

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Quinquagesima Sunday, March 3, 2019

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 3, 351:1, 364, 367, 50.

Lessons: Jonah 3:1-9, Hebrews 12:18-29, Mark 9:14-34.

Sermon Text: Luke 9:37-46

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

These events happened on the day after Jesus' transfiguration, which we talked about last week. On the mountain Peter, James, and John had seen the glory of Jesus. At that time they didn't understand much of what happened there.

On this day Jesus is approached by a man in a large crowd. Now,

JESUS TELLS HIS DISCIPLES AGAIN WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO HIM

1. ***"The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men."***
2. ***"But they did not understand what this meant."***

This isn't the first time Jesus had told his disciples about what he was going to do. But it is one of two times recorded in all three gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke when Jesus spoke of his coming betrayal, crucifixion and death. It is easy to think that he told his disciples often about what would happen to him, because he was always preaching and teaching them.

When he comes down from the mount of glory Jesus comes face to face again with the suffering in this world caused by sin. From out of a large crowd steps a man begging for help. He describes his child's condition characterized by symptoms similar to what we call some forms of epilepsy. But this is also an obvious case of demon possession. An evil spirit dominated this child's life. The father had apparently brought the afflicted child to Jesus' disciples while he was on the mountain, but they were of no help.

When Jesus says ***"O unbelieving and perverse generation, ... how long shall I stay with you and put up with you? Bring your son here"*** these words are really directed to all those present: the crowd, the father and the disciples. The crowd is always ready to marvel at wonders done by Jesus but shows no real faith; the father admits his littleness of faith as Mark reports ***"if you can do anything."***

And the words of Jesus are also directed to the disciples who by their inability to cast out the demon, show a lack of faith in the power and authority given to them by Jesus. He had told them as Luke records at the beginning of this chapter, ***"he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases."*** Luke 9:1 (NIV)

Jesus is clearly irritated by this unbelieving and perverse generation. On the mountain of transfiguration, he had just received strengthening from his heavenly Father and from Moses and Elijah. Now he is back in the sin-filled world. These are the people for whom he willingly is going to the cross. The burden of the cross which he carries for the sins of the world, including the sin of unbelief, presses hard upon him.

Yet his love and compassion does not fail. He invites the father to bring his son. At that very moment the boy is seized by another convulsion. The evil spirit knows that his control over this child has come to an end. Jesus rebukes the demon, heals the boy, and gives him back to his father. Mark writes of this miracle in this way: ***"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?’ said Jesus. ‘Everything is possible for him 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 evil spirit. ‘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 to his feet, and he stood up.” Mark 9:20-27 (NIV) Once more the greatness of God is displayed. Jesus shows his power over Satan and his evil spirits.

Luke makes a very close connection between this story and Jesus predicting his sufferings and death, which are also called “his passion”. It is almost as if Jesus has his mind on other things while healing the boy. It is almost as if he is thinking of how, as the only son of his Father in heaven, he knows that he himself must and will be afflicted by all the powers of Satan and hell.

This earthly father was troubled by the pain, agony and suffering that his only son had to endure. He was hoping for someone who could do something to save him. When put into terms of thinking of a human father who has only one son, and seeing that one son suffer the torments he is seeing, we can begin to realize the sacrifice Jesus made for us, and that his Father in heaven made to pay for sin. When Jesus was transfigured, the heavenly Father had given the command: ***“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!”*** Matthew 17:5 (NIV)

Jesus introduces his statement that he, and he calls himself here ***“the Son of Man”***, will be betrayed into the hands of men with this admonition to his disciples: ***“Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you.”*** But what Jesus had to tell them was more than they could grasp and understand now. Betrayal and the cross and the death of Jesus did not fit into their thinking. For now it was hidden from them. Jesus had said earlier: ***“For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open.”*** Luke 8:17 (NIV) Soon enough they would come to know the meaning of the cross.

This is something Jesus had to do. This is what he came to earth for.

They didn’t understand. As two evangelists tell us, they then began arguing about who was the greatest!

He had obviously told them at least once before, and knowing about God and the Lord Jesus and how he was constantly teaching, we could conclude that he had told them many times. But they didn’t grasp it, didn’t understand, and didn’t even ask him about it, and Mathew records that ***“the disciples were filled with grief.”*** Matthew 17:23 (NIV)

This is the second time these three evangelists record Jesus as speaking explicitly concerning his coming passion. Even this time the disciples do not fully understand. In fact, it seems they fear to face the full disclosure, because they may hear more than they want to hear.

We have no reason to criticize them. All the facts about Jesus have been known for nearly 2000 years. But there are still those who refuse to admit that sin – our sin – made Jesus’ suffering and death necessary, and that his resurrection is our assurance that our sins are actually paid for. And aren’t there even times when we who believe don’t want to hear some of the things that God has to tell us? The power of Satan is very real, and he is still in our lives.

The words ***“is going to be betrayed”*** is a clear statement that someone near to Christ will give him over to those who will kill him. If they recognize this, it is no wonder the disciples are afraid to ask any further questions. Instead, they push his coming suffering out of their minds, and instead argue about who of them will be the greatest in the coming kingdom of heaven!

Jesus spoke about his coming suffering and death in greater and greater detail as time went on. Their only reaction at this time was to be filled with grief. It was only natural that they would be saddened at the prospect of Jesus’ death – especially when they failed to understand its significance. Jesus was sad, too, as he contemplated his approaching suffering and death, but he could confidently commit himself into the hands of his heavenly Father, because he could look forward to the glory that was in store for him. Even though three of the disciples at his transfiguration had gotten a preview of that glory, at this point none of them fully appreciated the Lord’s promise of glory.

A hint is given that Jesus was ready to help the disciples to understand. But they are afraid to ask. Perhaps the subject is simply too painful to talk about: suffering, rejection, death. They must think that this is

strange talk coming from one who obviously was filled with such almighty power. Here is the mystery of the cross.

The very Son of God humbled himself to suffer and die, to be rudely, evilly, roughly, and terrifyingly handled. He humbled himself in order to suffer, not for his own sins, not for just the sins of one man, but for the sins of all men. I don't think that any artists have ever shown that terrible horror, pain, suffering in a way that could truly recognize how terrible Jesus' suffering and death was. Perhaps in our generation one movie has come close, the R-rated – for violence – 2004 movie “The Passion of the Christ” directed by Mel Gibson. But we must be careful that we let the Word of God speak to us and not just look to art or movies to try to teach us.

When we hear, in the words of the Gospels, the passion history of Jesus Christ we can see the love of God. We can be amazed at God's great love, for he did much more than cast Satan out of one boy. Jesus has suffered – he had to suffer and be handed over to evil men – so that Satan could be cast out of all our lives. He suffered for all men. He paid the price for all sins for all men. You only need believe it to receive that gift! Lord, let us gladly learn and understand! Amen.