

Sermon 2009 Pentecost 15  
September 13, 2009  
9-13-09  
Text: Mark 9:24  
Theme: "Believe...But Be Prepared to Duck!"

Does anyone here ever get frustrated because Jesus tells us to do stuff and it doesn't seem to work the way Jesus seems to think it will work? Go make disciples. Go proclaim the Gospel. Go heal the world with the forgiveness of sins. And we dash out into the streets to do the miraculous only to find that there are a bunch of potholes and roadblocks out there.

The kitchen guild doesn't want the kitchen dirty and the altar guild doesn't want to have to set up for Holy Communion every week and the financial committee says there's no money and the trustees don't want the building getting all wrecked and dirtied and the 1/2 the music committee doesn't want those old stodgy hymns but the other 1/2 doesn't want that guitar and drum nonsense and the financial committee says there's no money to pay either so who cares? So the council get's together and talks about it for about three or four hours and the pastor throws up his hands in frustration because whatever gifts he has, they aren't the ones anyone wants and some people go church

shopping and some dig into their pews and make them like fortified bunkers and all the while people all around us are starving for the love and forgiveness that Christ offers freely.

The disciples faced the same challenges. They just weren't given the opportunity to be dumb enough to tie themselves up with a bunch of human committees and red tape. The Lord intervened. Apparently he has decided today to just let us role around in our bureaucracy as long as we would like. After all, I know there are people who are dying for the love of Christ but the color of the tile in the ladies restroom is so much easier to address. We'll deal with the Gospel later.

The father of the boy betrays the problem right off.

"But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." IF? IF you can do anything? To whom does he think he's talking? This is Jesus; the second person of the Holy Trinity, the son of God, the receptacle of all authority in heaven and earth. IF? That's our problem too. We are good at mouthing all manner of platitudes but do we really believe that Jesus will do what he says he will do. We say all the right belief statements

but it seems as though we always have a backup plan in case the Gospel doesn't work and usually that backup plan is the Law.

We love the Law because it is tangible. It has rules we can grasp and enforce. And if we abuse it, like so many in our circles do, we can make ourselves feel better. We can rant and rave about that horrible ELCA who is unbiblical! You know, I don't necessarily agree with the ELCA sometimes, but I think that we, the Missouri Synod, choose to constantly measure the ELCA against the Law so that it keeps the focus off of us. Okay so we believe that so called alternate lifestyles are unbiblical, but what have we done to reach out with the love of Jesus to people who for whatever reason are in such a lifestyle? We believe that the body and blood of Christ strengthens faith and heals us and so we set up a gauntlet to prevent as many people as possible from reaching these healing elements? Why do we so love the Law?

**Because it is more difficult to believe that the Gospel will work.**

The Law of the Pendulum states that a pendulum set in motion can never exceed the distance of its primary arc. That is

a physical law and a physics teacher who taught high school Bible study asked his students if they believed that law. Absolutely. They had all had this teacher for math and physics and they all believed that the physical laws were absolutes. So he hung 200lbs of free weights for a rod suspended from the ceiling, had a volunteer sit in a chair with his back against the wall and pulled the pendulum right up to an inch from his nose. He asked,

“Do you still believe in the law of the pendulum that says that this pendulum cannot exceed its primary arc? When I let go, this pendulum cannot come back to any more than an inch from your face. Yes. The student believed. The teacher let the pendulum go and it swung out. Slowly it stopped and began its arc back to the student in a chair with his back against the wall. You have never seen a kid move so fast. That kid flew out of his chair when 200 lbs of weights started heading back towards his face. See he believed in principle but when it came to putting that belief into practice, he couldn't do it.

So Jesus says,

“This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.” In other words stop trusting in your own abilities and call upon the one who gives the power to do whatever he calls us to do. There’s a difference between believing something and putting that belief into practice. I believe Lord, but I need help putting that belief to work for me. “I believe; help my unbelief!” Even when we know what needs doing and even when we are pretty sure that we know how to do it, the strength and the power to accomplish the goal still comes from the Lord and the Lord alone and when we fail to call on him..., well, we end up arguing about the color of the tile in the ladies restroom or the flavor of the communion wine.

So we take a deep breath, fill ourselves up with God’s Word and Sacrament, call Jesus to his promises to be with us always and step out into space. Many of you know that I have spent a great deal of time walking in space. Sometimes it seemed as though I would surely fall and sometimes it even seemed as though I was falling, but the Lord is always there blessing those who do the job that needs doing, pushing doubt down and

confidently invoking His name. "I believe; help my unbelief!"

Our mission is not to be sure that there are never any loose ends, or that all of our doctrine is neat and tidy. Our mission is to reach people with the love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ, people who are trapped by the Law and desperate for Gospel, people who wander lost through a maze of secular humanism always seeking and never finding satisfaction in their possessions, or their causes or their drugs that numb their pain.

Lamb of God, you are blessed with all the tools you need and you are surrounded with a sea of humanity who need you. Stop doubting and get to work. In the early 90's you were a congregation of over 200 in worship reaching out all over this community. Your stalling and stammering for the past 15 years is just what Satan wants. He wants to encourage your doubt that Jesus will really lift you up as you step out in faith. He wants to keep you fallow and quiet. But you are the people of God! You are neither fallow nor quiet. The time has come for the Lamb of God to roar and let this community feel your presence and know that you will not be silenced.

The time has come for you to step out in faith Lamb of God and I don't mean just with money. I mean in your own personal lives. I mean each and every one of you taking seriously this promise of Christ and being confident that if you call on him the demons will be shaken out and grace will flow. I mean stop complaining about difficult situations and seeking people to blame for everything that goes awry and instead pour all of that energy into seeking the lost and proclaiming the Gospel.

See, all of us can sit around and find reasons why it won't work. We can be afraid all the time that something we do might come back to bite us. But the reality is that we use those excuses to give ourselves permission to do nothing. The people of God are filled with the Holy Spirit and we are afraid of nothing. We face every demon not with our own ideas and abilities but with the sure and certain confidence that Christ Jesus stands with us and the demons must retreat. They can do none other in the face of Christ. AMEN.