

# "Beyond Repair"

Text: Mark 9:14-29

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours in the sure knowledge that Jesus has destroyed the power that death held over you, and there remains therefore an eternal rest for the people of God. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

It is obviously harder for some than for others, that momentous declaration that something is "beyond repair." Those here who know their pastor well, know that he is solidly in the "next to impossible" camp. Whether a result of nurture or nature, some of us just find it harder to give up on something and discard it. In fact it is often true that those of us who are at times in the junk collection business are perfectly content to give something away to someone else *even when we know full well that the recipient will probably throw it away*. What someone else does is beyond my control. The point is that I didn't "waste."

Obviously this tendency toward "waste not" can get to be a problem. I remember once seeing a vehicle that had caught fire and had burned until there was nothing left to burn. Still, in looking at that charred lump of smoldering scrap iron, I found myself wondering if there still might be a salvageable part...

This whole discussion can be somewhat amusing and inconsequential – until a human soul becomes the object of our evaluation. That's where the declaration of "beyond repair" takes on a whole new significance. Who is ever able to make the pronouncement that an eternal human soul is beyond salvage?

Our text for this morning actually speaks to such things, if we will but look and listen with the eyes and ears of faith. The text on which we base our study this morning is found in Mark's Gospel, the 9<sup>th</sup> Chapter:

<sup>ESV</sup> **Mark 9:14-29** *And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and scribes arguing with them. <sup>15</sup> And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed and ran up to him and greeted him. <sup>16</sup> And he asked them, "What are you arguing about with them?" <sup>17</sup> And someone from the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute. <sup>18</sup> 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." <sup>19</sup> 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." <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> And Jesus asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. <sup>22</sup> 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." <sup>23</sup> And Jesus said to him, "If you can! All things are possible for one who believes." <sup>24</sup> Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!" <sup>25</sup> 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." <sup>26</sup> 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." <sup>27</sup> But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose. <sup>28</sup> And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" <sup>29</sup> And he said to them, "This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer."*

Here ends the precious Word that God has given to us this morning for our instruction and growth. With the reminder that these are *God's* words, and that God himself promises great blessing to those who treasure his words, so also we pray, "**Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth!**" Amen.

The first knife-blade of law that our text draws slowly across our hearts is the revelation that you and I, consciously or not, have made that terrible declaration in connection with human souls; we have, in one way or another, declared them to be *beyond repair*.

Consider the demon-possessed boy in our text. How many in that boy's circle of life had written him off as beyond salvage? Humanly speaking, it would be hard to fault them. Perhaps for a decade or more the boy had been chained inescapably to a dark malevolence. In his body he no doubt bore the marks of his demonic captivity, for we read that his captor had at times "**thrown him into fire.**" In your mind then picture a filthy, scarred, terrible-to-behold creature. How difficult to look upon such a spectacle and to separate captive from captor, human boy from evil occupant.

One, we know, did not give up. One in that crowd that Jesus approached was still able to see the beloved human being in that pile of human wreckage: his father. Love was, of course, the thing that gave such understanding to his vision. When the man looked on his son, he undoubtedly did not see what was; he saw both what had been and what could be again. He did not see the demon, he saw his boy.

Those that didn't look or see with the eyes of love very likely saw something altogether different. They saw human wreckage, something obviously beyond salvage. They saw something to be tossed on the scrapheap and forgotten. The man who saw differently brought the human wreckage to Jesus' disciples. You can imagine his desperation, his impassioned plea: *"Fix him. I beg you. This is my son."*

We cannot know – and it really doesn't matter – if Jesus' disciples agreed to try to help because they saw the boy or because they saw the demon. They had, after all, been given the special power by their Lord to cast out demons, and so they tried. And failed.

After their failure an argument broke out, the unbelieving scribes no doubt taking opportunity by that failure to condemn both the disciples' effort and their power. The scribes and Pharisees were very good, after all, at making that declaration of "beyond repair" over against human beings. Their mantra was not "save" but "discard," not "help" but "avoid." Jesus himself once told his disciples that they must honor the authority of these men, but that they were not to do what they did, for ***"they tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger."*** (Matthew 23:4) Sin, in the Pharisees' eyes, rendered human being "beyond repair." In a way it stands to reason. When your salvation plan depends upon a superficial keeping of the law, they found it easy to discard those who had failed their program by sinning.

Jesus always saw the human being, didn't he? In perfect, sinless love he always saw the soul that must one day stand before the divine bar of Justice on the Day of Judgment. How slow he was to ever declare a human soul to be beyond repair – even reaching out to Judas up until the bitter end, weeping for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and praying for the soldiers as they drove the nails into his hands and feet. Never once did he lose sight of the eternal nature of every human soul. His greatest heartache was always centered on the death of the unbeliever, and his life's work was to provide a means of escape.

Understand that Jesus also saw a reality that others could not see. Obviously he could see the pitiful spectacle of the demon-ravaged boy that lay in front of him. Obviously he could see the torment of the boy's father. Everyone could see such things. What Jesus also saw was the equally appalling state of *all* the godless – even those who on the outside were prosperous, well-dressed, well-fed, and outwards healthy, clean, and happy. Even there he recognized the stench of death and the impending calamity that is eternal damnation. Even there, where all looked shiny and new, he recognized the need for salvage.

The question we must ask ourselves then is *"How do we see those around us?"* Are we fooled, both ways? Are we quick to discard those ravaged by sin and unconcerned about those who seem to be doing well, despite their unbelief? Both kinds need the sort of salvage that only the gospel can afford.

This was the first "beyond repair" lesson in our text – and the one that was arguably the easiest to identify. The second was not so easy. From our text: ***Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!"*** It is certainly not difficult to feel for the dad in this situation. He was obviously in great pain. As with most fathers here this morning, I have little doubt that he would have, if given the chance, gladly traded places with his tormented son. Who here wouldn't do the same for your own child? We would therefore gladly and wholeheartedly commend such a man to Jesus, begging him to help this suffering human being by helping his child.

But what do you understand by his statement: ***"I believe; help my unbelief!"***? Specifically, how was Jesus to help the man's *unbelief*? Was he asking him to *repair* that unbelief? Again, what exactly was he saying to, or asking of, Jesus?

Many of us have used these words in our own prayers. We have probably also understood and used them wrongly. When I myself have spoken these words, for example, I was in effect saying, *"Lord, I believe. Please do something about my unbelief!"* In other words, I was asking God to do something about the doubts and uncertainties that still cling to me – dragging me down and holding me back. *"Please, Lord, so something about that!"* Nothing wrong with that, but that's not what the man asked of Jesus in our text.

The context here tells a different story, lends a different understanding. The man asks Jesus to help his son *if he can*. His confidence has been shaken by the failure of Jesus' disciples. Jesus, however, pounced on

those words: **"If you can! All things are possible for one who believes."** Jesus here attacks the root of the problem, which is the failure of all present to believe with utter certainty that *absolutely nothing is impossible for Jesus Christ, the Son of God*. And there is more to that truth than just casting out a demon. That truth applies also to the salvage of human souls – beginning with yours and mine. Jesus derides the very notion that his power is in any way limited. *"If I can?? Of course I can! The question is not my power but your faith."*

The fact is the man was not asking Jesus to salvage, recondition, or repair his unbelief; he was begging Jesus to help him *despite* his doubts and lack of faith. *"Help me Jesus, even though I have such terrible doubts and weaknesses."* And Jesus does.

Though you and I wish and pray that things could be different, we will very likely always be tormented by doubts. Satan sows them liberally and daily. Faith itself is not provable. It is unverifiable, based always and only on **"the conviction of things not seen."** (Hebrews 11:1) There will never be a point therefore – this side of heaven – where we will be unencumbered by such baggage, try as we will. The supremely comforting message from our Savior in this text is simply this: *I will help you anyway. You are weak, but I am strong. You have doubts, I have none. You cannot rescue yourself, but I can rescue you. In fact I am even now doing just that. That's exactly what I came to earth to accomplish."*

Humanly speaking, all humanity was "beyond repair," "beyond salvage," – but not for the One for whom nothing is impossible. How amazing to truly recognize how broken and worthless we were, in and of ourselves – the condition we brought on ourselves by our own sin – and yet how our Savior loved us anyway. He recognized not something good in us (there was nothing) but he saw us as the pitiful creatures we really were and yet loved us enough to redeem us, restore us, forgive us.

The disciples in our text ask the Savior why they were not able to cast out the demon. His reply: **"This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer."** The disciples had trusted too much in themselves and their own power. Jesus told them instead to access *his* power, through prayer. Here again is purest, sweetest gospel. Here again God's divine arrow points not to us for the solution but to our Savior. The only real power we have is God's. The only hope we have is not in doing it ourselves but through trusting the power and goodness of our Savior, who did all things for us and provided all necessary goodness as our substitute when he offered his perfect life as the full and complete payment for our otherwise un-payable debt of sin. And doubt. And weakness of faith.

Our simple prayer then this morning: *Thank you, Jesus, for not dismissing us as "beyond repair."* Amen.

## Scripture Readings

<sup>ESV</sup> **Isaiah 50:4-10** 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. <sup>5</sup> The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious; I turned not backward. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>ESV</sup> **James 3:1-12** Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> 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! <sup>6</sup> ¶ 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. <sup>7</sup> For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, <sup>8</sup> but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. <sup>9</sup> With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. <sup>10</sup> From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. <sup>11</sup> Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? <sup>12</sup> Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.

# ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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Michael Roehl, Pastor Today's Organist: Eileen McEnroe

**The 16<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost – September 13, 2015**

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

## The Opening Hymn – 5

"Lord Open Thou My Heart to Hear"

## The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. *(Brown Hymnal)*

## The Scripture Lessons: *(Printed on the back page of this bulletin)*

**The First Lesson:** (Isaiah 50:4-10) In our first lesson this morning we focus on human speech. It is God who gives us the gift of speech. As with all his gifts, he expects us to use his gifts to his glory. This remains true not just during the easy times but also in the face of persecution and ridicule, as was the case with the Prophet Isaiah in our first reading. Clearly we recognize Christ as the one speaking these words by prophecy through the pen of the inspired writer.

## Psalm 66 *(Supplement page 37) (Brown Hymnal)*

**The Second Lesson:** (James 3:1-12) There is perhaps no aspect of our lives that teaches the need for forgiveness and a Savior so well as a simple review of the words we have spoken. In our second lesson, the Apostle James identifies for us just how great is the evil we bring into our lives through what we say, and how great the damage we cause.

## The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – page 5. *(Brown Hymnal)*

## The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 392 *(Red Hymnal)*

"Blest Is the Man, Forever Blest"

## The Sermon – Text: Mark 9:14-29 *(Printed on the back page of this bulletin)*

**"Beyond Repair"**

## The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

## The Installation of the 2015-16 Sunday School Teachers

## Offering followed by the Prayers

## The Pre-Communion Hymn – 312 *(Verses 1-2) (Red Hymnal)*

"Lord Jesus Christ, Thou Living Bread"

## The Preparation for Holy Communion *(Brown Hymnal page 17)*

## The Distribution -Hymn 306 *(Red Hymnal)*

## The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving *(Brown Hymnal page 20)*

## The Benediction

## The Closing Hymn - 309 *(Red Hymnal)*

"O Jesus Blessed Lord to Thee"

## Silent Prayer

**Welcome!** - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here! **To our Visitors seeking an altar at which to commune** – Since we desire to follow the words of our Savior, we practice "Close Communion" – a practice that is not new to confessional Lutherans. This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting them to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please first meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word.

## Attendance - Sunday (48) Average (51)

## This Week at St. Paul:

<b>Today</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service w/ Holy Communion
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship and coffee time
	<b>-11:30 a.m.</b>	– Church Council Meeting
<b>Monday</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– CLC Board Meetings in Eau Claire
<b>Next Sunday</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday School (no Bible Class)
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday Worship Service
	<b>-11:00 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship and coffee time

**CLC News** – Pastor Peter Evensen is considering the Missionary call to India. The various CLC Boards are scheduled to meet this week in Eau Claire – first individually and then collectively as the CLC Coordinating Council. Please pray not only for safe travel, but for wisdom and discernment for those who conduct Synodical affairs on our behalf.

**Out of Town** – Pastor Roehl is scheduled to attend the meetings this week in Eau Claire. He can be contacted while away by phone, text, or email.

**Church Council Meeting** – Council Members please remember the meeting scheduled for this morning after the fellowship time.

**Quarterly Voters' Meeting** – A Quarterly Voters' Meeting has been scheduled for Sunday, September 27, at 11:30 am. All voting members of St Paul please consider attendance as something other than "optional." Input from all is always better than input from some.