

## Lenten Devotional April 2, 2022

### Scripture

Mark 9:14–29

14 When they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and some scribes arguing with them. 15 When the whole crowd saw him, they were immediately overcome with awe, and they ran forward to greet him. 16 He asked them, "What are you arguing about with them?" 17 Someone from the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I brought you my son; he has a spirit that makes him unable to speak; 18 and whenever it seizes him, it dashes him down; and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid; and I asked your disciples to cast it out, but they could not do so." 19 He answered them, "You faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him to me." 20 And they brought the boy to him. When the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. 21 Jesus asked the father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. 22 It has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us." 23 Jesus said to him, "If you are able! All things can be done for the one who believes." 24 Immediately the father of the child cried out, "I believe; help my unbelief!" 25 When Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You spirit that keeps this boy from speaking and hearing, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again!" 26 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." 27 But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he was able to stand. 28 When he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" 29 He said to them, "This kind can come out only through prayer."

### Devotional

Joel Peterson '18

The place where a crowd has gathered in today's passage is a passing town not even worth naming. Context tells the reader only that it is a place in Galilee between the Mount of Transfiguration and Capernaum. As Jesus and his disciples attempt to sneak through to Jerusalem, they are delayed by a pressing need: a boy with an afflicting spirit.

Those who travel through my particular Pennsylvania passing town might stop in a small restaurant surrounded by empty hardware stores and banks. The lone server rises from the jigsaw puzzle that has momentarily kept their attention and brings your menus. As you wonder which selection might get you on your way the fastest, the server tells you the history of the town and recounts her trip to Woodstock '69. But the anecdotes turn a corner as she begins to tell you about her family. The stories of overdose deaths and addictions are enlivened in her telling. And yes, there's a boy—just 8 years old—with an afflicting spirit.

A passer-through might initially be taken aback by her vulnerability, but regulars know that this never-busy restaurant is a place of prayer. The boy, just like the nameless child in Mark's Gospel, has an ailment that makes normal life impossible. The doctors have diagnostic terms for his condition. They have treatments and medications that insurance won't cover. The need is no different than it was for the disciples of Jesus. "Why can we not cast it out and set the boy free?" we ask.

Lent invites us to spend time in the places of little importance, to stop in the town where most only pass through. This season invites us to spend time with the unanswerable questions, with people who cry out for a healing that seems like a fantasy. As we pray, we say "I believe; help my unbelief." We hold fast to the promise that the one who travels through the valley of the shadow of death with us rebukes the spirit of death itself. We declare our belief that the children of God whom the world does not even stop to notice will be taken by the hand and enlivened with the Spirit who gives abundant life to all.

### **Prayer**

Savior, remind us of the world's need for your healing power from the spirits of affliction. Help us to believe even when we find ourselves unbelieving. Lift us up with the determination to seek your liberating power in places where we might otherwise give up. Fill us with awe at the wonders you will show us in unlikely places. Amen.