Sunday School Commentary Lesson

By

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Powerful Faith, Mark 9:14-29

William Plummer and Bonnie Bell wrote in People magazine: The Northwestern University Wildcats shocked the world of college football in 1955 by making it to the Rose Bowl Tournament. The man behind the team's turnaround was coach Gary Barnett...Barnett was determined to prove that kids at the Big Ten's smallest and most academically demanding school could play football. He ordered a Tournament of Roses flag for the football building and kept a silk rose on his desk to remind everyone where key where headed. "At the first meeting," says Kicker Sam Valenzisi, "he told us we needed belief without evidence. He asked, 'Do you know what that is? That's faith.'"

Commentary Lesson

Mark's introduction to this exorcism story reveals the disciples as being engaged in active typical of Jesus' ministry: They have gathered a crowd, are debating with the scribes, and have attempted to heal a possessed boy (v.14, 18b). Upon first seeing Jesus, the crowd is "overcome with awe" (v.15a). The narrator doesn't give a clear reason perhaps Jesus was still glowing from his experience on the mountain or maybe they thought that finally this sick boy would be made well.

The story as a whole follows the pattern of other miracle stories in the gospels. After the public event, Jesus instructs the disciples privately (v.28-29). Attentive readers will notice that a change has occurred in this scene. Jesus answers the disciples' question directly, without first commenting on their lack of faith.

The story revolves on the issue whether Jesus can heal the little boy or not. The whole attitude of the father is most intriguing. This well meaning and compassionate father takes his possessed son to Jesus. But Jesus is not present; he's vacationing on the mountain. So this man, who had brought his son to so many "would be healers" is disappointed again when - Jesus' disciples fail to heal his son. His faith was badly shaken, so badly that when he came to Jesus all he could do was report the fact that the disciples had failed to heal his son (v.18). Jesus, after stating his frustration, engages the boy’s father - "How long has he been like this?" The weary father responds "since childhood" (v.22). Also in this verse he sincerely, but with a tired, weak faith, says to Jesus "If you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." Jesus clearly understood the moment and he reaches out to the father to help him grow in faith. Jesus responded in verse 23, "If you can? Everything is possible for him who believes." Immediately the father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me to overcome my unbelief!" How many of us can surely relate to this well meaning
father who comes to Jesus honestly and openly - "I have faith, but help me where my faith falls short." I have faith he cried. If there is still some doubt or disbelief in me, take it away and fill me with an unquestioning faith. We see Jesus did just that. William Barclay writes, "It sometimes happens that people get less than they hoped for from some church or from some servant of the church. When that happens they ought to press beyond the church to the Master of the church, beyond the servant of Christ to Christ himself. The church may at times disappoint us, and God's servant on earth may disappoint us. But when we battle our way face to face with Jesus Christ, he never disappoints us.

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