirit," he said, "I command you, come out of him and never enter him again." 26 The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, "He's dead." 27 But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.**
1. The man caught the sin of his doubt and begged for help.
 2. In spite of the man's doubt, in spite of the man's sin, Jesus helps.
 3. In other words, Jesus forgave the man who doubted God, in the presence of God,
 4. Jesus helped the man to show His love. Jesus healed the man's son.
- B. Yes, our doubt is a sin.
1. But Jesus came as the Messiah because we are sinners.
 2. Jesus died to forgive the sin of our doubt.
- C. Yes, God's created beauty in the world around us and the blessings in our life should be enough to overcome our doubt, but we still see the pain of this world.
1. But, in spite of our doubt, there is something Bigger.
 2. Jesus is calling us. **"Everything is possible for him who believes."**
 3. The love of Jesus forgiveness is stronger than the sin of our doubt.

CONCLUSION - If you think about it, Jesus' forgiveness in the face even of our doubt, is enough to give us a new birth for our faith.

(After Sermon)

(Jennifer kneeling besides Richard. She looks up as the doctor walks in)

Doctor: Hi Jennifer, Hi Richard.

Jennifer: Hi Doctor Jones. How is Drew doing?

Doctor: We've done what we can. He's recovering from the surgery. He has treatment coming up. He's sick and it will be tough. But, there's still hope.

Jennifer: Is there anything we can do.

Doctor: You've done all you can. You got him treatment in time. No one sees something like this coming. There is one thing you can do, though.

Jennifer: What is it?

Doctor: You can pray. Pray *God* will work healing. Pray for the treatment. Pray for those of us who are working with him. Drew and all of us need God's help. You can pray.

Jennifer: I've been praying. . .

Richard: (Quickly Breaks in) Prayer, Doc? Prayer? I've been praying. For months I've been praying. Drew doesn't seem to be getting any better. What good does it do? Does God listen? Does God help? Can he help?

Doctor: Richard, I think I understand. No, I haven't had a son ill as your son is. But, in a way I think of all my patients as family. I think of the kids who are patients as my kids. There have been times when I prayed and did not get the answer I wanted that really caused me to doubt God too. But, I'll tell you two things, Richard, things I believe. First, I have seen things happen that medicine can't explain. No one knows why some people have gotten well. No one knows when it happens. But, I don't believe it is a coincidence. I believe it's God. Secondly, those families who know God loves them always seem to do better, whether a person gets well or doesn't. Yes, I believe in prayer. But, what I really believe in is the God who loves us and answers prayer. (Pause) Richard, right now the best thing you can do for Drew is pray, and put him in God's hands.

Richard: I know Doctor. It just hurts so much to see Drew hurt. But, deep down I do believe in God.

Doctor: I'd be glad to pray with you two.

Jennifer: Thank you, Doctor. Thank you, Lord.