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Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

June 5, 2022

Communion Sunday

Mark 9:14-29

Prayer: *Father, again, I thank you for gathering us together, I thank you for the gift of your church, I thank you for the gift of the youth and just the confidence that we have that these folks can just take over eventually and it's just a wonderful thing to see that kind of grace poured out on young people as well. And I just continue to pray, Lord, for today, I pray for the service, I pray for the ability on a communion Sunday to focus on you and what you've done for us on the cross. I just continue to pray that you would give all the grace, strength and wisdom necessary for us to enter into that service in a way that brings honor and glory to you. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

So as I said like we know this is that specific day that we honor Jesus Christ and his cross. And so we focus first on this dinner, this Passover dinner that Jesus celebrated for the very last time with his disciples. It's spoken of in *Matthew 26*, which says: *Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my*

body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." And so Jesus took bread and he took wine and he offered them up as symbols of his flesh and blood and he asked his disciples to eat the bread and drink the cup so that they too might symbolically eat his flesh and drink his blood. And then he asked them to repeat this remembrance on a regular basis, and this is what we call "the Lord's table." We celebrate it once a month and we do that by meditating on what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us on the cross, by then examining ourselves and that means asking God's Holy Spirit to convict us of sins, by confessing those sins as well and then participating in the elements. John 6:53 says: So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."

Well we've been following the life of Christ in the gospel of Mark, and last time if you remember we were looking at the transfiguration of Jesus. And we saw Peter, James and John, they're brought to a mountaintop and there they see Jesus reclaim a small fraction of the glory that actually belonged to him prior to

his going to the cross. And as I said, the disciples up on that mountain, they're witnessing this final briefing between the Father, the Son and two of the patriarchs. This is all prior to the final battle. At the age of 33 Jesus is about to offer his life up on the cross. God who created the entire universe is now set to have creatures that he created out of nothing and who rebelled and now literally hate his presence, God is going to allow those very creatures to offer him up in order to pay the sin debt of those sheep he is rescuing. They're going to beat him, they're going to mock him, they're going to flog him, strip him and crucify him thinking he's a rebel nobody who needs to be taught a lesson. The Roman soldiers think they're conducting a routine execution unaware that they're participating in the greatest battle that is taking place in the history of the universe. They have no idea that they are mere pawns assisting in an actual battle between Jesus and Satan.

Up on that mountain Moses and Elijah appear to Jesus to comfort and encourage him about the impending trial he's about to undergo, and on the way back down the mountain Jesus tells them to say nothing of what they have seen until after he rises from the dead. And as I pointed out the last time, the disciples, they don't know how to respond to that because even though they heard from Jesus himself exactly what was going to happen, they still don't understand the

resurrection that is coming. *Mark 9:9* says: *And as they were coming down the mountain, he charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead might mean.*

So much of what Jesus told the disciples was a complete mystery to them and Jesus knew that it would remain a mystery until the Holy Spirit descended on them, opening their eyes, opening their minds, opening their spirits, connecting all of the dots of all of those things that Jesus had said while he was with them. Verse 11 says: *Then they asked him, "Why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?"* Well part of the mystery that they couldn't solve without Jesus and this idea that he was about to die was that in their mind prophesy demanded that before the Messiah even comes Elijah was going to return. I mean they hadn't seen any trace of Elijah so the idea that Jesus would be leaving them, it made no sense. They understood the prophet Malachi when Malachi said: *"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction."*

So Jesus answers the disciples directly. He tells them exactly who

Elijah was and that he had indeed already come. This is *Matthew 17:12*. Jesus says: *"But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands."* Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of *John the Baptist*. So Jesus tells the disciples that Elijah in the form of *John the Baptist* has already come. He says he's already come and he was treated with absolute contempt, being thrown into a dungeon and then having his head cut off as a party favor. As Jesus put it, they did not recognize him but did to him whatever they pleased. And so Jesus goes on to warn them, if they can do this to Elijah who has come in the flesh as *John the Baptist*, then don't be surprised that the *Son of Man* is also going to suffer at their hands. Verse 12 he says: *And he said to them, "Elijah does come first to restore all things. And how is it written of the Son of Man that he should suffer many things and be treated with contempt? But I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written of him."*

Well so how is it written that the *Son of Man* would be treated with contempt? Well you only have to go to the scripture to find out. We know the *Old Testament* contained many, many references to the suffering that Jesus would undergo. *Psalm 22*. *Psalm 22* describes in depth precisely what would take place at the cross, although at

this point the disciples clearly wouldn't recognize it because it's couched in details that wouldn't become obvious until they were revealed at the cross which was now only weeks away. But some thousand years earlier before the crucifixion was even known as a form of punishment, David had written in *Psalm 22*: *My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death. For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet -- I can count all my bones -- they stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots. Isaiah 53* as well said: *Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.*

The disciples probably told the men that -- I'm sorry, I jumped a little bit ahead here. What we're looking at is Jesus being described in the Old Testament, and what was mistaken in the disciples was that they had understood him to be a totally different type of person that they were expecting. They had anticipated a very, very different Messiah, and like most of the Jews of this fellow period, they believe the Messiah was going to come to break Israel out of the grip of Rome and establish this

godly kingdom forever. They had misread the signs that God had placed in scripture. They had come up with their own messiah who was altogether different from the one that God was bringing.

And so the disciples, they're on the way back down the mountain and they're wrestling with this idea that they had created of what the Messiah was going to be and the actual Messiah, and they're wrestling with the notion that Elijah had not yet come and the Messiah was supposed to act in a certain way when James and Jesus and John and Peter come upon this huge commotion taking place at the base of the mountain. We pick up on *Mark 9:14*. It says: *And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and scribes arguing with them. And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed and ran up to him and greeted him. And he asked them, "What are you arguing about with them?" And someone from the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute. And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able."*

So I just want you to picture the scene, if you will. There's this demon-possessed young boy, the disciples have been comforted with this situation and James and Peter and John and Jesus, their

leaders, they're not there. They're up on the mountaintop at this point. So at this point the disciples are probably very confident that they can handle this. They know what they're doing. If you remember they had recently come back from being sent out by Jesus two by two. A group of 72 of them were sent out to all the different towns that Jesus was going to go to and the exercise was a complete success. Jesus and the disciples had come back, they come back from each and every town and they return jubilant. *Luke 10* says: *The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!"* And Jesus himself said to them: *"I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."*

So now they're faced with a real test. Jesus and the de facto leaders of the group, they're up on the mountaintop and there's this desperate man with this demon-possessed son, and we don't have the details of what actually took place. We can just assume the disciples probably told this man that they had this thing knocked and it was no big problem, they would clear it all up and found out suddenly that they were rank failures.

And when Jesus and the other disciples come down the mountain, they discover the scribes engaged in a heated discussion that probably included mocking the disciples' so-called power to engage the enemy. Jesus responds and this is verse 19: *And he answered them, "O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me." And they brought the boy to him. And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. And Jesus asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." And Jesus said to him, "'If you can'! All things are possible for one who believes." Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!"*

Well this desperate father in the midst of this incredibly desperate situation, he utters what has become one of the most hopeful statements ever made about faith. In the face of the disciples' failure, in the face of a lifetime of struggles seeing his young boy just savaged by demons, this man summons up the little faith that he can and then asks for the one thing that God will always grant. He says, *"I believe. Help my unbelief!"* You know, I can't tell you how many times I have repeated verbatim this

man's words in response to a struggle in my own life. And so you might ask how do belief and unbelief work together in tandem? Well, Jesus said in *Matthew 17*, he said: *"For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you."*

Now at the time that Jesus said that the mustard seed was known as the smallest seed in existence. What Jesus is saying is that even the tiniest flicker of genuine faith, that has power. And what stands out in this cry from the boy's father is the honesty of his statement. I mean he doesn't try to hide the fact that his faith is at this incredibly low ebb and he simply acknowledges before God that it's barely there and then he asked God himself for some more. Jesus said even the smallest grain of faith can be compounded simply by asking for it and then asking for more as his father did.

Now has that ever happened to you? Have you ever felt just like giving up? I mean, have you ever felt like you've had a situation and you prayed and you prayed and you prayed about it and not only does nothing happen but things seem to get worse? We know God is sovereign and we know that sometimes our will and his will are not the same, and we know that Jesus taught us in the Lord's prayer, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as is in heaven. And

so Sometimes we wonder if I'm not praying what is ultimately God's will then why am I not just wasting my time? Well it's easy to forget that the very act of praying for those things can not only change the outcome of what we're praying for, but if it doesn't change the outcome, what it can change is us.

One of the most famous examples of God saying no to prayer would be God's answer to Paul's plea that he remove the thorn sent to him by Satan. In *2 Corinthians* Paul says: *Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. And three times God said, no, no and no. But that's not where Paul's prayer ended. It actually ended with God transforming Paul's view of that no answer that he received. God gave Paul the grace to understand exactly why he said no and not only to accept it but to revel in the difference between his view and God's. This is what Paul said. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.* So what Paul did is he gave his present weakness over to God's future strength and power and that's just what God wants to do for us.

I got a phone call the other day from a dear friend and he was excited about moving back into this area. In fact he asked me to pray about moving here because he really wanted to come to church. And he called me and he was very excited, said that God had just presented him with this incredible opportunity. He got an offer -- he saw an offer for the exact house and the exact location that he was looking for at the price that in his price range and he said this has to be a God thing. I had to tamp his excitement down a bit, I said, it may well be but it's not guaranteed. Well, sure enough I get a phone call from him the very next day and he's very disappointed, somebody had outbid him on the house and had taken it out from underneath him and paid a lot more money, paid cash and he was disappointed and he said, why would God allow that to happen? I said, how do you know that God doesn't want you to be the next-door neighbor of somebody else three blocks down in a transaction that's not going to take place for two months or two years. In other words, how do you know that God doesn't have other plans for you than these that you had thought he had? The fact is nobody but God knows what the future is, and it may involve using you in ways that you never even imagined.

You know, when Paul experienced the no answer that he received from God, he also experienced God taking him into his decision making process and we would love to have the same results. We would love

to have the ability to say, Lord, you know far better than I do what my present and future situation is, so at this point I'm just going to have to trust you. That doesn't stop us from crying out and being disappointed and confused, but that's where exercising even a mustard seed of faith is so precious to God. Remember it was Jesus who described the unjust judge granting this request of a woman simply because he couldn't stand her nagging.

This is a story that Jesus told in *Luke 18*. He's describing this judge, he says: *"For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.'" And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"*

Jesus is just pleading with us to trust him. He says if this judge who doesn't care at all about the woman, he doesn't care at all about justice, if he's going to respond to her persistence by granting her her wish, don't you think that I who loved you enough to come down and live off this same exact planet as you, live the

same kind of life as you perfectly and die for you, don't you think that I would grant your request in your time frame if it was best for you? I mean there's not a single Christian that I've every met who has not experienced some kind of deep disappointment with God as some time in their Christian lives, and yet God insists that at some point we will see that every single thing that was done in our lives was done for our good and his glory.

I mean have you ever been accused of unjustly disappointing somebody? I mean, something that try as you might you try to make it seem okay and you try to explain what you're doing, people just don't get it and you just are misunderstood? How many times in a given day do you think that God experiences that, not from his enemies, but for those who he died for? I mean just look at the cross. The cross is a perfect example. I mean it's arguably the most hideous, hideously evil deed ever done in the history of mankind but it was also the greatest deed that was ever done in the history of mankind. I mean it produced an enormous amount of confusion and disappointment and fear, not just among God's enemies but among those who dearly loved him.

Jesus and the disciples as well as the crowds were oftentimes, they were not on the same wavelength at all. After Jesus started putting some distance between him and his unbelieving followers, he

wound up confusing his disciples as well by saying things that the crowd found outrageous. One of the most outrageous things Jesus ever said was the very scripture that we always open up our communion service with, *John 6:53*. Those are outrageous words, I mean, you think about them. Jesus said, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."* I mean just imagine hearing that statement for the very first time. I mean for many in the crowd, that was it, they were done, they were walking away. This guy's nuts. Not only is he nuts, what he's saying is awful; it's awful to even comprehend. Listen to what *John 6* says. It says: *After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. So Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."*

Peter said what I know I've said and what I've heard many of my brothers and sisters say when faced with profound disappointment in God. I got no where else to go. My commitment is here. This is it. There is no escape hatch, so to speak. Our commitment to faith in God even in our disappointment is still greater than any confusion or disappointment we have. And all of us has said at one time or another, *Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of*

eternal life. And I don't know that a human being can say more precious words to God than those. Understand, the only thing that we possess, the only thing that's of any value whatsoever to God is our faith, and that's precious to him. And difficult times and times where prayers seem to go unanswered and unheard, that offers us that opportunity, sometimes a unique opportunity to offer something precious to God, and that's faith when faith seems absurd.

This morning as you anticipate taking the bread, I'd like you to ask yourself if you've been in that situation, if you've had those kind of disappointments, if you've had those circumstances where you find yourself saying, "Wow, I'd like to bail. This is too much. What he's saying is too much," and yet you've said, "I've got no else to go," and you turn back to him, those times when you've said to God, "*I believe, help thou my unbelief*", take a moment to consider that.

While we're considering that *1 Corinthians 11* says this, it says: *But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.*

But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world. And so again I repeat this on a monthly basis, I said that communion is an incredibly serious undertaking and to enter into it in an unworthy manner as to court disaster. God has said in the past that he has taken people's lives for doing this. I've often said if you first need to be reconciled to your brother or sister, if you first need to bring your sacrifice of yourself to the altar first by getting straightened out there, then don't participate, it's far better to just pass the elements on and to treat this with the utmost respect. Err on the side of caution and get right with God first.

But I also say on the other hand that you can also make the mistake of thinking that you have to be spotless and perfect in order to participate in the table and that, too, is a mistake the enemy loves. What we say over and over again is that being a child of the King means that when we sin, we recognize that we have failed because we have the Holy Spirit of God within us and we recognize that our salvation is a gift that no one is ever capable of earning by being good. And so I quote Dane Ortlund each month. He says, "In the kingdom of God, the one thing that qualifies you is knowing that you don't qualify, and the one thing that disqualifies you is thinking that you do." And that also means that when we fail we are aware of the fact that we've sinned because the Spirit of God

within us convicts us, and so we grieve, understanding that God has said, *if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to heal us from all unrighteousness.*

So being a child of God doesn't mean that you are spotless and sinless. What it means is that we understand that we have our advocate with the Father, someone speaking in heaven on our behalf, someone who has said: *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father -- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.* And so because we have Jesus's righteousness and not our own, that's the reason why we can boldly come to his table, not on the basis of ours but on the basis of his righteousness. So therefore don't deny yourself the privilege that Jesus has purchased for you at the price of his own blood. We say it each time, he lived the life we were supposed to live then he died the death we deserve to die in our place so that we could be made worthy of this very moment. So as you anticipate taking the bread, ask yourself where is my faith this morning?

1 Corinthians 11:23 says: For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of

me." So take, and eat.

Okay. We're back at the mountain, Jesus, Peter, James and John have come down, he's been apprised of the situation. This demon-possessed young boy remains unhealed, the disciples remain disheartened, embarrassed, maybe even a little bit frightened. The religious leaders are having a heyday, they're mocking the attempts of the disciples and the crowd is anxiously waiting to see who's going to win, who's the good guys and who's the bad guys.

We pick up on verse 25. It says: *And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again."* Well the first thing we note Jesus' response is that the boy, he's in even worse shape than we had imagined. Not only had he been repeatedly cast into the fire to torture him in water to drown him but we also find out that he's deaf and mute, and we know that because Jesus identifies the spirit within him as *"you mute and deaf spirit."* Verse 26 says: *And 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." But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.*

You know I spoke last time about the power of power versus the

power of love. I talked about how Jesus had emptied himself and Jesus emptied himself by taking the form of a servant being born in the likeness of men, that's the power of love at work. We have no inkling of how much humbling and how much emptying Jesus had to undergo to interact with us because we really have no inkling of the extent of his power. We recognize that he spoke the universe into being simply by exercising that power but we don't know how that works. We're essentially clueless. And at the transfiguration, the three disciples, we see them catching a glimpse of the power that Jesus once had and just the very fact of being there causes Peter to almost lose his mind. And here we see yet another glimpse of that power. And this time we see the power that Jesus had over demons. Understand, the disciples had collectively attempted to remove this demon. They had had a large measure of success previously, and what they probably had not realized that there are grades and steps of authority in the demonic world much as there are in the angelic world. In the angelic world you have at the very top, you have the seraphim, those are the angels that surround God's throne singing "Holy, holy, holy!" They're followed by the cherubim, those are the cherubims that actually do interact with human beings in scripture but they're followed by thrones and dominions and powers and principalities and archangels and angels. And there's also a ranking and authority in the demonic realm. I mean we all know

Satan is at the top but there's also thrones, dominions, principalities, powers and rulers in that aura as well, in that realm as well. And so we have no idea what the rank of the demon was who inherited that little boy, but apparently it was a far greater rank than the others that the disciples had dealt with. And what's interesting to behold is that once again we see every single time that Jesus interacts with a demon, what do you see in the demon? The demon is always when he's interacting with Jesus, he's either whimpering, trying to make excuses or begging for mercy. And the prevailing understanding by both Jesus and the demon whenever they interact is that Jesus is absolutely in charge. They have no choice but to obey, and this instance is no exception. Jesus commands and the demon itself, obviously exhibiting great displeasure, cries out, convulses the boy and leaves him, giving all appearances of having killed him. Verse 26 says: *And 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."*

Well the vast majority of this interaction between Jesus and this demon takes place in the unseen realm outside of our human senses, and there we find that the conflict is easily met and matched by the superior power of Jesus who's truly the only super man who's ever really existed. Jesus resolutely keeps his power under control and he only uses it in these extreme type of situations and

yet when he does use it, there's no question of it at all. And what's beautiful to see is the tenderness of Jesus taking place immediately after this raw display of absolute power. Verse 27 says of the boy, it says: *But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up and he arose.* I mean you remember the boy, he's been pitched forward onto his face by the convulsing spirit. As it leaves him, he looks dead until Jesus takes him by his hands, lifts him up and stands him on his feet. So we see complete and utter tenderness towards this young boy, absolutely devastating power towards the invading demon.

Next we see the disciples and Jesus move away from the crowd and they go into a house. Verse 28 says: *And when he entered the house the disciples asked him privately "Why could we not cast it out?" And he said to them, "This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer."* Well Matthew's account expands on that and it demonstrates why Jesus seemed so frustrated, so much so that he said in Matthew's account: *"O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me."* In Matthew's account Jesus seems to have lost it at the disciples' inability to heal this young boy. I mean this is one of those scriptures where you can actually see Jesus doing one of those face plants, you know, like he just cannot believe what he's dealing with. And it's not because the disciples have made a mistake or

not gone about exorcising this demon properly. Jesus never castigates honest mistakes. What frustrated Jesus no end was what he made clear in the very same account recorded in Matthew's gospel. This is how Matthew describes it in verse 19. He says: *Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" He said to them, "Because of your little faith."* It wasn't improper technique that frustrated Jesus, it was the fact that they were now at the end of his public ministry and they're still clueless and faithless. They had spent three years with Jesus watching him constantly all of the time and yet still when push comes to shove, instead of doubling their efforts to prayer, instead of trusting that Christ was still in charge, they threw their hands up in the air and said, we're busted; we can't do this. Their lack of faith is what upset the Master. In fact you could almost say that the young boy's father had more faith than the disciples.

Jesus vents his frustration with his disciples by saying once again: *For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you.* What Jesus was actually castigating them and everyone else about was their reliance on their own abilities rather than their relying on the supernatural ability of God. Jesus acknowledged this was a

demon of high rank, not one that's going to come out easily. You know, they'd seen the other demons come out easily as they had fanned out from town to town. Jesus said to them: *"This kind cannot be driven out by anything other than prayer."* And then Jesus proceeds to treat this incredibly powerful demon as if it's nothing more than some kind of loathsome insect, which it was to Jesus. Jesus didn't need to pray and fast in order to remove him. He said, "Get out," and he got out. That's not how it worked for the disciples. And it was obvious that their efforts weren't working, they just gave up. What Jesus was disappointed with the disciples was their inability or their unwillingness to learn how to look into that power that comes through prayer. Like I said, it's easy to forget that the very act of praying for something can change the outcome of what we're praying for or it can change us as we're praying for it. The apostle Paul is our proof and our example of how prayer itself can change us. You may be tempted just as the disciples were to throw your hands up, to give up, but God knows the future and he knows your heart. What he wants more than anything is for us to never give up and to constantly trust in him.

And as we are about to take of the cup, I would ask us to ask God to point out those areas in your life where you felt like giving up and to ask God to change you like he changed Paul. *1 Corinthians*

11:25 says: *In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."* So take, and drink.

This is the part that we call heart, hands and feet where we actually try to have some kind of practical way of remembering the Lord Jesus Christ. And I just want to reflect on what we've been talking about. Jesus was clearly vexed with his disciples. I mean what he said to them was not very pleasant. I'd like to compare that to what he said to the centurion. If you remember the centurion, first of all he's part of a hated class, he's military, this is a Roman centurion. His servant is sick and he's dying. And he approaches Jesus and he says, would you heal my servant? Jesus said, I'll go to your house. He says, you don't have to do that. He says, I'm a military guy. I get how this works. I tell somebody to do it and he does it. He says, all you need to do is say it and I know it will work. And Jesus says, *"Nowhere in Israel have I found such an amazing faith as this."* What did he say to the disciples? *"How long am I going to have to bear with you?"* I mean that's quite a range of what Jesus is saying.

And so what was it about the centurion that so pleased Jesus and about the disciples that so vexed him? Well, I think you can say the centurion's answer to who's in charge was what? Jesus. And

the disciples' answer to who was in charge is, "we are," until we're not, and as soon as we find out we're not, we panic. And that's what actually happened.

And I just want to bring that to what we oftentimes talk about at these times and that is sharing the gospel, because the idea of sharing the gospel and the understanding of sharing the gospel is a matter of really realizing who's in charge. You see, if you think you're in charge of sharing the gospel, you're going to be just like the disciples, you say, oh, it's not going to work. Well, what am I going to do? We just throw up our hands and just give up. I think one of the things that we have to realize is -- and I think one of the dangers that people have in thinking about church and evangelicals and that kind of thing is thinking, oh, if I just get somebody to come to church, then they'll become a Christian. The vast majority of the people that you share the gospel with, the vast majority of people that you have opportunity to share the gospel with, they're not going to walk through those doors. They're just not. And that's not the idea. The idea is you guys here get energized, you guys here get understanding, you guys here get the desperate need that those guys out there have and you bring that to them. We can't expect these folks to be walking in here saying, look at all these weird people. I got to sit down and listen to this stuff in order to get to what the gospel is? No,

no, we bring it to them. And I think one of the reasons why we don't bring it to them is we still think that we're in charge. We still think that it falls on us.

You know, I was just thinking about Steve, Steve Sumnick, he's got a new job. You all know what he was doing before? He was packing mashed potatoes in a freezer for Shop Rite for those take home meals. What a miserable, awful, awful job. I constantly said to him, I can't believe you'd do that. It's just working all day at 34 degrees, it's just horrifying. But then I was thinking, you know, God had him there for a reason. And you know he left, they gave him a party when he left, and they gave him a party because there was something special about this person that was there. There was something sanctifying about somebody who was a vessel of the Holy Spirit and acts like it being in their presence. In fact he was telling me one of the guys there, there's a pretty rough crowd there, one of the guys said he really felt safer when Steve was around. That's a spirit thing. I think that's what the Holy Spirit intends for us all to be.

And I was just thinking of this particular scripture in 2 *Corinthians*. It says: *For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life*

to life. *Who is sufficient for these things?* What God is saying is I just want you to reek of Christ. That's all I want you to do. And some people are going to smell that and they're going to say is that the sweetest smell I've ever smelled? That's wonderful. But other people are going to smell that and say, that stinks! I can't stand that. And we all know what that's like. We've all seen those kind of reactions as well. But God says, *who is sufficient for these things?* He knows we're not. That's what the disciples were doing. They were thinking they were sufficient, and when things didn't go well, they just kind of punted. Your job is not to seal the deal. Your job is not to say, well, I go to those people's house and I get them to become Christians. No, your job is like Steve understood even while packing mashed potatoes at Shop Rite, you're there to represent the aroma of Christ. That's all God asks. But I look around and I say, you know, we look at a world that's falling apart. And the people out there are desperate. They're not going to be in here. They're relying on you to connect to them and that means the same thing I pray almost everyone of these times is that we would think about people that God brings into our lives, colleagues and neighbors and people that you just bump into and that doesn't mean you have to hone your skills where you're just able to fire away at anybody at will, but what it means is you recognize who you are, you're a temple of the Holy Spirit, being brought into this community for the purpose of

being the aroma of Christ.

And so what I'm begging for is for folks to recognize that and just say, here I am, Lord, I want to be that aroma. I want to be somebody that says, boy, I get around that guy and I sense the presence of Christ. That's incredibly attractive. And so what I'm asking right now is for us to take is a moment and pray. Once again, I would pray that you would think of a colleague, a friend or a person, somebody that you could be that aroma of Christ to. So let's pray.

Father, I just thank you. I can't begin to unpack the privilege that we have been given. Lord, we have you, we have God himself living inside us. You don't get more privileged than that. And yet with every privilege comes responsibility and part of that responsibility is we are supposed to go out into that neighborhood right outside those doors and be vessels for your Holy Spirit and be the aroma of Christ so that people can just say there's something different about that person. These people out there have a desperate need. They don't know it. Most of them don't realize it and I don't think God is calling on every one of us to be Billy Grahams, he's calling us to be whoever we are. But while we are whoever we are, we are to be the aroma of Christ. And so I pray you would give us that ability, that heart and that drive. And I

pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.