

'Power for Kingdom Living'

Jesus transforms our darkness into something glorious for God's Kingdom.

.....Luke 9: 37 – 50.....

"The next day, when they came down from the mountain, a large crowd met him. ³⁸A man in the crowd called out, 'Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child. ³⁹A spirit seizes him and he suddenly screams; it throws him into convulsions so that he foams at the mouth. It scarcely ever leaves him and is destroying him. ⁴⁰I begged your disciples to drive it out, but they could not.' ⁴¹'O unbelieving and perverse generation,' Jesus replied, 'how long shall I stay with you and put up with you? Bring your son here.' ⁴²Even while the boy was coming, the demon threw him to the ground in a convulsion. But Jesus rebuked the evil spirit, healed the boy and gave him back to his father. ⁴³And they were all amazed at the greatness of God. While everyone was marveling at all that Jesus did, he said to his disciples, ⁴⁴'Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you: the Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men.' ⁴⁵But they did not understand what this meant. It was hidden from them, so that they did not grasp it, and they were afraid to ask him about it. ⁴⁶An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest. ⁴⁷Jesus, knowing their thoughts, took a little child and had him stand beside him. ⁴⁸Then he said to them, 'Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For he who is least among you all – he is the greatest.' ⁴⁹'Master,' said John, 'we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we tried to stop him, because he is not one of us.' ⁵⁰'Do not stop him' Jesus said, 'for whoever is not against you is for you.'"

When Jesus, along with Peter, John and James, came down from the mountain after the glorious experience of his transfiguration, they were immediately confronted by the darkness that overwhelms humanity.

The crowd was in a tizzy because the nine disciples Jesus had left behind couldn't figure out how to heal a boy from his dreadful affliction. This scene is powerfully told in a painting done by the famous Italian artist, Raphael in the year 1520. (slide)

When I first saw his painting called, '*The Transfiguration*', I couldn't understand why he included the scene of the demon-afflicted boy. It seemed to detract from the magnificence of Jesus' glory. But, looking more closely, it becomes obvious that Raphael connected these two consecutive gospel events in order to contrast the two scenes and then to point to Jesus as the solution for the confusion and suffering in the '*lower*' scene.

Raphael used color and drama to emotionally draw us into the scene of what Luke, Mark and Matthew tell us happened immediately after Jesus' Transfiguration. (*Mark 9:2–29*) (*Matthew 17:1–21*)

In the '*upper*' story, Jesus floats in total authority and divine power while he talks with Elijah on his left and Moses on his right. (slide)

The three apostles who went up with Jesus to the mountain, are, of course, frightened and awed at the sight they are witnessing. James, in green, is on the left, Peter is in the center

and John, in red, is on the right. The bright colors which Raphael used on the apostles' clothing signify the three main Christian virtues: *faith*, which is green; *hope*, which is blue/yellow; and *love*, which is red.¹

As you can see on the far left, there are two mysterious men who are not part of the Biblical story. It is a bit of a mystery who they are, and how they were so privileged to be painted into this holy scene. I am not sure if anyone knows their exact identity, but Raphael was commissioned to paint this scene for a church in Narbonne, France, whose patron saints are two young boys who were martyred for their faith in 304 A.D. Justus and Pastor were only 13 and 9 when they declared their loyalty to Jesus as their Savior and Lord in defiance of the Emperor Diocletian's edict that everyone must worship the Roman gods alone.

Another possibility is that the two men could be two other martyrs, who lost their lives in 258 A.D., during Christian persecution under Emperor Valerian. These two saints, named Felicissimus and Agapitus, are honored on the Feast of the Transfiguration in the Catholic Church, which will occur this coming week, on August 6.

While this is going on, there's a lot of drama happening in the '*lower*' scene. (slide) On the right side is the desperate father with his son, who is being tormented by demons who throw him into violent epileptic seizures.

With him are family and others who are concerned for him; most likely it is his mother, there by his side. They are pleading with the nine (9) disciples on the left side of the painting to heal the boy. It appears that everyone might all be trying to talk at the same time.

It is obvious that the disciples are baffled as to how to help the boy. It appears that each has a different idea, and they are caught up in confusion. One of the disciples, thought to be Matthew, there seated on the lower left foreground, is asking everyone to '*wait*', and he is looking at the woman, illuminated in pink, kneeling between the disciples and the boy and his entourage.

Matthew has a book, possibly Scripture, as a reference, opened in front of him and appears to want to know what the woman is saying to him. She is wearing the colors of hope and love, and motioning toward the boy, asking for compassion and healing for him.

The young disciple leaning toward the boy is thought to be Phillip. Andrew is thought to be seated next to Phillip. The older man standing over them is thought to be Simon the Zealot (not Simon Peter) and the disciple next to him, pointing at the boy, is thought to be Judas Thaddeus (a different disciple from Judas Iscariot). Judas Iscariot is thought to be the disciple in the dark, far corner, of the painting.

The disciple in red, who is standing, and the one below him, beside Matthew, have the right answer about how to help the boy. They are pointing to Jesus.

And Jesus is the answer, isn't he? When we find ourselves surrounded by so many different voices, and caught up in confusion and despair, Jesus is always the answer for every need we have. He alone has the power and love to rescue us from trouble.

¹ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transfiguration_\(Raphael\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transfiguration_(Raphael))

It appears that Jesus became impatient when he realized that neither his disciples nor the father had the necessary faith to heal the boy. Jesus' words catch us off guard, because we're surprised that Jesus would speak so bluntly.

But, Matthew, Mark and Luke, all tell us that Jesus said, '***O unbelieving and perverse generation, how long shall I stay with you and put up with you?***' Why was Jesus upset with them? What did he expect them to do that they didn't do?

Mark tells us that when the boy's father asked Jesus to heal his son, '***if you can,***' Jesus told the father, that there is never any 'if' when it comes to God's power, which always can heal. He said, '***everything is possible for him who believes.***' The father then asked Jesus for more faith, saying, '***I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!***' (Mark 9:21 – 24)

Matthew tells us that when the disciples asked Jesus why they couldn't get rid of the demon afflicting the boy, Jesus told them that it was "***Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.***" (slide)

In Mark, Jesus also told the disciples that they were ineffective because '***this kind can come out only by prayer.***'

Taking all of these accounts together, it becomes clear that Jesus was frustrated by his disciples' ***lack of faith*** and ***failure to pray*** for the power they needed from God. The disciples had fallen into the same trap we all do. They must have stopped relying on God's power and started acting through their own power instead. We often forget that we are only effective for God's purposes when we ask God's Holy Spirit to work through us. By our own strength we can do nothing. (*Philippians 4:13*)

While he was on earth, Jesus prayed and worked miracles through the power God had given to him by the Holy Spirit. That same power is ours when we believe that Jesus is the Son of God and trust him for our Salvation and follow him with our hearts and lives.

God's healing grace is always effective in the way that God wills it. Faith and prayer may not cure in the way that we wish, but God always heals: heart, soul, mind and body, in the way that best fits His Kingdom plan. '***In all things God works for the good of those who love Him.***' (*Romans 8:28*)

It became clear, in what happened next, that Jesus' disciples still '*didn't get it.*' He told them again about his upcoming death, and they couldn't understand it. Perhaps God didn't allow them to take it all in at this point, but Luke seems to think that they could have understood him better if they would have '***not been afraid to ask him about it.***'

It appears that some of their confusion about who Jesus was and what he came to earth to do was their own doing. They were still locked in their preconceived notions of what their Messiah should be like and they couldn't imagine any other kind of Savior. How many times do our own set ideas keep us oblivious to the new thing God is doing around us?

Unbelievably, after all this, the disciples started arguing about which of them would be most important in the Kingdom of God. Were they jealous because they hadn't been included in Jesus' mountaintop event? Jesus tried to set them straight, once again.

He turned to a child, because children had very little value in that society, and told them that everyone has great worth and honor in God's Kingdom, especially those who are humble; whom the world considers unimportant.

'*The least*' will be '*the greatest*,' Jesus told them. The '*least*' is the person who wants first and foremost to serve God, not seeking any acclaim for themselves, not asking 'what's in it for me?', but always wanting, in everything, to point toward Jesus. Like the disciples who are pointing to Jesus in the painting, the '*least*' know that it is Jesus alone who brings the 'love' and 'hope' of God into our world. Sometimes at great personal cost, the '*least*' forgo earthly prestige and recognition to do whatever honors God and His Kingdom.

In the very next moment, John spoke up to let Jesus know that they had defended his honor. They saw someone else, not from their group, who was also claiming power in Jesus' name to heal people. They were certain that Jesus wouldn't want the competition.

Jesus again corrected them. He was glad for anyone, even if they were not part of his band of disciples, to join in spreading God's Good News. He said, '**'Whoever is not against you is for you.'**'

If Jesus felt so strongly about sharing ministry to build up God's Kingdom, we need to be sure to do the same. Even if we are not from the same denominations, we are all part of the same Christian family, united by our love for Jesus and our willingness to join him in reaching out and building up God's Kingdom.

In God's Kingdom, everyone shares the same goal of working toward God's good. In the Kingdom, personal prestige doesn't matter, because the important thing is that everyone works together, using their talents, for the prospering of God's Kingdom.

It is hard to resist the temptation to follow God using our own power, but today's message reminds us that it just won't work. By much prayer, and through much faith, God fills us with the power we need to trust in His timing and to carry out His will.

If we keep our focus on Jesus, and not on other people's expectations of us, we will grow in confidence, knowing that God values us and God is pleased with us when we follow His Son. I'm sure you all feel saddened like I do that Simone Biles was too overcome with emotional pressures to continue to compete in the Olympics. I wonder if she could have continued if she had been reminded that the only score that matters comes from the One who is in charge of the details of her life.

Being a citizen of God's Kingdom frees us from the confusion and 'tug-of-war' between many voices. Faith in the One who makes all things possible, gives us hope and courage even when faced with the seemingly impossible, '*mountains*', in our life.

Through the presence of the Holy Spirit, whom God gives to all believers in His Son, Jesus, His power is ours. Amen.