**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church**

**Watertown, WI**

**“Help”**

Pastor Aaron Reseburg

September 15, 2024

Mark 9:14-19

In my experience, most people are not very good at asking for help, at times, myself included. I'm not sure why that is, but I can think of a few reasons as to why it's so hard to ask for help.

The first reason is not knowing that you need help. To this day, I remember getting homework back from teachers and not doing very well on it. My mom, a teacher, would ask me why I didn't ask her for help. I would answer that I didn't need help because I thought I knew what I was doing.

Another reason people don't ask for help is that they don't think anyone has the capability to help them. They think that their problem is too big or too complex and that no one can help them, so why even ask?

Another reason is of course, pride. Some people don't ask for help because they don't want other people to think that they are too weak or too dumb to fix their problem or accomplish their goal. So, to avoid what they think is embarrassment, they don't ask for help when they really need it.

In reality, when we refuse to ask for help, it's really a mixture of most of these reasons and even a few more.

Our reading for today really centers around the theme of help. First of all, we have the father. He clearly needs help; his son has been possessed by a demon most of his life. The demon throws the boy into fire and water and causes him to have what seem to be seizures.

Given the length of his son's problems, he had undoubtedly gone to many for help, but no one has been able to cast it out. Not the pharisees, not the scribes; no Jewish religious leaders have been able to help his son thus far. Hearing about Jesus and hearing about what His disciples had been doing, he goes to them to ask for help. The disciples have already been casting out demons, but when they attempt to help this boy, they are not able.

It isn't until Jesus appears that the demon is cast out. The demon enters into the presence of Jesus and throws the boy into another fit. Desperate for help as his son is rolling on the floor, the man begs Jesus to help him, "If you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." Jesus makes it clear that this is not a matter of "if' because all things are possible to him who believes.

Jesus isn't talking about the man; He is talking about Himself. Jesus is the only one with perfect faith. The only one who trusts the Father perfectly and never doubts.

The man is used to asking for help, he is probably very dependent on other people; that's part of why he asks Jesus to have mercy on both of them. The demon was constantly trying to kill his son, the man couldn't leave him alone. He was probably very reliant on other people for help.

In response to Jesus' comment, the man blurts out an amazing statement, "I believe, help my unbelief." With that, Jesus casts out the demon.

What an amazing statement, "I believe, help my unbelief." That is the statement of someone who has true faith. True faith, true belief, in God must confront the existence of some level of unbelief which comes from Original Sin.

There are many people in the world today who claim to be Christians, who think they are Christians, but have simplified the Christian faith down to knowledge of Christ, or a belief in God. The Christian faith is not about knowledge. Sure, there is quite a bit of knowledge involved as we learn about the Bible and what it teaches us, but just knowing that there is a God, just knowing that Jesus Christ, is real is not faith.

James teaches us this in James chapter 2, "You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe­ and shudder!" Just believing that God is real isn't enough. You need faith which trusts in His Word, which clings to His Word of both Law and Gospel. So many people believe that Faith is all about them and Jesus. They think that just believing in God will save them.

I have used this analogy before. You may believe that what is coming at your head is a rock, but unless you act accordingly, you are going to be knocked out. Belief plus faith leads a person to act, it leads a person to good works, to go to church, to read God's Word, and like the man in our story for today, true faith leads one to ask for help.

Dear Christians, you need help. You cannot do this alone; you cannot lace up your shoes and do this alone. You need help. The world will tell you that you are enough, that you can do anything if you put your mind to it, that if you work hard, everything will work out for you. It's just not true.

There are forces in this world that are much stronger than you. The devil and his demons are fighting against you. They want to draw you away from God. Their greatest trick is making Your life go very well. Giving you money and success, helping you along, making sure that everything goes well for you.

The demon in our reading for today created doubt in the hearts of many by making it appear as if God's Word and the disciples could not cast it out. It seems today that demons create doubt in many people's hearts by convincing them that they are good enough on their own, making their lives go well, and by convincing them that the church just can't do anything for them.

The prosperity preacher will tell you the opposite, he wants to convince you that God wants you fat and wealthy and if you aren't, you just don't have enough faith. You just don't believe enough. It's just not true; God's Word doesn't teach us that. Money and security many times become barriers to faith, not the result of faith.

The man in our story was helpless, he was powerless, he was utterly reliant. That, dear Christians, is exactly where we all are. We need to understand just how desperately we need help. Everything that we have can be taken away in an instant, and then we will truly see how little we have done to get what we have. It is often in our lowest moments that we return to Christ. Many people have returned to the faith after the death of a loved one. Others return when they have children and realize how hard it is to raise a child in the faith without a church family.

In our dependence, we realize just how much help we need.

The disciples needed help in our story for today, but they didn't ask. The demon was too powerful for them. They only needed to ask for help, to pray for God's help and guidance, and the demon would have been gone.

They needed to pray the prayer of the father, "I believe, help my unbelief." Dear Christians, when you are at your lowest, my prayer is that you would remember those words and pray them. When you are at your highest, when everything is going well, my prayer is that you will remember those words and pray them. You are not enough, you can't do it alone, you need help.

Don't be afraid to ask for help. Christ is able, He is ready and willing, and the Holy Spirit is powerful enough to strengthen your faith. He will turn you away from yourself and towards Christ. Christ will help you trust Him; He created your faith, and He will nourish it. He will sustain it until the day you die and even after you die. He will hold you and never let you go. He will help you when no other can. In the name of Jesus, Amen.