

ORDER OF WORSHIP FOR 9-12-21 8:30 AM

P: The Lord be with you.

C: And also with you.

Opening Hymn: *“Jesus Has Come and Brings Pleasure”* - **Hymn #533**

Confession and Forgiveness

P: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

C: Amen.

P: We hear God’s Word concerning what we do with our speech:

Epistle Reading: James 3:1-12

R: Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.

R: The Word of the Lord

C: Thanks be to God.

P: Almighty God, You have given us our mouths and tongues to declare Your praise and to build up others.

C: “We should we fear and love God that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, slander him, or hurt his reputation,” (Explanation to 8th commandment) **But we do.**

P: From our mouths comes so much hurt and not the encouragement You desire.

C: “But defend him, speak well of him, and explain everything in the kindest way.” (catechism-8th commandment) **But we don’t.”**

P: We deserve no words from You except eternal cursing in hell.

(silence as we think of our sins of speech)

ALL: Lord, have mercy on us.

P: God has spoken to us most clearly through His Son, Christ Jesus. In His name and by His command I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

C: Amen. Guide us by Your Spirit, O God, to steer us in the way of not speaking when we could tear down and opening our mouths to build up!

Hymn of Praise: *“Praise to the Lord, the Almighty”* - **Hymn #790**

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 50:4-10

R: The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary. Morning by morning he awakens; he awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught. The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious; I turned not backward. I gave my back to those who strike, and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard; I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting. But the Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame. He who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who is my adversary? Let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord God helps me; who will declare me guilty? Behold, all of them will wear out like a garment; the moth will eat them up. Who among you fears the Lord and obeys the voice of his servant? Let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God.

R: The Word of the Lord

C: Thanks be to God

Holy Gospel: Mark 9:14-29

P: The Holy Gospel according to St. Mark, the 9th chapter.

C: Glory to You, O Lord.

P: And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and scribes arguing with them. And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed and ran up to him and greeted him. And he asked them, “What are you arguing about with them?” And someone from the crowd answered him, “Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute. And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able.” And he answered them, “O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me.” And they brought the boy to him. And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. And Jesus asked his father, “How long has this been happening to him?” And he said, “From childhood. And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.” And Jesus said to him, “‘If you can’! All things are possible for one who believes.” Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, “I believe; help my unbelief!” And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, “You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.” And 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 arose. And when

he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, “Why could we not cast it out?” And he said to them, “This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.”

P: This is the Gospel of our Lord.

C: Praise to You, O Christ.

Children’s Message: (8:30 AM)

Sermon Hymn: “*Praise the One who Breaks the Darkness*” – **Hymn #849**

Sermon: “*Help My Unbelief*” - **Mark 9:14-29**

It’s easy to be cynical when you’re always waiting for the other shoe to drop. When you know you’re going to be disappointed. After all of the changes of the last year, hoping to get back to normal and then having another change, another round of cancelations, we’re all familiar with that idea.

Columnist Mike Royko of the Chicago Tribune knew the futility of being a Cubs fan. He wrote about being a Cubs fan, “It taught a person that if you try hard enough and long enough, you’ll still lose, and that’s the story of life.” He also wrote, “A Pessimist sees the glass as half empty; A Cub Fan wonders when it's gonna spill.”

When I first came to Ames, I was told that being a Cubs fan was good preparation for being a Cyclones fan. The Cyclones, too, had a history of futility. They had a history of losing in heartbreaking fashion. Of course, I’ve seen that in my time here. Getting to the NCAA tournament, only for George Niang to hurt his foot. Losing to Iowa 44-41 in overtime after leading by a touchdown near the end of the 4th quarter in 2017. The list goes on and on. I’m sure many watched the game against UNI last week with that same feeling of dread, knowing Iowa State has started slowly before, and a 6 point lead wasn’t enough room for comfort in the 4th quarter.

The father in today’s Gospel lesson has reason to be cynical. His son has been afflicted with a demon since childhood. It makes him convulse and foam at the mouth. It makes the child go into fire or water to try to destroy him. The father has tried everything, and nothing has worked. He finally heard about Jesus, and came to find him, only to discover that Jesus was up on a mountain. The disciples try to help the boy, but they cannot. And now he’s down to his last chance. Jesus is finally here, but the father still doubts. The father still questions. The father has had his hopes raised before, only to have them dashed once again.

This time, though, things are different. The father hasn’t put his faith in just anyone. The father hasn’t found another quack doctor. Instead, he’s found Jesus. And so he’s hopeful, but afraid to be let down again.

“If you can do anything,” the father pleaded, “have compassion on us and help us.”

“If you can!” Jesus quipped. “All things are possible for one who believes.”

There was a bit of rebuke in Jesus’ words. There was also a ray of hope and a way out. “All things are possible for one who believes.” What is impossible for us is possible through faith,

through God, through Jesus. Throughout his ministry, he made miracles happen! And now, in his last chance, the father has hope again.

That's when the father cried out, "I believe; help my unbelief!" Some ancient manuscripts add that he burst into tears. He was caught between hoping for the impossible and afraid to be let down again. We could expand on the father's prayer a little this way: Lord, I want to believe! I really do! I know you can do miracles. But I just can't see it right now. I'm full of so many doubts. I want to believe, so help my unbelief!

And Jesus did! He gave faith to the doubting father and took away the disbelief of the disciples. Jesus commanded the demon to come out, and out it came!

When Jesus hears this, he responds, "if you can! All things are possible for one who believes." The father responds "I believe; help my unbelief!" That doesn't sound like much faith. But it's enough. Jesus heals the son, drives out the demon, and restores him to his father.

That's how our faith is, too. Faith comes before the fulfillment. We're asked to believe before we see the results. How can we do that? Because we trust the one asking us to believe. We know that Jesus has kept his promises, and we trust that he will continue to do so.

We read in the Lutheran confessions, "Worthiness does not depend on the greatness or smallness, the weakness or strength of faith. Instead, it depends on Christ's merit, which the distressed father of little faith enjoyed as well as Abraham, Paul, and others who have a joyful and strong faith."

"Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief!" Some days, that's all we can do. Some days, that's our prayer. Sometimes, our faith is shaken when we've been praying for years, and have yet to receive the answer we hoped for. Sometimes, our faith is shaken when scandals in the church or the moral failings of those who claim to be Christian make us wonder how something so imperfect could be right about God. Sometimes, our faith is shaken when literal storms and floods come, and we wonder where a loving God is as peoples' lives are washed away. Sometimes, our faith is shaken when we face sickness or financial troubles or relationship troubles. Sometimes, our faith is shaken when we encounter another scientific theory that doesn't line up with the Bible. No matter who we are or where we are, there are things that make us doubt, and wonder how we will be able to believe.

C.S. Lewis, in his book *The Screwtape Letters*, imagines a mentor demon, Screwtape, writing to a mentee demon on how best to lead a human away from God. In one chapter, the mentee demon is excited that his human patient is going through a trough, a period of dryness and doubt. Screwtape warns his mentee not to be so quick to judge. Humans follow a law of undulation, a series of peaks and troughs in all areas of their lives, but especially in their religious life. Humans know they were created for something more, and are continually striving for that, but also fall back. Both God and the devil can use these changes. Their goals, though, are totally different. Screwtape writes that "We want cattle who can finally become food; He wants servants who can finally become sons. We want to suck in, He wants to give out. We are empty and would be filled; He is full and flows over."

It is in the troughs, it is in the valleys, that people learn to trust God not because of his presence, but in spite of its lack. Screwtape ends his letter with the advice that “Our cause is never more in danger, than when a human, no longer desiring, but intending, to do our Enemy's will, looks round upon a universe from which every trace of Him seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken, and still obeys.”

We may still struggle with cynicism. We may still find it hard to hope for the Cyclones to win. We may still struggle with wondering when the next shoe will drop. We still may go through troughs and valleys in our faith and in our lives. But we can go through those challenges with hope. We can believe with hope. We can believe in Jesus, the one who healed the son and restored him to his father. We can believe in the one who sacrificed everything for you. With faith in Jesus, we always have hope.

Apostle's Creed:

Hymn: (8:30 AM) *“Oh, for a Thousand Tongues to Sing”* - **Hymn #528**

Prayer for Faith:

P: “Lord, we believe;

C: help our unbelief!”

P: Lord, Jesus, it is hard to believe when there is lack of support from the Church:

C: “And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, ‘Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.’ But Jesus did not answer her a word. And His disciples came and begged Him, saying, ‘Send her away, for she is crying out after us.’” (Matthew 15:23)

P: It is hard to believe when obstacles are placed before us:

C: “Some men were bringing on a bed a man who was paralyzed, and they were seeking to bring him in and lay him before Jesus, but they found no way to bring him in, because of the crowd.” (Luke 5:18-19)

P: It is hard to trust when others put down our beliefs:

C: “People brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. So the Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, “He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see.’ Some of the Pharisees said, ‘This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.’” (John 9:13-16)

P: It is hard to believe when You don't seem to answer when we want You to:

C: “Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw Him, she fell at His feet, saying to Him, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother Lazarus would not have died.’” (John 11)

P: We doubt like Abraham who was promised a son, but seemed to wait too long for one to come.

C: We doubt like Elijah who was ready to give up and die.

P: We doubt like Peter who was walking on water until the wind picked up and he began to sink.

C: We doubt like the disciples who woke You in the boat when the storm came up.

P: We doubt like the two disciples from Emmaus who could not see how You could rise from the dead.

C: We doubt like Thomas who wanted to see Your hands and side before he would accept that You were alive.

P: We doubt like Paul who asked You to take away the “thorn in his flesh.”

ALL: “Lord, we believe; help our unbelief!”

P: (other requests)

P: “It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man.” (Psalm 118:8)

C: “Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness.”
(Psalm 37:3)

P: “Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD GOD is an everlasting rock.” (Isaiah 26:4)

P: “Lord, we believe;

C: help our unbelief!”

Lord’s Prayer:

Closing Prayer:

P: O most loving Father, You want us to give thanks for all things, to fear nothing except losing You, and to lay our cares on You, knowing that You care for us. Protect us from faithful fears and worldly anxieties and grant that no clouds in this mortal life may hide from us the light of Your immortal love shown to us in Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

C: Amen.

Blessing: (pastor)

C: Amen.

Closing Hymn: “*Listen, God Is Calling*” - **Hymn #833**