Text: Mark 9:14-29

**Introduction**

Our Gospel reading today has become a popular one from which to talk about doubt. But to be honest, I just don’t think that is the core of what it want to talk about. I also think brooding over doubt just isn’t helpful to the Christian life. I’m not dismissing it as a fact. Even the Apostle Paul who saw the risen Jesus in full glory on that Damascus road would about seeing as through a glass darkly. If you want to talk about doubt it is not about fundamental things like: is there a God? Yes, there is. And the overwhelming majority of humans great and small from all times and places would agree. So much so that is it foolishness to think otherwise. Even the Apostle Paul would say that all of us are without excuse, “for his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made (Rom. 1:20 ESV).” We can all look out the window and recognize generic God.

Luther would call that generic God, the hidden God. And at least for me this might be Luther most practical theological bit. When we observe creation, the natural world, we observe the eternal power. And all that we see from that eternal power is that creatures come and go. Even the mountains rise and are worn down. If we extended it to our day stars and universes come into existence, rush away from us, and sink back into black holes. And all these things testify to the majesty of God, and tell us nothing at the same time. Other than we are but grass, here today and gone tomorrow.

**Text**

If the hidden God, the generic God is on our case, the doubt is valid that we are meaningful in any way at all. But contrary to the hidden God, we have the revealed God. God did not stay locked up in his heaven only communicating those invisible attributes – like power and glory. God revealed himself. He revealed his heart. He did this in many and various ways. Patriarchs and Prophets, Judges and Kings. But in these latter days He sent his Son. God himself came to us and revealed his heart.

This story of a Father, a Son with a demon, and the disciples, when it is told, always follows the transfiguration. Peter, James and John were at the top of the mountain and have seen the glory rest fully on Jesus. But he’s bid everyone to go back down, and those at the bottom of the mountain have not seen that. Although they have seen all the signs. As Jesus would say to the disciples of John the Baptist, “the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. (Matt. 11:5 ESV).” Jesus had revealed himself as God. And more importantly he had revealed himself not as a God who comes in judgement, but one who comes in love. Jesus had revealed the Father as a God who had his guts churned over sheep without a shepherd. He had revealed God as not just the God for a small sect, but a God whose love was more than enough for Jew and Gentile. Jesus is the revealed God – friend of inconsequential sinners.

And I think that is the background of the confrontations in the text. The disciples had been everywhere with him. They knew that Jesus did everything with the Father and through the power of the Spirit. They themselves had been sent out with this power. Yet how they accomplished these things. Not by the power and majesty, but by faith that the one who has the power and majesty loves us. How they accomplished everything they did seems to have left them. They were trying to cast out the boy’s demon by themselves. And they could not. And Jesus confronts them, “O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you?”

**Christology**

And there are of course two answers to that question. In the flesh, not much longer. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. The revealed God is approaching the greatest revelation of his heart – that cross. That cross, that great revelation of the love of God for us sinners would mark the end of Jesus in the flesh with his disciples. But the other answer is that Jesus never leaves us. We have the Spirit. We have the full revelation. And Jesus promises to be with us until the end of the age. But that presence is only by faith. By faith that the hidden God has revealed himself in Jesus.

If we are ever going to pass from a faithless generation to a faithful one we must receive the God revealed in Jesus Christ. Should we not receive him, that hidden God, that God who wears masks innumerable, who presses down upon us, would never let us go. Like the boy we might be thrown down and foam and grind and become rigid. Sometimes tossed into the fire. Sometimes into the water. All the while never knowing anything about our place. Nothing other than the exhaustion. It is only in faith in the revealed God chases those doubts of the hidden God away. Faith that the life of Jesus reveals to us that God does love us. Faith that he prepares a place for us. Faith that we are not insignificant grass, but the children of God.

That is what Jesus came to reveal. And the fact that the disciples have not received that yet is distressing.

**Moral**

For it is the faith of the disciples that is going to spread that faith worldwide. It is the faith of the disciples to will demonstrate the continued love of God for his people.

And the man’s reaction is the crisis point. “If you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.” Have compassion. It is our old friend splagnizomai. Having your guts churned. What happens to Jesus when he gets off the boat and sees the great crowds. Exactly what Jesus has come to reveal about God. God’s guts are churned about the state of his children in his creation. Just as much as this father evidently cares about his son. God cares about his. And the life of Jesus is the testimony to that love. But these disciples at the bottom of the mountain are not able to relay that. If you have compassion. If you care enough. And after all we’ve recently seen the disciples telling Jesus to send a woman away. And they have not been able to relay the revelation of the love of God. Because that is exactly what the Father is doubting. That God cares enough to help him.

And Jesus command is simply believe. Believe the Patriarchs and prophets. Believe the miracles. Believe the cross and resurrection. Believe that Almighty God’s guts are churned over you. Believe that the revealed God is his true face. That all those masks of the hidden God are just the problem of looking through a glass darkly. But this light has come. And this light shines. And Jesus does love you and will not leave you.

Ask, and it will be given. Whatever troubles your heart. Whatever mask of that hidden God presses against you, ask the revealed God – ask Jesus. And I promise you, he will see you through.

**Eschatological**

That’s what the father in our lesson does. “I believe, help my unbelief.” He asks. And God helps his unbelief. He grants him what he sought. His son. God revealed his love for him in this is powerful direct way.

The disciples themselves later ask Jesus, “why couldn’t we do it?” And Jesus gives them the same answer. “This kind only comes out by prayer.” They didn’t ask.

The truth of that hidden God is that we are small. But the lie is that we have no champion. We have the greatest champion. He’s already won. All we have to do is ask. Have faith that the love of God has been revealed to you. That Jesus is here and desires to pull you out of the water or fire are wherever life and thrown you.

Ask. These problems only come out with prayer. Have faith that Jesus wants to answer in the love that he has revealed. And that he will make it plain.