



# ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 Mays Chapel Rd., Timonium, MD 21093

Trinity 21  
October 229, 2023

## ✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son and of The Holy Ghost. Amen.

The passage selected for the Sermon is taken from the Gospel:

“And as he was now going down, his servants met him, and told him, saying, Thy son liveth. Then inquired he of them the hour when he began to amend. And they said unto him, yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him. So the father knew that it was at the same hour, in the which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth: and himself believed, and his whole house.”

There is a passage in St Mark with a similar encounter by a desperate father. In that one, Jesus asks the father if he believes, and he answers, “Lord I believe, help thou me my unbelief.”

In each of these encounters, the fathers come in desperation. Certainly they had done all they could do themselves. They would never had come to Jesus before the doctors had been consulted and their remedies exhausted. More than likely, they had been to the temple to offer prayers and sacrifices. They came to Jesus as their last hope. Their pleas are desperate. There is no one left for them to turn to.

Before Jesus will answer their pleas, he tests their faith. In today's Gospel, the man answers Jesus' challenge by turning and heading home

as he was bidden to do. He did not make that journey in certainty. When he encountered his servants, he first needed to know how his daughter was. It was only when he was reassured of her health that he checked the time of her recovery. He wasn't ready to give his whole heart in faith unless her improvement corresponded with the time of his encounter with Jesus.

In the encounter in St. Mark, that father doesn't even wait to get out of sight of Jesus before he blurts out his doubts. “Help my unbelief.” Give me a sign. Give me any reason to quell my fears and my desperation. Jesus grants their petitions, but he makes them step out in the proclamation of their faith before they have the experience and comfort of trusting that their prayers will be answered.

In the most vivid way possible, these two fathers represent the state of our own faith. They are perfect emblems for our times. We all have terrible problems in our lives, difficulties that are too big to handle by ourselves. We have been conditioned to put our faith in the government, or even to political movements. Yet, we find no help from them against hurricanes, and fire and random violence. We put our trust in doctors and in science, at least when the science seems to match our opinions and prejudices. And yet, the doctors and science can't always give us comfort and

healing and protection. We put our faith in our employers, and our retirement funds, and in our families, and yet we still live with fear and uncertainty over our finances and our security.

Like the fathers in the Gospel, it is only when all these alternatives fail us, when there is no one else left to turn to, that we come in desperation and humility to God to beg for a miracle.

Even then, like our two fathers, our faith is pretty faint hearted. Sometimes we doubt that Jesus can truly help. Help thou our unbelief. Sometimes we know He can help, but aren't sure that He will help. We judge ourselves to be unworthy, which is not a bad assessment, but it underestimates His willingness to forgive and love us. Sometimes, when our prayers are answered, we are quick to check back to see if there is some option we can credit instead of God. Exactly, what time was it when we got better? Maybe I won't have to keep those desperate promises.

Even though our confessions of faith are so imperfect, Jesus receives them anyways. We are reminded of his invitation in the comfortable words each week, "Come unto me all you who travail and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you." He would prefer we come to Him with our first breath, but He takes us in our desperation. Though, like these two fathers in the Gospels, we have not matured in faith to trust His goodness, yet he blesses us for our hope, the hope that carries from our unbelief through the absence of proof we can perceive,

until we can have the realization of our prayers and the trust that our faith requires.

Unlike the two fathers in our Gospel accounts, there are times when our desperate prayers seem not to be received and answered. We do lose loved ones to the ravages of disease and death. We can struggle with our demons and addictions our whole life long. It can seem that our loneliness and our sadness continue without relief.

We have to remember that God's love for us and His loving promises are not restricted to this life. The children of these fathers had relief immediately, as we all pray for those in our families who are in need. But the fulfillment of the promise to be healed, to be reunited, to be in the love of God with the people that we love, are meant to truly fulfilled in the life to come. Sometimes the people we love precede us to that life, and it is their prayers and our hope to be with them that pulls us through to heaven. Sometimes, the sufferings we endure are meant to inspire and transform those who watch us for inspiration and hope. Sometimes, our difficulties are the vehicle through which our own hearts are opened so that we can live in empathy and charity to those who surround us.

In each of those cases, we need to continue our journeys home in hope, growing in faith, and believing that our prayers will be answered.

O Lord, help us in our unbelief.

***In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen***