



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for Pentecost 17

September 15, 2024

Big Jesus

Mark 9:14-29

¹⁴When they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and scribes arguing with them. ¹⁵And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed and ran up to [Jesus] and greeted him. ¹⁶And he asked them, **“What are you arguing about with them?”** ¹⁷And someone from the crowd answered him, “Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute. ¹⁸And 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.” ¹⁹And 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.”** ²⁰And 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. ²¹And Jesus asked his father, “How long has this been happening to him?” And he said, “From childhood. ²²And 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.” ²³And Jesus said to him, **“If you can! All things are possible for one who believes.”** ²⁴Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, “I believe; help my unbelief!” ²⁵And 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.”** ²⁶And 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.” ²⁷But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose. ²⁸And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, “Why could we not cast it out?” ²⁹And he said to them, **“This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.”**

In last week's Gospel, Jesus performed a miracle for the physical body, healing a deaf and mute man so that the man's "ears were opened, his tongue released, and he spoke plainly" (Mark 7:35). In today's pericope, Jesus performs a spiritual miracle, casting out a demon, saying, "You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again."

Dear Christian friends, our Lord's miracles of physical healing might be easier to believe than His spiritual miracles, because we've all experienced physical problems of one kind or another, whether it be a cold, the flu, or even something more serious like cancer or the failure of one of our organs. And we've all met people who are unable to hear, unable to see, unable to speak, or to walk, or to use their hands. Because such physical limitations are known to us, it might be easier for us to comprehend our Lord's miracles of physical healing.



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The spiritual miracle Jesus performs in today's Gospel – that of casting out a demon – might seem more distant, harder for our minds to grasp, because few of us have ever seen someone behaving like the young man in Mark's account. Oh, we certainly see strange behaviors, but these are always traceable to some sort of illness, such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, schizophrenia, or they can be put down to the influence of some kind of intoxicant. I think it's safe to say that most of us have never seen someone behave like the boy in today's Gospel and then heard it explained, "The boy has a demon."

Spiritual miracles require great faith because we only have the Scriptures to rely on. We only know about demons because God's Word talks about them. We only know that serious spiritual dangers surround us because God's Word warns us that our enemies are not flesh and blood, but the spiritual forces of darkness (Eph. 6:12). Even if someone might have some strange "otherworldly" experience that can't be explained, we still wouldn't be able to say for certain whether that experience was demonic. The Scriptures only take us so far and strongly forbid us to venture further on our own (2 Cor. 11:14; Deu. 18:10-12).

What, then, may we learn from today's Gospel? First, we should learn that there are forces in Creation that are much greater and more powerful than we can possibly imagine. That's not the sort of thing we like to hear, we who like to think of ourselves as sophisticated, enlightened, and technologically advanced. But hear it, we must, Christian! For your own good, learn it. For the good of your neighbor, believe it.

"Teacher," says the father of this boy to Jesus, "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. 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."

"If you *can!*" Jesus repeats, and you can almost hear our Lord chuckle at the words. That's the second thing from today's Gospel that we must learn and believe: Our human Lord Jesus is so thoroughly and completely divine that not even the most mysterious and indescribable forces can stand against Him. It is written, "The One enthroned in heaven laughs" (Ps. 2:4); and again, "The innocent one mocks at them" (Job 22:19); and yet again, "having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross" (Col. 2:15). Big Jesus, little demon. "If you can," Jesus says with a chuckle, and then more seriously, "I command you, you deaf and mute spirit, come out of him and never enter him again."

Beloved, what Jesus says, goes. Each of us Christians can put that into our pocket and take it home today. When Jesus speaks, the things He speaks happen. "Let there be light, and there was light" (Gen. 1:3). "I command you, come out of him." And with that, after crying like a baby, and taking one last, impudent shot at the boy, "the demon came out."

Now, ask yourself this: If the Word of Jesus is so powerful against demonic forces, as in this pericope, how much more powerful is that Word which Jesus speaks concerning



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your sins? Do you ever feel as though your sins crush you and afflict you and dog your memory? Mine do for me. Nevertheless, as insurmountable as we think our sins to be, Jesus isn't really bothered by their weight. He put all of them — the sins of the entire world — on His back, carried them to the cross, and then buried them in His own grave. Does it seem easier to say, "Rise, pick up your mat, and go home," than to say, "Be gone, evil spirit!" (Cf. Mark 2:9-10)? Listen: For Jesus, it's the same thing. Did you hear how He manhandled this demon by the power of His Word? Then know that He has handled your sins in the same way: "Come out from him and leave him alone!" Big Jesus!

Your Big Jesus came to you in your baptism. This is a spiritual miracle, one in which sins are forgiven and cast away. In baptism, a child is removed from the kingdom of Satan and transferred into the kingdom of God's Son. It's a spiritual miracle that you have witnessed many times, even though you may not have thought of it that way.

A spiritual miracle shall occur before your very eyes yet this morning, as your Big Jesus turns ordinary bread and wine into His own body and blood, in, with, and under the physical elements, so that, when you eat and drink the bread and wine, you're also receiving the very body and blood sacrificed for you on Calvary's cross. It's a spiritual miracle with both spiritual and physical benefits. Your eyes see bread, your tongue tastes wine, but you receive into your own body the body and blood of Christ.

Now, like the father in Mark's account, you may believe, but only in part. It's hard for us humans to grasp what we cannot perceive with our senses. So we must join our voices with that man and say, "I believe. Help my unbelief!" The Words, "Help my unbelief" demonstrate that faith — the act of believing — is itself a divine miracle, and a gift that only God can give. The man asks Jesus to give him what he cannot produce for himself. Faith — saving faith — is not a work you muster up from within yourself; it's a gift, a miracle, performed on you by the Holy Spirit working through the Word of Christ.

So, when I call on you to believe, I'm simply calling on you to receive the gift of faith, which comes through the Word of Christ (Rom. 10:17). Let it come, beloved, and don't resist it; it is the gift of God to you.

Last week's Gospel told us of a miracle for the physical body. Our Lord healed a deaf and mute man so that the man's "ears were opened, his tongue released, and he spoke plainly" (Mark 7:35). In today's Gospel, Jesus performs a spiritual miracle, casting out a demon that caused a boy to be mute and deaf. "You mute and deaf spirit," Jesus said, "I command you, come out of him and never enter him again."

Physical or spiritual, the limitation is the same. Physical or spiritual, Jesus Christ is One Lord over all. Physical or spiritual, everything gets put back into place, cleaned out, and made right again by the Word that Jesus speaks. Physical or spiritual, your Lord has done it all for you, He continually does it all for you, and He shall do it all yet again for you on the Last Day, when you shall rise to live eternally before Him in body and spirit. For thus it is written, "Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose." In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen