INTRODUCTION

Last week I explained to you how we were making a shift from the high Christology of John's gospel to the low Christology found in the Gospel of Mark. Where the Gospel of John began with the idea that Jesus was divine, the Gospel according to Mark begins with a more human Jesus facing some all-too-human situations of the world. Last week that played out in Jesus' prediction of his death on the cross and his teaching that we disciples must be ready to take up our crosses along with him.

Today, our Jesus-in-the-thick-of-humanity faces a father who was at his wit's end. By his first-century description, we learn that his son had been possessed by a demon that caused him to foam at the mouth and threw him around in very dangerous ways. Today, we'd more likely call that seizures, and be glad for the medicine that is available to help folks with epilepsy. But if we hold ourselves to the story as it was written, we can see how desperate this father was. And many of us can connect with the feelings he had. He loved his son. His heart hurt for his son's trauma. The father was physically, emotionally, and spiritually exhausted by all the years of dealing with his son's sickness. He felt guilty that he couldn't do more, and he felt angry that others weren't more effective in helping. He was frightened about what terrible things might happen if there weren't some kind of significant change soon. He had tried so many times to find a cure that he was on the verge of losing hope. Yet, for his son's sake, he had to try, one more time at least. If the disciples couldn't do anything, then he would work his way up the chain,
begging and demanding to see their boss. Maybe Jesus could provide the help he and his son so desperately needed.

I can certainly relate to this father's concerns, and maybe you also have been where that father was. Maybe, like me, you're there right now. Maybe, like this father, you say, "I do believe, but I need help in overcoming this problem. I need help trusting that this story will have a happy ending. Lord, help my unbelief!"

1. SEEK THE HELP OF OTHERS

This story gives us a couple of tips that do help us in our unbelief. The first of those is to seek the help of others. The fastest way to lose hope is to keep your problem to yourself and try to solve it all alone. People who try to manage their tough problems single-handedly often have their other hand on a bottle or some other substance or destructive habit because they can't figure out any other way to handle the stress.

When we have a difficult problem, we need to reach out to others who can give us more ideas than we can think of by ourselves. Holed up in our own misery, we just sink deeper and deeper into trouble. But when we take a step toward someone else, when we reach out for assistance, then we break out of that downward spiral. We start to move in a positive direction of hope and trust and faith. We start to see possibilities that weren't visible before.

There are lots of problems and challenges in life that we can take to someone else. We seek advice and assistance from our families, friends, and neighbors. We seek support from businesses, skilled laborers, schools, and non-profit agencies. We read books written by those who have been there before us. We seek encouragement from our church. We join an online support group. We seek involvement from police, lawyers, doctors, and counselors. The easiest
problems get taken care of rather quickly. The difficult ones take much longer. But the good news is that, with the help of others, seemingly impossible things become possible.

Did you read the newspaper article the other day about the 24-year old man who lives near Washington, D.C., who has already undergone surgery 350 times to remove growths from his throat and lungs? Because of the work doctors and scientists have done to help that one man, doctors have now learned how to grow cancer tumors in their laboratories. They can now take cancer cells out of any particular person, mix them with some mouse cells, and grow those cancer cells sufficiently well that they can safely experiment on the cells to find out the specific chemotherapy drugs that will best work for that individual person. If I understood the article right, this research could all be done in less than two weeks. This new procedure provides an affordable model with amazing possibilities for treating the thousands of people who become sick with cancer every year.

This new development seems especially amazing when we reflect upon the days when people were even afraid to say the word cancer. Remember? In times past, to be diagnosed with cancer was to be given a death sentence. It was too scary to talk about. And, now, here is this development that makes the impossible seem possible. When we've got a tough problem, seeking help from others is the right thing to do.

2. PRAY FOR DIVINE HELP

Many of us know all too well, however, that there are problems that family, friends, and professionals don't know how to fix. They might learn someday, but they don't know now--when it counts for us. Or, they might already know how to fix our problems, but we can't afford their services. Or, maybe their solutions aren't available to us or successful for us for a million other reasons.
That's when we really need to pray for divine help. We don't have to wait until we're at the end of our rope to seek God's assistance. We can do that any and every time we need help, and God will guide us to resources and solutions. But, when it seems like we've tried everything and everyone we can think of and have come to our wit's end, we need to remember that we still have hope. As long as God is in charge, we never run out of possibilities. The word *impossible* is not in God's vocabulary. God has endless resources and ways of getting things done.

To access those possibilities, though, we need to pray. We need to tune in to God's Spirit. We need to open our minds and our hearts. We need to imagine God's infinite nature and the expanse of God's blessings. We need to stop thinking in terms of shortages and limits and excuses. We need to trust God to take us to a new place and a new way of being. Most of us don't make that kind of leap with just occasional prayers thrown up to God in a crisis. We come to that kind of trust through regular and constant prayer, the kind of prayer that is well-practiced.

Most of you know that I say many a prayer for my two children, Angie and Oscar. Their life has been difficult since they were conceived by impoverished parents in the country of Colombia. Nothing for them has been easy. Nothing for them has been without pain. While life as adopted children in the United States certainly has had its benefits, it also has had more than its share of sorrow. As a parent of these two kids, I survive only by prayer--prayer for them, and prayer for my husband and me. We have tried so many schools, so many programs, so many counselors and doctors and medications. Frankly, it's natural for us to wonder where God is in this. It's easy for us to question why and think that no positive answer will ever come. But we can't give up hoping--or give up rejoicing in the small, maybe different, victories that do come. So we continue in prayer, opening our hearts to whatever it is God wants to say and do. For our
own sanity and for the sake of our kids, we turn the situation over to God. We acknowledge, and rely on, that we need divine help.

**CONCLUSION**

I've told you a number of times before that one of my favorite hymns begins with the line, "O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come." Whenever I'm feeling down, whenever I'm feeling weak, whenever I'm doubting my own ability, whenever I need encouragement for the future, I recite those lyrics. I get help from knowing that God has been with me and lots of other folks in years past. And my faith is bolstered that God will see me through whatever trial I'm facing now. I have to acknowledge that the answers to my prayers may not come in the exact ways I picture them, but somehow God will be at work in this situation.

Another song that often comes to my mind is one I sang in a youth choir many years ago:

I read in the Bible the promise of God
That nothing for him is too hard.
Impossible things he has promised to do
If we faithfully trust in his Word.
Nothing is impossible when you put your trust in God
Nothing is impossible when you're trusting in his word.
. . . For everything, oh, everything--
Yes, everything is possible with God!*

So, let's not give up. Just because we don't know what to do doesn't mean that we're out of possibilities. Seek the help of others and pray for divine help. That's the way to find healing and hope.

O God, we believe. Help our unbelief. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

*Eugene L. Clark, c. 1966, as found in *He Is Lord* (Kansas City: Lillenas, 1974), p. 5.