

Text: Mark 9:14-29

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, *Amen*.

Satan is powerful. Satan was a mighty angel. But in pride he rebelled against God. He corrupted a third of the angels. We call them demons. They fought against God and were cast from heaven. To continue his rebellion against God, Satan deceived Adam and Eve. He turned them to rebel against God's commandment. Their rebellion brought sin and death into this world.

Satan is totally evil. He wants only to destroy what God has created. Everywhere you see pain and suffering, and whenever you hear of wars, famines, plagues, there is Satan at work in this world with his demons. He can be subtle, too. He is called the father of lies. Satan continually plies his craft of cunning in this world. He deceives with lies and uses the deceived to spread his lies to others. False preachers in the Church, politicians who propagate transgenderism and other barbaric perversions of God's creation, teachers who destroy the faith of children, musicians whose every song glorifies sexual immorality—all spread Satan's lies.

Satan's goal is to destroy people's faith in God and His Son, Jesus Christ. Satan uses many tricks to accomplish his goal. In our Gospel we see two of Satan's most powerful weapons against faith at work—fear and doubt.

Jesus returns to His disciples with James, Peter, and John, from the Mount of Transfiguration. There He manifested His glory for a time. The pure, holy, light of the world which overcomes darkness shone before the Apostles. But Jesus' other disciples had not seen this.

Jesus finds them in the midst of a great crowd arguing with the scribes, the teachers of the law. **"He asked them, "What are you arguing about with them?"**" They don't respond, neither do the scribes. But **"Someone from the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute. And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able."**

Satan had employed one of his showiest tricks: demonic possession. A demon had afflicted this little boy and tormented him. The demon carried on, convulsing the boy, making his mouth foam, grinding his teeth. Could there have been a more terrifying sight for the boy's father? And when the disciples tried to cast it out, and the demon went into convulsions and foamed, wouldn't they have been disconcerted?

If fear sets in, then doubt will follow and from that doubt an even greater fear is born. The disciples tried to cast out the demon. They probably commanded the demon to depart in the Name of Jesus. But the demon put on a show, and the disciples were

startled. They grew afraid and doubted. Doubted that they had the power to cast the demon out.

That's exactly what Satan and his demon intended. Satan will put on a show to strike fear in our hearts, fear of his great evil power. This fear of his power sends doubts into our hearts, doubt in God's power to defend against the evil one. When doubt and fear replace unshaken faith in God, then Satan has won.

That happened to the disciples. The demon didn't come out right away, and they grew afraid. They doubted. And so the demon didn't come out. The Scribes were arguing with the defensive disciples afterward and castigating them for trying to cast out demons in the Name of Jesus. What authority does Jesus have over the devil, the Scribes wanted to know.

But now Jesus stands among them. He does not rebuke his disciples for failing to use the right ritual. But he says, **"O faithless generation! How long am I to bear with you?"** How long until you learn that I who cast out demons am powerful to cast out every devil! Had Jesus' disciples believed instead of doubted, the demon would have left.

Jesus says, **"Bring him to me." And they brought the boy to him. And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth." And Jesus asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us."**

In Jesus' presence, the demon puts on his show of power. The father tells Jesus that this has happened since childhood. He asks Jesus to do something, if it's possible. Jesus' disciples failed. The man is not sure that Jesus has the power to cast out a demon that has overpowered his son since childhood.

But Jesus says, **"If you can? All things are possible for the one who believes."** Jesus certainly can! He is able to help because He is powerful. He is stronger than Satan and every demon by far because He is their Creator. He tells the man that all things are possible for the one who believes. This isn't some silly motivational statement meaning, "Just believe harder and you can do everything!" Faith is not a feeling of psychological confidence. Jesus never tells anyone to just believe harder. The man can't. He is a fearful, doubting sinner.

Jesus is simply saying that the man's desire that his boy be delivered is not impossible, but possible, possible if the man asks Jesus in faith. No request for Jesus' help goes unanswered if asked in faith. But in Him is always Yes and Amen.

The man cries out, **“Lord, I believe, help my unbelief!”** He knows that Jesus is calling him to trust that He is able to cast out the demon. He believes what Jesus says, but wonders how it’s possible. He’s still plagued by doubt. Jesus looks like any other man, and the demon’s antics appear very frightening. But he prays to Jesus to help him overcome his doubt. He says, **“Help my unbelief!”** Help me see that you are the deliverer!

Jesus hears and answers that prayer for greater faith. He says, **“You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.”** And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, **“He is dead.”** But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up, and he arose.”

Jesus casts out the demon to demonstrate that Satan is no match for Him. Jesus might have seemed like a normal man to the father who prayed, **“Help my unbelief.”** But by casting out the demon, Jesus opened the eyes of that man’s faith to see that Jesus is more powerful than Satan. Satan is powerful. But Jesus is stronger.

Believe that, Christian! Satan wants to deceive you. He wants you to think that he wields great power over you. Satan means accuser. Satan wants to destroy your faith by striking fear and doubt in your heart. He accuses you before God. He points out your many sins and asks you how, how, could a holy God ever accept you? It’s not that you’ve just messed up once or twice, but you sin daily. You dishonor God in word and deed and you fail to love your neighbor. O sure, He forgives sins, but He doesn’t offer cheap grace, does He? What will you do on judgement day? Satan would make you fear that God does not accept you. He would make you doubt that forgiveness is really yours.

When such doubts and fears assail, turn to Jesus who is the Christ. He is the Seed of Woman who crushes the serpent under his foot. Jesus has taken your place to face every accusation against you for your sin. He’s taken your guilt to himself and suffered the punishment due the guilty. He has borne the sin of the world on his shoulders when He in obedience to His Father’s command was crucified on the tree of the cross to redeem rebel man who in disobedience ate from the tree in the garden.

He is risen free from sin and death. He descended to hell to proclaim his victory over Satan. His resurrection victory announces to you that you have a clean conscience free from sin. Sin is gone. Paid for and left in the grave. You are forgiven and free. Satan cannot accuse you before God because in Christ there is no accusation. When you repent of your sins and trust that Christ is your champion who has defeated Satan by His death and resurrection, then Satan is powerless over you.

Friends, faith in Christ shields you from the devil's weapons. Satan will do all he can to overthrow your faith. He shoots his fiery darts of doubt and fear at your heart. But don't let them pierce you. As St Paul says in Ephesians, chapter 6, "In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, by which you are able to extinguish all the fiery darts of the evil one."

But how do we take up the shield of faith when Satan attacks? Jesus' response to the disciples shows us. **"His disciples asked him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" And he said to them, "This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer."** We take up the shield of faith when we use our faith. We use our faith when we exercise our faith. When faith is exercised, faith is strengthened. Faith is exercised and strengthened when we read God's word, when we receive the sacrament, and when we pray.

Jesus is not telling the disciples that they misidentified the kind of demon and didn't say the right prayers. God does not tell us much about who demons are. He does not give us special prayers that have power over demons. If we place our confidence in special prayers or formulas or rituals, then we're not trusting in Jesus. We're trusting in our works. And then Satan is powerful once more.

No. The disciples couldn't cast out that demon because they doubted and grew afraid. They gave up. Jesus teaches that they should have prayed. Prayed that God would deliver because He is Satan's conqueror. Such prayer would have strengthened their faith. God would have heard it and the demon would have been powerless before the prayer of faith.

Friends, Satan will continue to attack you throughout your life. But whenever doubt assails you, whenever fear swells in your heart, exercise your faith. Turn to the Lord in prayer. Pray, "I believe—but help my unbelief, Lord Jesus!" Pray "Deliver us from evil, from the evil one, O Lord!" And consider why you pray that. You pray because you believe. You believe, you trust, you know, that Christ is Satan's conqueror. Christ is your defender against all doubt, all fear, every evil. The devil cannot stand against such a prayer because you say it in faith. But he must retreat, and so your faith in Christ has shielded you from Satan's deadly weapons and conquered. Your faith conquers, not because it's so strong on its own but because of where it looks, to the Lord Jesus, risen triumphant, who was crucified for you.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, *Amen*.