

"Can Jesus Help Us, or Can't He?" That's the question pressing the people in today's Gospel text and it's the same one that presses us today. "Can Jesus help us, or can't He?" "What authority does Jesus really have?" "Can Jesus help us, or can't He?" When life is stressful, whether you're a kid, a teen-ager, or a grown-up, you may wonder "Can Jesus help me or can't He?" When a l-o-n-g school year lies in front of you, a year filled with pencils, books, and maybe even a few of teacher's dirty looks, you may very well be wondering, "Can Jesus help me or can't He?" When your so-called friends at school are being mean - saying things about you behind your back or spreading rumors about you on snapchat, you might wonder "Can Jesus help me, or can't He?" When the workload at the office, farm, school, or any other job site seems overwhelming, just plain monotonous or both, you might begin to wonder "Can Jesus help me, or can't He?"

When your family is being pulled apart by fighting and bitter feelings, or when the doctor's diagnosis is **not** good news, it's then that you may begin to wonder, "Can Jesus help me or can't He?"

"Can you really help, Jesus?" That question hangs in the air while Jesus and a desperate father discuss the condition of the child writhing in the dirt in front of them (v. 20). "How long has he been like this?" Jesus asks with doctor-like investigation. "From childhood," the man answers, and after describing the symptoms he pleads: "If you can do anything, help us! Have compassion on us" (21-22).

The father had his doubts about Jesus. He didn't **know** what Jesus could deliver. Jesus' disciples were powerless (18). The "silent spirit" was the one in control (17-18). So, in the middle of all the unbelief and strife, Jesus claims authority! He responds to the man's plea: "**If** you **can**." Jesus echoes the man's words to rebuke him, as if to say: 'Of course I can! Why would you question that? "Everything is possible to the one who believes" (23)!

Jesus' words are bold. They're a call to trust Him and take Him at His Word. The father's paradoxical reply reveals His weakness: "Lord, I believe! Help my **un**belief!"

In his moving response, filled with emotion, the father wasn't praying that his faith would be helped until it was "strong enough" for Jesus to do something. Instead, he was confessing his ***weakness*** and asking that his son would be healed anyway. And Jesus demonstrated that the man's faith or ***lack*** of faith, was no obstacle to Him. He commanded the unclean spirit to get out and never come back! And what happened? The spirit obeyed! (25). It had no choice.

So, "What authority does Jesus really have?" The father found out that with God all things ***are*** possible! And in the New Testament, this event wasn't unique. In the Gospels, Jesus was the "go to guy" for doing the impossible! ***He*** was the one in charge. Even death left a person when Jesus commanded it. So, He raised ordinary people like Lazarus from the dead. And best of all, He Himself rose from the dead! The full significance of the events of the text, especially Jesus casting out the demon, is seen in the light of Jesus' resurrection from the dead! There was no "***if*** you are able!" In the New Testament, Jesus "***was*** able."

But that was then, and this is now. We're a long way from the New Testament. Things are different today. Jesus doesn't walk among us visibly now. Life goes on. Life is busy. Life can get frustrating. Life sometimes hurts. Life is often out of our control. School can be tough. Friends can be mean. Work can be overwhelming. Family bonds can be tested. The word from the doctor can be devastating.

So, we're back to the question that presses us: "Can Jesus help us or not?" "Does He have any authority at all over that afflicts me, and will He wield His great authority in ***my*** favor or not?" The temptation is for us to doubt, just like the father of the boy in our text. We don't see very many dramatic demonstrations of God's power in our day, do we? I think we can truly relate to the plea of that father: "Lord, I believe! Help my unbelief!" That's another way of saying: "Do You have the authority, Jesus? Then, please, show us Your power."

"Does Jesus have the authority or doesn't He?" As one of your Pastors, I need to answer that question- that plea. Remember that neither I nor Pastor Adelsen stand here today or on any other Sunday on our own authority. Instead, as your pastors whom God has called to serve you,

we're here on the authority of the resurrected Jesus, the Son of God Who now lives and reigns from heaven, in Whose name and in Whose stead we speak. And so, it's His authoritative word we bring when we tell you in the absolution that He has forgiven your sins! Jesus has the authority to forgive you and He **has** forgiven you! You were given that promise in your Baptism, you receive it as from our Lord Himself in Holy Communion, and here and now you hear His decision again.

So, your sin can't separate you from God. Jesus has done away with it. That means that your weakness, your troubles, your sorrow- whether it's school problems, work problems, family problems, health problems, or any other kind of problem, they all have this in common: They only have only a short time to live. **They** don't reign. **Christ reigns!** The Lord and King of all, when He returns, will transform our lowly bodies into spiritual ones (1 Cor. 15). "There will be no more death or sorrow or pain..." God promises in Revelation 21(v.4). No other authority in heaven or on earth will stop Him. This Jesus is **Lord**. And He is **Your** Lord, Lord for you." Nothing will separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:37-39). This is the promise of the One who rose from the dead and who has power over all things. Let not your hearts be troubled. Neither let them be afraid! Jesus has the authority; Jesus has the power to help you and His will, His desire is to do just that. Amen!