

“You had one job, guys! One job! What happened?” This is akin to Jesus’ reaction after He, Peter, James, and John returned from the transfiguration on the mountain. The other 9 were approached by a father who wanted them to cast out a demon from his son. Easy, right? Jesus had told them this is their job, and they’d even accomplished this before. And yet things do not go as planned. The son is brought to them, tormented by the demon inside. And they cast it out. “be gone!” “Go! Scat! Shoo!” Nothing. The boy is still writhing on the ground, and the crowd that has gathered sees the disgrace the disciples are bringing upon themselves—they were pretty confident that they could fulfill the father’s wishes, but not one of them managed to get rid of it. I’m sure this brought up questions like—what can you really do anyways? Is it only Jesus who can do this? Or have you lost this power already? They are all arguing over who understands the situation right, when Jesus and the 3 come down from the glorious mountain top into the midst of the nitty and the gritty of the world and proves His power and care for the least of these.

Now, I’m not sure how you’re feeling at this point, because, truth be told, you and I find ourselves in situations like this: in a world marked with pain and sin and evil, and we have been sent out with a similar commission. We’ve been told to, as we are going, baptize and teach others about the Gospel. The baton of the Gospel has made it to us and has been handed over, and we are to proclaim the good news of God, that which brings healing, similar to how the disciples were trying to heal. So this doesn’t often look like casting demons out left right and centre, but if you’re like me, the task of evangelizing and of obeying the 10 commandments seems equally overwhelming most days; this the life of being a faithful Christian, a disciple of Christ, seems nearly impossible.

In terms of discussing faith with friends or strangers, 9 times out of 10, it’s so much easier to not. Discussing God means that His Law is going to be brought into it, which means people are going to disagree and get angry or feel guilty and kind of just, shut down. Or talking about the love of God among some people seems too fluffy and forced—it’s much easier to wait for the opportunity to arise

naturally—which so often feels like it never happens, if we’re honest. And even when we’re discussing the love of God for sinful humans, if we’re going to believe this as true, then you have to admit that you’re a sinner, and we’re back at awkward point A. This commission to preach the Gospel throws a major wrench into the everyday of life, and so most days, I’ll be the first to admit it, the task doesn’t even stay on the backburner.

Now this would be one thing if we were setting a phenomenal example in our lives. If we managed to fulfill the 10 commandments nearly flawlessly and managed to love the least of these in the world, but I myself am perfectly content in the rut that is my life; I like my routines, I like my comforts. Going out of my way to be with those who are grieving is not on the top of my priority list; giving more time and energy to those with special needs isn’t something I’m going out of my way to do. I’ve earned my money and therefore I’ll give to the extent that I’ve learned to give, but typically I’m not going much beyond that.

Really, if you’re like me, we crash and burn in following the radical, unpredictable love of Jesus and sharing in it.

We fail so badly, and can end up quite disappointed at such a failure, because we’ve forgotten our beginnings. You and I, from the time that we were conceived were much like the boy, writhing around on the ground, looked down upon by spectators, helpless, at the mercy of disciples who seem powerless. Before we became Christians, we were only under the power of sin and the devil, entirely susceptible to the evil that he would impose upon us and cause through us.

But in our baptism, someone much like the father in our text, brought us to Jesus. “If there’s anything you can do Jesus...please.” And Jesus, through the hands and the voice of the pastor, steals that baby straight from the hands of Satan himself. The child is exorcized as evil is cast as far from that child as the east is from the west—sin is removed because of the promise of Christ, His cross, and our baptism into Him, and as our sin leaves, so does any hold that Satan is truly able to have over us. And

out of the waters, our hand is taken by Christ, and we who just died to sin alongside Christ are risen to new life, a new life in and by the power of Christ. Not the pastor, not the church, but by the work of Christ, you became a child of God.

Now, as we have been made whole and holy, as we have been given Christ and His gifts, we move forward in this life, changed, with new perspective and mission, a purpose superseding all that we cared for before. But even though we have been given absolutely everything, it is crucial that we continue living like the father in the story rather than the disciples in today's reading because we, too, remain as helpless sinners. Let us never embark on our own—for this is the issue that the disciples ran into. They attempted to get the job done on their own instead of trusting the one who gave them the authority and command and power, was simply a word away. Jesus tells them that prayer is what was missing in their attempt.

Now, it is pertinent that we do not think that Jesus is saying prayer is like an incantation that, if said at the right time in the right place, God will do whatever we ask. No, the fact that Jesus commends prayer to them as the missing link shows that they were striving to do this on their own; they were faithful in following His orders, yet even the action that they had been sent to do could not be divorced from the power of the Father; even though they had the command, they still had to rely on Him for each and every moment along the way.

This requires a humility, like that of the father. We cannot presume anything, but instead bring those in need, asking for Christ to do something, do anything, if He is able. And He is more than able, but His ability does not overshadow His wisdom, of when it is best to bring about change in a person or situation. No they both work together. And trusting that He is both entirely wise and entirely powerful, we can approach Him in trust.

So as Christians, let us survey the situation around us. We might look at the natural disasters around the world and approach like the Father and say "Lord, if you can do anything..." and we do the

same with those around us who we see are grieving, and those whom we see are lonely, or in distress, or seem to be losing their faith. We, like the father in our text, approach Christ, whom we trust knows the situation better than we ever could, and we ask, Lord, if you can do anything...we beg of you, Have mercy." I believe, help my unbelief—Lord, I know you can work, but so often, I doubt that you can or will, but help me to trust that you know and will do best.

Now, you must be careful in these moments, in these very moments when we feel like we are inadequate as Christians because we realize that we do not love enough or listen enough, because when you pray that Christ would do something, and that He help you to believe He is willing and able to do something in His own time and way; as He helps your unbelief you might very well be drawn into the very situations you once resisted, the situations I all too often resist. You may find yourself where you must give up your time. You might be among those who make you very uncomfortable. You might be sitting, listening to the same story told by a grieving widower for the 17<sup>th</sup> time—and it's a long story. You might have to cancel plans with your best friends because a mere acquaintance has learned they are being kicked out and you're the only person who they can ask to help them pack.

As you go out in this commission to love the Lord and share His love, you will likely find yourself drawn out of the routines you have come to love, out of the life you have grown accustomed to because loving isn't necessarily convenient, but it's what we're called to, and even when we don't realize it, it's what Christ is doing through us because we have been made one with Him. But because we are one with Him, it doesn't matter what we are giving up, because we already have everything we need.

So you may step out in these moments to give of yourself because you know who is truly working, who is truly taking care of you. He has heard your prayer and works through you, this is true whether or not He acts in the way we perceive as best,

For Christ is Compassionate Seeking to have mercy on those in the throws of evil and sin, those who suffer the consequences of destruction in the world. He does not look with disdain upon us who

need His help, nor on those around us. But He was incarnate to meet us, right here, right now, in whatever situation each person is going through.

He is Powerful to do all things. Christ, who laid down His life eternal in order to defeat death and rose Himself from the grave in order to lead the way in the resurrection, has proven that nothing stands in His way; He is able to do absolutely anything, so we need not fear whether the situation might be too much for Him—even if He seems still and silent, it isn't that we have overwhelmed Him with today's troubles.

So when things don't happen even though we do them in faith, it is also important to remember that it is not our fault that there were no results, as if we didn't pray hard enough or long enough or right enough, as if prayer gives us some control over God and our world. No, the act of prayer is simply a demonstration and a participation of our faith in the God who is all powerful; and He is all powerful even if He does not choose to act all powerful in this moment—He is able to cure all disease, but that will happen in His time; He is able to end all war, but that will happen in His time. As we pray for and seek His work amidst our world, we pray that He works, but we also pray that His will be done, for that is ultimately going to be better. And with this in mind, we can trust that

He is Working through us. When Christ says you are salt and light to the world, a disciple of His, He doesn't mean you could be if you got your act together, if you managed to muster up enough faith and obedience; as long as you are in Christ, as long as you believe and equally recognize that you are a sinner and need help with your unbelief—as you are living in the tension of the Christian life, you are sharing His love with those around you, fulfilling His Law, and continuing to learn to be His brother, the Father's child.

As you care for those who cross your path, as you sit in fear and confusion with the family who was just abandoned by a parent, or when you eat lunch with the person with few friends at school, and as you ask someone how they're doing (and wait for a genuine answer)

Even when these things that we try to do go wrong (have you ever been snapped at for trying to love someone or share about Jesus with them? Even when every attempt at good goes wrong, you are Christ's salt and light, His disciple living in this world.

Even when we don't know we are doing anything good, when you're simply living out what your days have in store: when you are simply bathing your children and visiting your parents, teaching your students, checking up on a patient, driving a school bus or greeting others here at church.

Let us daily pray Lord I believe, help my unbelief; in this we who are dead in our sins are raised up to walk in the light of Christ. And as we exit our house, believing that we have a mission from Christ, believing that He is able to do all things, let us pray Lord I believe, help my unbelief. And at the close of the day, after some things have gone well and others not so much, we believe that we have lived this day as a forgiven child of God in His kingdom, let us pray, Lord I believe; help my unbelief.

Amen.