

Friday, March 24, 2023
Season of Lent
Day 27

Matthew 17:14–20

¹⁴ When they came to the crowd, a man approached Jesus and knelt before him. ¹⁵ “Lord, have mercy on my son,” he said. “He has seizures and is suffering greatly. He often falls into the fire or into the water. ¹⁶ I brought him to your disciples, but they could not heal him.”

¹⁷ “You unbelieving and perverse generation,” Jesus replied, “how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy here to me.” ¹⁸ Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of the boy, and he was healed at that moment.

¹⁹ Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, “Why couldn’t we drive it out?”

²⁰ He replied, “Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.”

Reflection

Jesus always seems a bit short tempered in this passage to me. It might just be the way the Gospel writers tell their story, but I think something else is going on. I think time is running out. The disciples have come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, but when Jesus tells them he must go up to Jerusalem to die Peter rebukes him. He takes his inner circle up on the the mountain and is transfigured and again Jesus frames his comments around his death and resurrection. For Jesus, the eschatological clock is running down. Soon he won’t just be away on a mountain. Soon he will be seated at the right hand of the Father. Will they be ready?

We know from Mark’s Gospel that the man has his own doubts of even Jesus’s ability to heal, so he must not have approached the disciples with much hope. The disciples themselves have Jesus’s own authority to heal and exorcise, but they have not been able to cure this boy. Perhaps, like Peter on the waves, the situation seemed too difficult to accomplish. Whatever the case might be, Jesus—who is recapitulating Moses journey—finds a group of people who are not exercising their faith in God.

That’s what this comes down to; either God’s kingdom has come and God’s purposes are being accomplished or not. Faith is not a power we store up and exercise. To have faith is to have a trusting belief in God. Now, things are a bit complicated for you and me. Is Jesus saying here that if we only believe we can cure all? That our lives will be perfect? No, that can’t be what Jesus is saying. We live in this in between time; the kingdom has come but is coming. So what is the call on you and me? To grow in our faith in God. To believe that God is in charge and working out his plan no matter what the situation. To put our trust wholly in him alone, no matter the outcome of one situation or the next.

Prayer

Lord, we confess that we desire power to control situations. But, your name is not a magic spell. Forgive us for using it in such a way. Forgive us for the times when we make those who desire healing feel like they lack faith because they are ill. Give us the strength to put our trust in you, our Good Father no matter the situation or the outcome. Remove the mountain of our fears and doubts. Amen.