

**Pentecost 17 / September 15, 2024**

**Mark 9:19**

**“O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you?”**

### **Faithful Regeneration.**

Have you ever felt exasperated? When you are exasperated do you ever wonder, “What would Jesus do?” Do you think He might be exasperated too? Can you picture Jesus exasperated? We probably think of Jesus as cool, calm and collected, but He could get pretty worked up. Zeal for His Father’s house consumed Him as He chased the buyers and sellers from the temple. He probably had fire in His eyes when He pronounced seven woes on the scribes, Pharisees and teachers of the law, saying they made their proselytes twice as fit for hell than they were before conversion. Several times in the gospels He expressed exasperation at the disciples’ misunderstanding of His words and their inability to comprehend the meaning of His signs.

He was clearly exasperated at the lack of faith He found among the people of Israel, whom He termed ‘lost sheep.’ He expressed amazement when He found faith in the most unlikely of people, pagan Gentiles. He commended the faith of a Canaanite woman, exclaiming, “Woman, great is your faith!” He marvelled at the faith of a Roman commander saying, “In all of Israel I have not found such faith.” It’s exasperating when after continual teaching and admonition, people close their ears and refuse to understand.

In our gospel Jesus’ frustrations boil over when He comes upon some of His disciples arguing with the scribes, because of their inability to heal a child tormented by an unclean spirit. He cries out, “O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you?” It’s not clear precisely who He is angry with, the scribes, the crowd or His disciples. It’s safe to say He’s exasperated with all of them. The scribes demanded signs. Jesus gave signs in abundance, but they refused to believe. The crowds came to Him for healing signs, not because they believed He was the Saviour. The disciples, gifted with authority to heal and cast out unclean spirits, can’t figure out why the power doesn’t work anymore. They act as if the power is theirs, independent of the Giver. Exasperated, Jesus cries, “O faithless generation.” Jesus was exasperated at their lack of faith. No surprise Jesus was displeased. As it says in Hebrews, ‘without faith it is impossible to please God.’ Nothing is more pleasing to God than faith for faith receives His promises, all of which are expressed fully in Christ our Lord and Saviour.

Faith is the heart’s trust in God’s love, expressed fully in Christ Jesus. Faith is the gift of God, created in the human heart by the working of the Holy Spirit. St. Paul says “No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit.” Faith is the gift of God created by the Holy Spirit, working through the word. St. Paul writes, “Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ.” Through the word of Christ, the Holy Spirit creates faith in the human heart and gives us the second birth of the spirit. Through the word and washing of holy baptism the Holy Spirit regenerates us, so that we receive God’s love as forgiveness for the sake of Christ Jesus, believe He loves us and respond in love towards Him and others.

Jesus was exasperated at the faithlessness He encountered among the children of Israel. He rejoiced when He found faith in a Gentile commander and a Canaanite woman. Nothing is more precious in God’s sight than faith in the promises of His love, expressed fully in Christ Jesus. The smallest, weakest, dimmest faith is precious in His sight. A bruised reed He will not break! A dimly burning wick He will not snuff out! The father in our gospel didn’t have much faith, but he wanted to believe. When he confessed honestly the weakness of his faith and his need for Jesus to help him believe, Jesus helped him immediately. He healed his son and gave him reason to believe. Jesus wants us to believe. Jesus gives us faith and reason to believe through the word, the washing of baptism, the bread and wine of communion. Through the word and working of the Holy Spirit, He regenerates us from a faithless generation to a faithful generation, trusting His words, believing His promises.

Faith is not knowing all the answers. Faith is knowing God loves us for the sake of Christ Jesus. Faith is admitting our weaknesses and coming to God for strength in Christ Jesus. Faith is seeing our sins, confessing our sinfulness and coming to Christ for healing and forgiveness. Faith is acknowledging our lack of faith, confessing our weakness and saying with this poor man in our gospel, “I believe. Help my unbelief.” Jesus helped his unbelief by healing his son, casting out the unclean spirit, raising him up and making him well. Jesus does the same for us. First in the washing of Holy Baptism, by which He casts the unclean spirit from our hearts and sets us free from the dominion of the devil and the condemnation of eternal death. Continually through the word of absolution, by which He daily and richly forgives our sins, cleanses us of their stain, sets us free from their control so we may

walk in newness of life. It is not without reason that baptism is called the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit. In baptism Jesus continuously regenerates us from a faithless generation to a generation of faith in the promise of His love.

Faith is not the absence of doubt. Faith is the assurance of God's love in our doubts. Faith is honestly confessing our doubts, worries, fears and apprehensions in the assurance that Jesus hears in love, understands through His experience of our humanity and forgives for the sake of His cross. Faith confesses, "I believe. Help my unbelief." When we confess the weakness of our faith, and our need for His help, Jesus comes to us with His strength in the word, the washing of baptism and the nourishment of Holy Communion. Weak or strong, great or small, dimly glowing or shining bright, faith receives the promises of God for the sake of Jesus Christ.

How great is your faith? Jesus once told the disciples, "If you had faith as small as a mustard seed you could say to this mountain move here and it will obey you." The father in our gospel didn't have enough faith to kick up a little dust. Yet his little faith stood out in the midst of a faithless generation. His faith stands out, because he knew he needed Jesus to help his unbelief, give him faith, support and sustain it. If your faith can't move mountains that means you need Jesus to support you with His power and nourish your faith with His means of grace. The disciples didn't have enough faith to cast out an unclean spirit. They needed Jesus to get the job done. We all need Jesus for our faith. We will always need Jesus for our faith. There is nothing more important than seeing our need for Jesus to give us faith. When we pray, "I believe. Help my unbelief," He answers with grace to give us faith to believe.

The people who had no faith, the faithless generation, were those who saw no need for Jesus' help. They were the children of Abraham. They were the followers of Moses. They saw no need for Jesus. They asked sarcastically, 'Are you greater than Abraham our father and Moses our teacher?' Those who confessed their little faith, their lack of faith, were the ones blessed by the Spirit to believe. They were the children of the regeneration, given second birth by the Holy Spirit through the word. Jesus regenerates us from being a faithless generation, conceived and born in sin, to a generation of faith, conceived by the Holy Spirit, regenerated through the word and washing of baptism into His death and resurrection. Jesus gives us faith and fills us with the Holy Spirit through word and sacrament, so we may live each day trusting His promises. He doesn't push us aside because of our doubts. He draws us close to Himself in our weakness. He helps our unbelief and gives us faith to believe.

The author of Hebrews said it best, writing, "We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Jesus helps in time of need. Jesus gives us faith to believe in every need. In Him we are a faithful generation, regenerated by the Holy Spirit through the hearing of the word and the washing of Holy Baptism. God bless us with His grace for the sake of Christ Jesus, help our faith and preserve it until faith passes into sight in His resurrection to everlasting life. In Jesus' Name. Amen