

“You Never Know Who You Will Run Into” Series: The Father Who Asked the Unbelievable

March 20, 2011

Texts: Mark 9:14-29

Our scripture text today immediately follows the pivotal story of Jesus taking his three favorite disciples, Peter, James and John, with him up the mountain to spend some quality time with his Father-God. They had no idea the magnitude of this unique moment when they would be permitted to witness Jesus' transfiguration in the presence of God accompanied by the living Elijah and Moses. The voice sounding from the cloud that engulfed them must have been shocking, "This is my Son I love; listen to him." Peter wanted to stay up there on the mountain basking in the glory. No, they must follow Jesus back down to the world of blindness, pain and suffering where no one understands who He really is, much less what He must do for His people and the human race. In Jesus' absence an argument has broken out between the other uneducated disciples and some Jewish scholars. The scholars pounced on the opportunity to score some points against Jesus' authority. Let's keep in mind what has just happened as we see through the boy's father's eyes. I have drawn parts of this sermon from Ken Gire's book, *Moments with the Savior*.

You have no idea what life has been like since my son was born. This beautiful boy, so perfect as we swaddled and rocked him to sleep, making sweet faces, cooing and babbling, precious Levi. Stroking his soft hair as he slept we dreamed of how he would play games with the other children and grow up to be a fine strong man to work with me, or maybe he would even be a priest like his uncle whom we named him after. He seemed perfect at first, but by the time he should have started talking something came over him that was strange and evil. His mother and I first noticed it when we would try to get him to do something he should already be doing at his age, like wash his hands or come to the table or feed himself. Instead he would go into a fit falling down and trashing around on the floor. But, when he started biting his tongue and foaming at the mouth, it was too much. All kids have their temper tantrums, but this wasn't normal, not at all. Nothing we tried made any difference; it only got worse. We couldn't leave him for a minute. He was out of control. The other children would try to play with him, but when he had fits it would scare them and their mothers kept them away. He has no friends, nor do we anymore. He was robbed of his childhood and we our son. It is all we can do to keep him from hurting himself. Some evil power has a grip on him and won't let him go until it destroys him. Nothing has helped to free us from this prison we are trapped in, no hope, no light, only evil darkness.

I can't tell you how excited I was when some of our relatives told us about the new rabbi, Jesus, that he had special powers to heal and cast out evil spirits – they said they had seen it for themselves. But, with the crowds that surround him, so many sick people groping to touch him, how could we ever get Levi to him, much less heal him?

When Jesus came to our town that day on his way to Jerusalem, there was a throng surrounding his disciples. Against all hope, we got Levi dressed and set off to try to see this mighty teacher. We managed to work our way through the crowd, but he was gone with a few of his inner circle. Where had he gone? Everyone was looking for him; some said they had gone up the mountain, but they couldn't find him. But, I hadn't gone to all that trouble to give up on what might be Levi's only chance and ours for a useful life. "Do you know when he will be back. Please tell me so he can try to heal my son." One of them said, "Here, I have cast demons out of many people in his name. Let me try." Laying his hands on his head he spoke in a loud voice he told the spirit to leave him, but all of a sudden Levi spit in his face and laughed with a frightening cackle not his own, swinging and clawing at him. I was aghast at his behavior. Nothing the disciple tried or said worked; he was even worse in

a mad rage. I could hardly hold him back. How embarrassing! The crowd began pushing us back as some scribes in their fancy robes forced their way toward the disciple. Mockingly the taunted, “See, you can’t do anything, because your master is just a magician and a fraud. He’s no righteous Rabbi, as you claim. He doesn’t even keep the law. He’s really just another sinner like the prostitutes and tax collectors he welcomes.” Then one of them said, “Hey, aren’t you Matthew, the one who used to charge us twice the legal tax rate when you worked for the Romans! Your master is just like you, a filthy SINNER.”

I was afraid a riot was going to break out between the scribes and Jesus’ followers. The accusations and curses were flying both ways. Just in the nick of time, there came Jesus and his three other disciples toward us. In a wave the crowd rushed toward him like he was magnetic. I just happened to be on the side closest to Jesus and ended up right in front of him.

He said, “What are all you arguing about and making such a commotion?”

That was my chance and I took it falling down before him, “Teacher, I’ve come to bring my son, Levi, to you, because he has an evil spirit that keeps him from speaking and even causes him to have terrible fits foaming at the mouth and falling on the ground kicking, then he’s stiff as a board, scaring everyone, especially his mother and me. I thought your disciples could cast it out of him, but they couldn’t do any good; they only made him mad and more violent.”

I thought it was something I said at first, but Jesus got really mad and shouted, “What’s wrong with all of you? You are all a bunch of infidels! How long am I going to have to put up with you?” I was shocked when he turned toward me and said, “Bring **ME** the boy.” When I brought Levi up he immediately fell on the ground writhing, kicking, and foaming, making terrible grunts and moans.

“How long has he been like this?” Jesus asked.

“Since he was a baby. The spirit tries to kill him by throwing him in the water or fire making him suffer terribly. Please, help if you can!” I cried in desperation.

“If **YOU CAN!** Don’t you know that anything can be accomplished for one who believes. Do you believe in me?” he asked point blank. Wow, I didn’t know what to say. I hardly knew this teacher, though his reputation preceded him. They say he can do the impossible, but I don’t know. Something about him, though, gave me hope and faith even in this impossible situation. All I could honestly say was, “**I believe, but help me overcome my doubt, please!**”

That must have been good enough for him, because he turned right to Levi and spoke with an strong, authoritative voice, “**You deaf and mute spirit, I command you to get out of this boy and never bother him again!**” All of a sudden Levi was thrashing around on the ground again even more violently, foaming and spitting, and then with a loud shriek the spirit turned loose of him and he just laid there limp as a rag, or was he was dead? Thoughts raced through my head, “Maybe he is dead and he finally has peace, finally free from his torment. But, maybe, he will live, live a healthy life, just maybe. Please God, set him free and let him live,” I cried. Something inside of me was giving me assurance that everything would be OK, whether he lived or not, Jesus had answered our prayers, finally after these horrible years.

Jesus looked so lovingly at him as he stooped down and took his hand. Levi was limp and lifeless. But, as Jesus lifted his arm, he woke up. He opened his eyes; he began to move his legs and before I knew what was happening he stood up. He looked into Jesus’ eyes and actually smiled. **HE SMILED AT HIM!** I can’t remember the last time he smiled. He must have been just a baby. Then the most unbelievable thing of all, he spoke, “**Jesus, I love you.**” I was still on my knees, hot tears

pouring down my face. I wrapped my arms around my boy, my beautiful boy, the son I knew was inside of him all along, the one no one else could see, something I always believed, even on the worst days. In spite of all my worries and doubts, my fears of the worst, here he was, healthy and normal, finally talking.

Who is this Man? He must be from God. He DID what his disciples could not do. He must have been with God on that mountain. Maybe he IS GOD!

I took Levi to him that day desperately looking for something, anything, any kind of help or hope. Levi was the one who needed the help. But, it was me who received so much more. He showed me even the smallest speck of faith, no matter how crushed by defeat and doubt, can bring life and hope when offered to Jesus. I too was raised from death along with Levi. We all found new life in the powerful Spirit of that man, Jesus from Nazareth, or should I say “**from God.**” Our lives are forever changed. I am telling everyone I know that this man showed us that God loves us and is here and powerful to save, if we will just trust him. There is nothing too hard for him if we just believe in him. God is greater than anything, any demon, any disaster, any loss, even death itself.

Jesus shows us God is for us - By faith, nothing can stand against us?