

This Kind Can Come Out Only By Prayer

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Today's scripture reading is from the Gospel According to Mark, chapter 8, verses 34 and 35, and chapter 9, verses 14 to 29, as printed in the liturgy.

Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said, Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it.

But whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him. What are you arguing with them about, he asked. A man in the crowd answered, Teacher, I brought you my son who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech.

[1 : 28] 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.

You unbelieving generation, Jesus replied, How long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me. 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. Jesus asked the boy's father, How long has he been like this? From childhood, he answered. 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. If you can, Jesus said, Everything is possible for one who believes.

Immediately, the boy's father exclaimed, I do believe. Help me overcome my unbelief. When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the impure spirit.

[2 : 31] You deaf and mute spirit, he said, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again. The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently, and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, He's dead.

But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up to his feet, and he stood up. After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, Why couldn't we drive it out? He replied, This kind can come out only by prayer.

This is the gospel of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Good morning, Christ Church. It's good to see you all on this holiday weekend. And it's great to see the sun come back out today for us.

And we're here in the gospel of Mark. We've been preaching this since Christmas, and we'll preach it all the way to Easter. And if you're paying any attention to the literary structure of this little book, it's written as a three-act play.

And we've been primarily in act one with Jesus in Galilee, and he's demonstrating his power and his authority. That's basically the first eight chapters of Mark's gospel.

[3 : 41] On Wednesday night, Ash Wednesday, we took a turn to act two of this play. And it's basically Jesus on the way to Jerusalem, and he takes his disciples on this journey where he's teaching them now about his cross and about what his cross means for their discipleship.

And he's re-educating them about the nature of the kingdom of God. And that's basically from Mark 8 to 10. And then act three of this book is Jesus in Jerusalem, the final events, this final week leading up to his cross, and that's Mark chapter 11 to the very end.

And so we, the other night, Ash Wednesday, we began looking at act two, where Jesus is talking about the meaning of his mission and therefore the manner of our discipleship.

And he asks his disciples, he says, who do you say that I am? And Peter answers, on behalf of the 12, and he says, you're the Messiah. And Jesus says, correct.

And the kind of Messiah I am is that I'm going to be killed, and I'm going to lay my life down in humble service and suffering for the sake of others.

[4 : 56] And then Jesus says these words we just heard. He says, whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow me. If you lose your life for me and for the gospel, you'll save it.

And what a great theme that is for us during Lent. If you want to be my apprentice, Jesus says there's a cost to that. He says you've got to deny yourself, which is not so much about giving up chocolate or alcohol for Lent, as it is about, it's not so much about denying something to yourself, it's just denying yourself, your self-interested, self-centered ego.

Jesus is saying, I want you to surrender to me your entire identity structure and your destiny. I want you to surrender that to me. Deny yourself.

Take up your cross. That is, be ready and willing to be executed with me or to die for me. And he says, I want you to lose your life for me and for the gospel, which means I want you to give yourself to my mission.

I want you to become an ambassador of my good news of the kingdom of God in this world. So that's where we are now in Act 2 of Mark's gospel.

[6 : 11] And if you want to turn to your pew Bible on page 820, that's where we are today. And you can kind of see some of this larger context. You can see that this is just after the transfiguration where the glory of Jesus as the divine son of God has been revealed to the disciples Peter, James, and John.

And while Jesus is up on the top of that mountain with his three disciples, you've got nine other disciples down at the bottom of the mountain. And they're struggling with, in this valley, they're struggling with evil.

And Jesus shows up to find them in an argument. And he says, well, what are you arguing about? And this father steps forward and he says, I'm responsible for this commotion. My poor boy has been attacked with convulsions since he was a child.

And I thought that you and your disciples would be able to help and to heal him. But your people basically could do nothing. And they tried, but they failed. And Jesus then proceeds to exercise the demon out of this boy and to heal him and restore him in a moment.

And the disciples later on, they asked, Jesus, why couldn't we drive this demon out? We've had success with these things before, but today we failed.

[7 : 31] Why do we fail? And why, Jesus, were you able with extreme ease and with just a word to speak?

And evil is vanquished and the boy was healed. Why are we, your people, your disciples, your apprentices, not yet able? Why do we not yet have the power to do what you do?

And so that's the question today. Why don't we have the power to do what you do? Now, I preached the body of this sermon before, but it was a time when many of you weren't part of this church.

So I'm putting it back on some of your radar. And for some of you, you're hearing this for the first time. And I'm going to make some fresh application. But my thesis today and my golden thread is just Jesus' simple statement at the very end where he says, this kind can come out only by prayer. This kind can come out only by prayer. So let's think about this kind. In this boy, we have a picture of the modern world, which is seized and convulsed by evil.

[8 : 41] An evil which is distorting and destroying the image of God in human beings. And in these disciples, we see the church of Jesus Christ, which is trying.

It's doing its uttermost, but it's lacking in power. And it's obviously failing to deal with the situation. Do any of us ask the question of these disciples?

Do we say, Lord, why? Why don't we have the power? Why don't we have the power to deal with the evil that's so obviously convulsing our world? Why does the church in North America and the Western world seem to lack such spiritual energy and authority to engage with the situation that's confronting us?

And Jesus answers the question about why they couldn't drive out the evil spirit. And his answer is, this kind. You don't yet understand this kind.

You've not yet learned to differentiate between that kind and this kind. The disciples know how to deal with that kind of spirit.

[9 : 47] Because after their initial training, we saw this in Mark chapter 6, Jesus sends his disciples out and he says, I want you to go preach the kingdom of God and I want you to cast out demons. And they went out and they did that very thing.

And in Luke chapter 10, we read that on one occasion, they were so successful that they came back with such elation and such excitement that they felt overconfident.

And the Lord rebuked the pride of his little disciple community. And he says to them in Luke 10, 20, he says, Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.

He says, you guys are full of excitement because in my name and in my power, the devils are made subject to you. And because this kingdom of darkness, this kingdom full of evil spirits is just falling down before you as you preach the kingdom of God.

But Jesus says, this time, this father brings his son to you for healing and you're approaching that problem with overconfidence.

[10 : 52] You're approaching this problem with a sense of self-assurance. You have no doubt that you're going to succeed against the darkness. And yet, in spite of all of your efforts, this boy, he's no better at all.

In fact, he's just as desperate, just as miserable as he's ever been. And so Jesus says, I want to give you, my disciples, I want to give you eyes to see the difference between that kind that you've encountered before with success and this kind, which is way stronger than you ever realized. You guys tracking with me so far? If you've ever read the Screwtape Letters, if you've never read the Screwtape Letters by C.S. Lewis, if you're in middle school or high school or college and you've never read the Screwtape Letters, I encourage you to get this book and read it between now and Easter.

What an amazing book that is. But it draws on this New Testament teaching about the difference between this demon and that demon. Right? That in this evil kingdom of dark powers that Jesus describes, there's gradations and there's hierarchies.

And the Apostle Paul writes about this in Ephesians 6. He says, For our struggle is not against flesh and blood. He says, What do we wrestle against? What we really wrestle against, he says, are principalities and powers and the rulers of the darkness of this world and spiritual wickedness in high places.

[12 : 16] There's a gradation. There's a hierarchy. And at the head of all of that is Satan himself, whom the Apostle describes in Ephesians 2. He says, He's the prince of the power of the air and the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.

And so under Satan, there are these spirits, these forces, these powers that vary in strength. And earlier, the disciples could easily deal with the lesser spirits.

Right? They could master them. They could exercise them in Jesus' name. But Jesus says, Here is a spirit of greater power. This kind is not like the other feebler spirits.

It's altogether different. You're facing a much bigger problem. And the disciples rush to attempt a treatment before they've truly understood the nature of the problem before them.

And I think the church in the Western world today is so active, so busy, it's so devoting, massive amounts of time and energy and money without really stopping to consider Jesus' diagnosis of this kind.

[13 : 29] Right? We may not be as aware as we should be of the real essence and the real depth of the problem that's confronting the church. And what do I mean by that? Well, in 1882, philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche said that we should, our modern project, our project in the late modern world is that we should unchain the earth from the sun.

We should unchain the earth from the sun and therefore, on that basis, we should revalue all values. Okay? I can't explain what that means this morning.

But think about that. What happens if you unchain the earth from the sun? And what happens when you revalue all values? Well, since Nietzsche's time, we've seen belief in God rapidly fading in the western world.

We've seen the knowledge of biblical truth diminished and almost virtually gone. Probably in the next generation, it will be completely gone. We've lost a sense of universal, timeless, moral absolutes of what's right and what's wrong.

The notion that human beings are a species that need saving is increasingly dismissed and mocked. Jesus is interpreted as just a man among men, a social reformer, a political agitator, a good moral example or ethical teacher, but he's nothing more than that.

[14:57] The Bible is interpreted as just a book among books. It's got inspiring stories, beautiful poems, wise sayings, but it's mostly just superstitious myth and legend. Nothing more than that.

And the result of all this is that most of our friends and our neighbors and our colleagues and our family are in positions of plenty in our culture of affluence. They have everything they need.

They're able, at the click of a button, to get whatever they want, but they're totally unconcerned about spiritual things. No interest in the soul, no interest in higher and eternal things in life, no interest in God just eating and drinking and enjoying the pleasure of the moment, completely powerless in the face of evil.

Right? Totally unprepared to meet God face to face, to stand before the judge of all the earth with his exacting standards of absolute righteousness.

righteousness. This is what happens when you unchain the earth from the sun and you revalue all values. We're facing this unprecedented post-Christian context and this increasingly anti-Christ zeitgeist.

[16:17] That's the spirit of the age that we live in, the zeitgeist of our spirit, the spirit of this age, is resisting Christ.

And so can we carry on thinking that the problem is that kind when really Jesus would say, no, it's this kind. Like the disciples, are we trying to deal with this kind of situation that we find ourselves in without prayer, without extraordinary prayer, how arrogant, how clueless the disciple community seems to be about our inadequacy to deal with evil and suffering in the world.

We seem not to understand how weak we are, how proud we are. We overestimate our abilities and our faith. We underestimate the power of evil that's out there in the world and indeed the power of evil that's in here in ourselves.

And Jesus is wanting us, I think, to confront and to contend with this kind. This kind. Do you understand that you're dealing with this kind?

Does that make sense? But Jesus says, this kind can come out. This kind can come out. When you look at the actors in this scene, you notice that, number one, there's the devil who the New Testament calls a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, who comes to steal and kill and destroy and the disciples seem to give him no trouble at all.

[17:57] The boy, here he is in this terrible condition of helplessness and evil is making him increasingly subhuman. The scribes just argue and debate.

The clergy is completely useless when real evil needs to be confronted. The crowd is just in absolute distress. Who else in this crowd needs to be healed and delivered like this boy?

And this father is so distraught. He's just a man who his basic prayer is just rescue me from my unbelief. And then you have these disciples who are confident that they can help, confident that they can do something in this situation and then they're mortified and they're baffled by their failure. It's a scene of total despair. And isn't that our situation exactly in Berkeley in 2024? That Satan is rampant, the world is convulsing with evil and if you're not convinced of that you just need to read the headlines more often.

The church is impotent with her squabbling scribes. The crowd is agonizing with her massive levels of need just watching this spectacle.

[19:11] The people of God are faltering in their faith, just their faith is polluted and choked by unbelief. And the disciples are perplexed about what to do in the face of overwhelming evil.

Doesn't that feel just desperate? Well, Lent is a season in which we humble ourselves before our desperate situation. It's a season in which we say, Lord, help us.

Lord, deliver us. And what's amazing is that you've got more than just these six actors that I've named. You have the seventh actor that enters the scene and he says, this kind can come out. And he demonstrates the power to drive it out.

And then in this follow-up Q&A, Jesus says, you know, this kind can not be driven out by anything but. And he's basically saying, look, certain approaches to being a disciple community are utterly

useless when applied to this kind.

The power that maybe you've had before, the things that were sufficient before are insufficient now. The things that were adequate before are inadequate now. The things that were effective before are ineffective now.

[20 : 22] And it's leaving you helpless and hopeless and it's leaving this boy diseased and powerless. And Jesus, in this conversation with his disciples is driving them to a sense of deeper dependency.

When these disciples realize that in spite of their efforts, they're not enough, that they're actually quite useless, that they lack power that's needed to confront the powers and the principalities, what do they do?

And what does the church do today when she realizes that we're not touching the secular age at all? That the spiritual, moral condition of our society seems not affected by us one bit.

In fact, in many ways, we're being drawn into the spiritual and moral condition of our society. And in many ways, in many pockets, the church is making the spiritual and moral condition of our society worse.

Do you realize that? Jesus says, if you realize that, I want you to put your faith in my power to deal with the situation.

[21 : 31] I want you to put your faith in my power to deal with this kind. And so he says in verse 19, you unbelieving generation, how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you?

Bring the boy to me. He just looks out and he sees everybody's full of unbelief, no faith. Jesus is the only one that believes. He says, bring the boy to me and they brought the boy to him and when the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion and he fell down to the ground and he rolled around foaming at the mouth and we've seen this over and over in Mark's gospel that the spirits know Jesus.

The spirits know Jesus better than human beings know Jesus and so when they see him, they tremble. They understand his power and when Jesus gets closer to them, they resist and they tighten their grip on human beings and Jesus, in verse 21, it says, he asks the boy's father, how long has he been like this?

And he says, from childhood, he's often thrown him into the fire or water to kill him but if you can do anything, if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.

You can kind of imagine this father just shrugging his shoulders and saying, hey, Jesus, go for it. If you got anything, just do it. And Jesus teasingly rebukes him in verse 23 and just bounces this question back to him and says, what is this if you can nonsense?

[22 : 57] It's not about my ability or inability. It's totally about you and your setting limits upon God and what for him is possible or impossible.

And so this man hears that and immediately in verse 24, it says, the boy's father exclaimed, I do believe, help me overcome my unbelief. What an awesome prayer for the season of Lent.

What an amazing thing for the church to just honestly pray. I do believe but oh Lord, help me overcome my unbelief. Lord, rescue me from my doubts.

Liberate me from half believing to full believing. Save me from notional faith into real faith.

It's a prayer in which we say to Jesus, awaken me, enliven me, quicken me, revive me.

[24 : 13] Give me just the smallest amount of, just a mustard seed size of faith to grab hold of your massive amount of power. Lord, please enable me to believe in you.

And in verse 25, it says, when Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the evil spirit. He said, you deaf and mute spirit, I command you come out of him and never enter him again.

And the spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out and the boy looked so much like a corpse that they said, he's dead. What have you done, Jesus? He's dead. But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet and he stood up.

Jesus is the giver of life. Jesus is the one who breaks the power of Satan. Jesus is the one who releases us through his authoritative word.

Jesus is the one who's on his way to his own death and his own resurrection and so he just grabs a hold of this boy and he pulls him out of this death-dealing evil and he raises him up to new life with him.

[25 : 19] And this is a wonderful instance of what Jesus said he came to do. In Mark chapter 3, verse 27, he says, I came to bind up the strong man and to plunder his house. I came to bind up the strong man and to deliver all the prisoners, all the people that he's put into his house.

Have you experienced this? Has Jesus taken you by the hand to raise you up from darkness and evil and sin and death and to give you a new kind of life with him?

Has Jesus unleashed the power of the Holy Spirit in you so that you've been delivered and liberated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light? You can't become a Christian.

You can't enter into the kingdom of God in any other way. So if you're here and you're exploring Christianity with us, we're so thrilled that you are. but if you've not yet experienced the power of Jesus but there's a part of you that wants to and maybe there's a part of you that just wants to want to, I want to encourage you to just take a risk today and even right now in your heart and maybe later today you can just pray, Lord, I believe but rescue me from my unbelief.

And if you're a Christian you've said that. You're a disciple. You're a follower of Jesus. You've apprenticed yourself to the master. This season of Lent is a time to examine ourselves and to ask ourselves where is my faith in Jesus?

[27 : 00] What unbelief is lingering in the shadows of my heart and my mind that I need Jesus to overcome for me? And in what parts of my life am I saying, Jesus, if you can, help me?

When I'm looking at the challenges that I'm facing or that we're facing, where have I succumbed to unbelief and thought to myself, I'm pretty sure that this particular need is beyond your ability.

And I'm pretty sure that this particular challenge that I'm facing is outside of the realm of what's possible for you to accomplish. What are the areas of my life where Jesus is looking at me and going, you unbelieving and faithless soul, how long, how long do I have to be patient with you?

Oh. One of the verses in Mark's gospel just haunts me. It's where it says in Mark 6, verse 5, he, Jesus, could not do any miracles there in Nazareth and he was amazed at their lack of faith.

And that's the question for us is how much do we believe that Jesus has the power to do the things that we need him to do? How much do we believe that Jesus has the power to make this kind come out?

[28 : 27] He says this kind can come out but in conclusion he says this kind can come out only by prayer. This kind can come out only by prayer.

You succeeded before because you were dealing just with that kind of lesser, weaker demons and you've failed here because now you're in a different situation with this kind and you have insufficient power.

Your ignorance about the hierarchies of powers and principalities in this world has led you to a lack of preparation and therefore insufficient prayer and therefore powerlessness.

And Jesus says what I did, he says to his disciples I did what you could not do because I have the power and because I'm filled with the power that God gives me by the Holy Spirit.

What Jesus has just been doing on the Mount of Transfiguration is he's been there in a time with his disciples Peter, James, and John in a particularly intense time of prayer.

[29 : 31] Praying to the Father fill me with the Holy Spirit. Fill me with the power of the Holy Spirit and he comes back from that time of prayer with a heightened sense of power. And friends we're never going to be able to deal with this kind that's facing the church today unless we've applied to God for the power which he and he alone can give us.

A power that's beyond any of our ability. I assume that these disciples had actually been praying but they were praying unbelieving prayers.

And Jesus I think is calling us to a kind of extraordinary believing prayer where we say God I'm so aware now of my need I'm so aware that we are in over our heads and that we're confronting something too deep for us to deal with on our own and I'm aware of myself that I half believe and that I'm riddled with doubt and that I barely pray but help me with my unbelief enable me to depend upon you fill me fill us fill this church with your power.

Jesus is calling us to act out our faith through this kind of prayer and if you hear that as an individualistic just sort of do it yourself kind of project you're hearing it wrong because Jesus is talking to his circle of disciples and he's saying y'all need something you guys need something that can go down underneath this evil power and that can shatter it and there's only one thing that can do that and that's the extraordinary supernatural power of my father.

And the first place that my father's power is going to show up in your disciple community is through your prayer meetings. The prayer meeting is the spiritual thermostat of the church.

[31 : 33] The prayer meeting is where the spiritual heat and the spiritual energy gets cranked up among us. Right? The prayer meeting is where people come in with hearts that are cold and hard and closed and they walk out with hearts that are warm and soft and open.

At Christ Church we're hoping that prayer is happening in our homes and our community groups but we have this weekly meeting for prayer at 9.30 on Sunday morning in our boiler room just back there and down beneath the sanctuary and that's a place where we just pray Lord would you cause whatever is going on with this kind in our church and in our city to move aside so that you can create space for your kingdom to come in.

Once a month we gather on second Wednesdays at 7 o'clock for prayer to pray for the particular needs of individuals and the corporate needs of our church and of the world that we live in.

Once a quarter we come together for prayer vigils our next one happens to be on Good Friday and here's my crazy hope during Lent. You want to hear my crazy hope during Lent? Is that our prayer meetings would be full and I know that's hard for parents especially.

That may be actually a miracle if you could make it to a prayer meeting but I'm praying that our prayer meetings would become full and that we just have no space left for people to pray.

[33 : 07] There'd just be too many people that want to come and pray and I think that would happen if we're utterly convinced of our need and if we were to cease having so much confidence in ourselves and if we know that we can't succeed in the mission that we've been given without the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit and if we collectively decided that yes we want to see this power that can enter into the souls of people and break the grip of evil and liberate people and make people new if we wanted to experience the power of the living God we just simply have to pray for it.

It's not going to come automatically you have to ask God to give it to you and you have to ask him again and again and again and there's only one thing that stands in the way of this kind of praying faith this faith that prays and Jesus calls it yourself.

If anyone whoever wants to be my disciple must deny yourself and take up your cross and follow me. The church is never going to deal with the problems that's facing us unless we give up more than chocolate and alcohol for Lent and definitely give that up but what we should really give up is our prayerlessness.

What we should really give up is the thing that our prayerlessness is rooted in which is self-confidence and self-reliance and self-satisfaction. If anyone asks you what are you giving up for Lent I hope you'll say myself.

I'm just going to stop trusting so much in myself and I'm going to start taking up this cross of prayer and just deliberately saying Lord I believe but help my unbelief. That's how I'm that's what I'm doing in Lent.

[34 : 57] That's how I'm preparing for Easter. We really have no hope to deal with this kind unless God manifests his power among us. But when he does it's like this boy Jesus just overcomes the evil in him with apparent ease.

He just deals with this problem in an effortless manner. The devil's exercised the boy is healed the father's relieved the family's restored the community rejoices.

That's what happens when the power comes from on high. And friends Christ Jesus is risen from the dead. He's our risen and living Lord who's just waiting for us to come and pray to him and ask him for his power and so may we come to terms with our powerlessness in the face of evil and may we come to know the power of God in Jesus by the Holy Spirit and may we seek more and more in this season to be full of the Holy Spirit and full of his power through prayer.

And as we pray let us pray with the confidence that everything is possible for those who believe.

And let us pray with deep believing that nothing is impossible for God.

And let us pray knowing that the eternal infinite unlimited power of God it's right there for the asking. if only we would radically rely on his ability and not on the self.

[36 : 33] This kind can come out but it can only come out by prayer. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.