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“Light in the Darkness; Peace in the Chaos”
Text: Mark 9:14-29 (Isaiah 50:4-10; James 3:1-12)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

It was chaos. Jesus, Peter, James, and John come down the mountain, fresh from Jesus' transfiguration, to this. Chaos. Jesus' other nine disciples are arguing with the scribes and there's a great crowd around them, perhaps listening, perhaps yelling themselves and taking sides. When someone finally looks up and notices that Jesus is there, they all run over to Him. And, oh yeah, there's this boy rolling around on the ground, convulsing and foaming at the mouth. You couldn't blame Peter, James, and John had they tugged on Jesus sleeve and asked: *Uh, can we go back?* Peter's suggestion of setting up three tents and staying is looking pretty good now!

But no, they can't go back. This is why Jesus came. This is life. This is your life.

Is it not? Oh, maybe the details are a bit different, but is your life all neat and tidy, or more like chaos? Is your life all going according to plan, or more filled with interruptions, unexpected problems, arguments, troubles at home, problems at work or school, issues with family, betrayal by friends, and people convulsing and foaming at the mouth? Yeah, this is it, isn't it? Life in a world of sin, filled with sinners, with the devil conducting his minions to turn God's well-ordered, harmoniously-orchestrated creation, into chaos. Each of us playing our own tune, blowing our own horn, and making a mess of it all.

And then into this mess steps Jesus. And with Him disorder becomes order, chaos becomes harmony, fear becomes peace, death becomes life. He who rebuked creation when it was convulsing and rebuked the sickness and disease that had taken hold on people, now rebukes this unclean spirit, this ***mute and deaf spirit*** - which can hear Him! - and drives it out. And when His disciples ask Him about it later, He tells them: ***“This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.”***

Uh, we'd like to know more, Jesus! What does *that* mean? Are there different kinds of unclean spirits? Are some more powerful than others? What makes this one different? Why could this one not be driven out by anything but prayer? Tell us more, Jesus. Tell us more.

But not just with this, we ask that about a lot of things. About things that are happening in our lives, in our country, in the world. Why did I lose my job? Why is my family so

divided? Why did my loved one die? Why so much evil in the world? Why are Christians being persecuted? Why am I suffering so? Tell us more, Jesus. Tell me more.

Why is the question the disciples asked. Why couldn't we do it? And Jesus' answer seem to be not an explanation, but, if I may paraphrase here, simply this: *Why weren't you praying?*

The prophet Isaiah said today: ***Let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God.*** Walking in darkness and having no light is our situation when things happen and we do not know why. In the darkness, you don't know where things are coming from. In the darkness, you can't see where you are going. In the darkness, it's frightening. And we can use our tongues, as James said, to curse the darkness, to curse those who bump into us in the darkness . . . but that doesn't do any good. In fact, that usually just makes things worse. Agitating us, agitating them, and making the darkness darker, the chaos worse, and turning us against each other.

Instead, ***Let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God.*** Isaiah didn't say those words lightly. Israel in his day had a whole heap of trouble and darkness. From wrong belief and idolatry within, and from enemies threatening them from without. No amount of fighting and cursing could change that. They tried! It just got worse. And so, Isaiah said, ***trust in the name of the Lord and rely on [your] God.*** Or, if I may paraphrase here, Isaiah is saying: *Pray. Why aren't you praying?*

For to pray is to call on the name of the Lord and rely on Him. It is to entrust all your "whys?" to Him. It is not to know all the answers, but trust that He will do what is needed and what is right and what is good. For it's not that prayer itself does anything - it's that the one that we pray to can. And He wants us to pray, and has promised to hear our prayers, and has promised to answer.

So, *why aren't you praying?* Oh, we do, right? Or, are we arguing? Or, are we fretting? Or, are we looking to our elected leaders or the courts to solve our problems? Or, are we trying to do it? Or, have we given up? Resigned to the fact that this is just the way things are and prayer doesn't do any good?

Now, there is a time to argue and fight for the truth. Governments and authorities have been established by God to preserve and protect us and for our good and we should expect that from them. And God does use us in our many and various callings to be His blessing to others. That's all true and I don't want to diminish that in any way and become spiritual separatists or hermits. No. But these good gifts of God can also become gods themselves, and what we look to and trust for what we need, rather than the one who uses them as His masks; who works through them. And so we pray to *the one who breaks the darkness* (LSB #849) - the only one who can. The one who is our light in the

darkness. The one who came to bring order into our disorder, harmony to our chaos, peace to calm our fears, and life to overcome our death. The one who came to forgive, to release us from the grip of our death-causing sin.

And it is the son in the story today who gives us a picture of this, of what Jesus has come to do for us. For this is what satan wants to do to us - convulse us and our world, make us foam at the mouth at each other, cast us into fire and water, and destroy us. And so Jesus came and stepped in it with us. And He became the son who wasn't *like* a corpse, but was the corpse; the one of whom they said "**He is dead**" and He really was. And at His death, not He but all of creation convulsing terribly - the sun stopping its light, the earth quaking and trembling, the dead leaving their graves.

Now, you know the story doesn't end there, because the light of God's Word and His Spirit has revealed to you that Jesus then rose from the dead. That just as Jesus lifted up that boy, so He Himself was lifted up from the dead. *But until that third day*, that was a pretty dark time for the disciples. The time for a lot of "whys?" The time when it seemed as if their worst fears came true and all their prayers went unanswered. And maybe you've been there. You prayed, or still are praying, like the father, going to Jesus and asking for help, and the answer? Your son is no longer possessed or convulsing, **he's dead**. Great. Thanks a lot, Jesus.

Let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God. You know how it turned out for that father, you know how it turned out with Jesus' resurrection . . . do you think it will be any different for you, O you of little faith? Even if things get pretty dark for a while, ***all things are possible for one who believes***, for all things are possible for the one we believe in. For He was dead, but now is alive. Risen. Victorious.

So is the evil one throwing you into the fire and water to try to destroy you? Don't worry - Jesus beat him to it! John the Baptist said it: ***He who is coming after me is mightier than I . . . He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit (water) and fire*** (John 3:11). And He has! You were baptized into Jesus' death and resurrection to destroy the sin in you and give you a new life (Romans 6). His life. A forgiven life. A life that neither sin, death, nor devil can end. That when your body becomes a corpse, maybe for a long time, Jesus will then come and take you by the hand and lift you up, too. To a life where no evil, no darkness, can ever enter again.

But until that day, what darkness are you in? Who is foaming at the mouth or convulsing against you or what you believe? Pray. Pray for them. Pray for your enemies, for those who persecute you, for those who disagree with you, for those in fear, for those who have been misled, for those who wish you dead and would like nothing better than to stamp out you and your beliefs. Pray for them. ***Let him who walks in darkness and has no light***

trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God. This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.

And until that day, come and be fed and strengthened by our Lord at *the Table He has prepared before us in the presence of our enemies* (Psalm 23:5). Not apart from our enemies, but before them, in the midst of them and their raging. Here is a place of peace and forgiveness, of strength and confidence, of our Lord with us still with His Body and Blood, for us to run to and receive His life. And to *praise the one who breaks the darkness, who frees the prisoners, who preached the Gospel, who calmed storms and fed thousands, who blessed the children, who drove out demons, who brings cool and living water, who suffered in our place. The Word incarnate, who died and rose victorious, the One who makes us one* (LSB #849).

Why aren't you praying?

Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.