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Rest in Jesus

Mark 9:14-29

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Hello, it's great to be here with all of you today, both in person and those joining us online. My name is Gwyneth Preu, and I work here at BBC as the Family Ministry Coordinator. We've had an amazing few weeks at BBC. Two weeks ago was Easter, with a celebration of Christ's resurrection, and last week, we had the fabulous Symphony Chorus share their music with us. I would say both of those Sundays have been real mountain top experiences of worship! So now, this week, we are back to "regularly scheduled programming". I'm honored to share this week, as we come down from the mountaintop and turn our eyes towards Jesus. We also have a group of about 25 people from our church in Western Pennsylvania on a missions trip, and we are thinking and praying for them.

I grew up in eastern Pennsylvania – the other side of the state from where the mission trip group is right now – and have lived on the Cape for about 10 years with my family. I think there are a few other people here who have made their way to the Cape from Pennsylvania? I grew up going to a Presbyterian church. My parents brought me and my siblings every week to that church, and we learned about God, formed relationships, and built a solid foundation of faith. My church experience growing up is part of the reason I love working with and encouraging families at church and in their faith. There are a lot of ways the church where I grew up, and where my parents still attend, reminds me of BBC – the warmth, the community, and a love for Jesus. The church is a beautiful, historic building. In the sanctuary, on the back wall of the church, behind the choir loft, there is a verse that I probably stared at for hundreds of hours in my childhood, and it was one of the verses David Quinones read for us today. Here it is, from the King James Version, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." I always found it comforting – the idea of God giving us rest. But what does rest in God mean – that we get to take naps and never have any stress? That does sound nice, but probably not the intent of the scripture. Today's Bible passage will help us look at the type of real rest that only God can give us.

In our scripture passage, today, we find Jesus, right after the Mount of Transfiguration – which Pastor Doug preached on three weeks ago. Jesus and three of

his disciples are now coming down from a truly amazing experience of seeing Jesus transfigured before them, hearing God's voice, along with seeing Moses and Elijah. They had a real mountain top experience, physically and spiritually. So, we join Jesus and his disciples, in *Mark 9:14-29*, as Jesus comes down from the mountain.

“When they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them and some scribes arguing with them. When the whole crowd saw him, they were immediately overcome with awe, and they ran forward to greet him. He asked them, ‘What are you arguing about with them?’ Someone from the crowd answered him, ‘Teacher, I brought you my son; he has a spirit that makes him unable to speak, and whenever it seizes him, it dashes him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid, and I asked your disciples to cast it out, but they could not do so.’ He answered them, ‘You faithless generation, how much longer must I be with you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him to me.’ And they brought the boy to him. When the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. Jesus asked the father, ‘How long has this been happening to him?’ And he said, ‘From childhood. It has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you are able to do anything, help us! Have compassion on us!’ Jesus said to him, ‘If you are able! All things can be done for the one who believes.’ Immediately the father of the child cried out, ‘I believe; help my unbelief!’ When Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, ‘You spirit that keeps this boy from speaking and hearing, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again!’ 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 was able to stand. When he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, ‘Why could we not cast it out?’ He said to them, ‘This kind can come out only through prayer.’”

This is the word of God for us today.

The story of Jesus coming down from the Mount of Transfiguration, and what he encounters, seems anything *but* restful – there are crowds pressing in, disciples arguing, people calling out to Jesus, there is the boy who is possessed by a demon. This surely felt chaotic, after such an amazing experience on the mountain.

It is a compelling story because it shows Jesus relating with his disciples, the scribes of the city, a desperate father, and his sick son. We are going to look at the father's actions and behavior towards Jesus, and see what we can learn from this interaction.

First, we see the father coming directly to Jesus, on behalf of his son, and asking him for help. This father is a caregiver to his son, probably seeking answers, for years, to help his son. He says to Jesus directly – help us! Maybe you can relate to the father's story – as a caregiver to a parent, a spouse, a child, or watching a friend go through something where it feels like you can't help. Can you think of a situation where you felt helpless, watching someone you love suffer?

I remember when our oldest child, who is now ten, had her first fever, as an infant. Obviously, she was not the first infant to ever get a fever, but as first-time parents, who were solely responsible for her, Jon and I felt helpless as she cried and cried. I remember pacing around, holding her, wondering if it was safe to give infant's Tylenol, scared of her getting sicker. We were grateful to have a doctor only a phone call away, but it is scary when you are the person in charge of decisions and the care of someone so helpless. Sometimes, it feels like there is nothing you can do to help someone in your life who is suffering, and it may not be a situation easily fixed by a phone call to the doctor.

For the father in this story, his son has been dealing with seizures and possession, the inability to speak, and even potential death, for an extended period. This father must have been at the end of his rope, trying to figure out what to do! The father was probably deeply tired, in the way that caregivers can feel – the constant worrying and vigilance needed, when caring for the chronically ill or helpless. Most likely, he had sought doctors, perhaps other spiritual leaders, and was even seeking out the disciples, as Jesus came into the crowd. Again, many can relate to this – when we want to help a loved one, but don't know what next steps to take. This could be about a medical concern, financial issues, emotional health, any situation that feels out of our control.

So, the first thing we learn from this interaction is that we have to **come to Jesus and ask Jesus**, which means reaching out to him. The father, in this story, was bold enough, and maybe desperate enough, to come right to Jesus – in the midst of a crowd – with his sick child.

Second, the father is honest with Jesus. The words he cries out, in response to Jesus, are, “I believe, help my unbelief!” I find this statement so moving because I think it can resonate with so many of us. We *do* believe, but do we *really* think God can change a situation or our hearts? The honesty of this father speaks to all of the doubts that can creep into our faith. We truly believe in God’s goodness and ability to heal, but we also find it hard to fully believe what God is capable of. Sometimes, we are afraid to be honest with God because we feel ashamed of our doubt or our emotions of frustration and anger. We can look to other places in the Bible where people express their emotions to God without fear – the Psalms are a great example of this. In *Psalms 13:1-3*, King David wrote, “How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I bear pain in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all day long? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? Consider and answer me, O Lord my God!” That is honest and heartfelt pleading – asking God “how long” four times! We find more of that in the Psalms expressing frustration and pain – a third of the Psalms are called “Psalms of lament”.

In our human relationships, we know that honesty builds trust. Having a friend or family member we can be honest with about our emotions is such a gift. Right now, my kids enjoy the animated Disney movies, and I enjoy re-watching some that I grew up with. One is the story of “Aladdin”, made into an animated movie in 1992. Have many people seen this version? In the movie, Aladdin lives on the streets, but meets the princess and falls in love – but knows he doesn’t deserve her. When he finds the magic lamp with the genie, and wishes to be a prince, his wish is granted – problem solved, right? Except that he is not honest with her about who he is and where he came from. Doesn’t sound like a good way to start a relationship! Can you imagine starting a relationship under completely false pretenses, and then expecting it to work out? For those who have seen the movie, you know the complications, and in the end, honesty is what brings them together. In the same way, if we start a conversation or relationship with Jesus by only putting our best face forward, it is not going to feel very meaningful. We need to present our true, authentic selves in prayer, so we can feel known by Jesus.

Be honest with Jesus.

Third, the father and the son trust Jesus. After this back-and-forth conversation with the father, when there are crowds pressing in, and Jesus commands

the spirit to come out, what happens? Let's look again at verse 26. "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.'" (*Mark 9:26*)

So, this poor father is now being told by the people in the crowd – your son is dead! What a roller coaster of emotions for him. Then, verse 27 starts with "But Jesus". "*But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he was able to stand*" (*Mark 9:27*). Just when it seemed like it was all ending terribly – But Jesus. But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he was able to stand. Just when a situation felt absolutely helpless – But Jesus. **Trust Jesus** to take you by the hand and lift you up, even when it feels impossible.

This story of a demon possessed boy is the story of a miracle, something we've all longed for – perhaps in a health situation or in a relationship. We know that not every story ends with complete healing or restoration, but prayer and a relationship with Jesus can change us in that situation. There is no doubt that this father was profoundly impacted by his interaction with Jesus, and the same is true for us. If we are seeking out Jesus, we will be changed. If we can ask for help, admit our questions and doubts, and be honest with Jesus, it will change our lives and the people we interact with.

Life has mountain top experiences, but most of life is the reality of the everyday – sick kids, making hard decisions, daily interactions with family, friends, or coworkers. We can look forward to the extraordinary experiences, and enjoy and remember them, but it is really our daily life where our faith and prayers are played out. Even for Jesus, he had just experienced this incredible transfiguration on the mountain, and then was quickly immersed back into everyday life, with a crowd of people and demands being made on him.

Last year, I got to take a class on early church history. One of the people we studied was Saint Augustine, an influential theologian from Algeria, who lived in the 4th century. One of the lines he wrote says, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you." Our heart is restless until it rests in you – I have thought of that so many times, as we live in this restless world. He wrote this almost 2,000 years ago, and it still feels so true in our current day. There are so many ways our attention can be taken from Jesus – by a crowd, by disagreements, by health issues, by pursuing things we *think* will give us rest, but turns out are only temporary. When you

are worn out or restless, how do you find rest? We can find temporary rest in things like taking vacations, scrolling our phones, or saying no to certain activities. If we are restless in our life, we may want an adventure or a change of job. None of those things are bad, but they don't provide us with the soul rest that we really crave. True rest only comes from finding our rest in Jesus.

Last year, BBC offered an Alpha class for people who were learning about faith. One of the images shared in the class – that feels especially fitting for living on Cape Cod – was of a crashing wave. When we watch ocean waves at places like Nauset Beach, we see them crashing, churning, pulling in and out. Much like the chaos of the world around us, there are always, always, waves crashing – loud, overwhelming, and beautiful. But then, there is a deep stillness underneath the wave, in the deeper part of the ocean, that is quiet and amazing. We can find rest in Jesus in that deeper part of life; even while the waves crash around us, we can find peace.

This passage from Mark makes me think how approachable Jesus must have been in person – that a father would feel comfortable coming up to him in a crowd with the disciples and leaders. And Jesus is still just as approachable to us, today. What have we learned from the father and his son when we need to find rest in Jesus?

First, come to Jesus for help. “If you are able to do anything, help us!” Seek Jesus in prayer, talk to him as you go about your day, just ask him.

Second, be honest with Jesus – “I believe, help my unbelief!” Tell Jesus how you feel. He is not scared of what you will say, and your honesty will bring you closer to him.

Third, trust Jesus – let him take your hand and lift you up. This may be the hardest one for us, but I want to challenge you that if you trust Jesus, your heart will change.

It can be hard to apply all of this – I had a chance to do that this week. It is interesting how God makes you apply the thing that you are preaching about! There was some discouraging family news this week, and I was ruminating on it and thinking about how to handle it. After our kids left for school on Friday morning, I took a walk down to Long Pond, still thinking about what to do about this situation, and also thinking about speaking this morning. Then, I realized I should go through these steps! I asked God for help, telling him I don't know what to do! Then, I told him I feel

discouraged and frustrated about this. Then, I said that I trust him. I prayed that God would take me by the hand through this situation. And, while everything is not perfectly solved, I feel much more at peace, having given it to God and trusting that he is walking with me through it. I also strongly recommend a good walk and prayer time if you are feeling similarly – the time outside in nature and being able to talk with God freely is so restorative!

If you've never put your full trust in Jesus, start today, by praying to him and asking him to work in your heart and life. I know any of our pastors or ministry leaders would be happy to talk with you more, if you have questions and want to pray together. Remember that life and situations will seem helpless, like it did for the father of the demon possessed boy – but then there is Jesus. As we grow in prayer and our relationship with the Lord, this will help us to find true peace and rest in Jesus.

Let's pray together.

Jesus, thank you for hearing us when we ask you to help us. Thank you for loving us when we express our doubts and emotions. And help us to fully trust you to work in our hearts and lives. Help our restless hearts to find their rest in you. Amen.

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. The father of the demon possessed boy comes to Jesus, in *Mark 9:14-29*, and asks Jesus to help his son. How often do you ask Jesus for help? Is there a situation in your life where you feel helpless that you can bring to Jesus?
2. In verse 24, the father says, in response to Jesus, “I believe, help my unbelief!” What do you think the father meant by this statement? How does this statement resonate with your faith experience?
3. The father of the demon possessed boy was honest with Jesus about his doubts. Is honesty hard for you in certain situations? How can honesty improve relationships – including a relationship with Jesus?
4. After Jesus casts out the demon from the boy, in verse 26, the people in the crowd tell the father, “Your son is dead!”. Verse 27 starts with the phrase “But Jesus”, and shares how Jesus took the son by the hand and lifted him up. Have you had a situation that seemed hopeless, “but Jesus” changed the situation or your heart?
5. After a significant or “mountaintop” experience, it can be hard to return to the demands of daily life. What are ways you can make a relationship with Jesus a priority in the midst of your daily routines?
6. Jesus was approached by many people, and he made time for them – including the father in this passage. Does Jesus feel approachable to you? How can you come to him, be honest with him, and trust him?