

Mark 9:14-50
Jenny Douglas

1. Verses 14-29: Just after the Transfiguration scene, Jesus returns to his other disciples and finds them embroiled in a discussion or dispute with the teachers of the law. What follows is a typical Marcan miracle story in that it includes a description of the setting, the miracle itself, and an explanation. One of the central themes discussed is that of faith: in the spectators, in the disciples, and in the boy's father. For each of these participants in the scene, discuss the qualities of faith displayed and how these qualities contribute to the completion of the miracle.

- One commentary suggests that Jesus' statement, "everything is possible for him who believes" also applies to himself. How do we see Jesus' faith at work, and how does he serve as an exemplar?
- question from Hewitt: Compare the father's words in vs. 23 with the leper's in Mark 1.40. Which do you struggle with more, believing that Jesus *can*, or that Jesus *will*? Do his words in vs. 23 imply that nothing is impossible as long as our faith is strong enough? What other factors should we bear in mind?
- Why can't the disciples cast out this demon? When Jesus says that "This kind can come out only by prayer," what is he indicating about the disciples' previous attempts?

2. Verses 30-37: These verses constitute the second of Jesus' passion predictions, the first being in our lesson from last week. The format for these predictions follows a pattern of the prediction, the disciples' misunderstanding, and instruction on discipleship.

- In vs. 31, Jesus says, "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men." Contrast this passion prediction with his words in 8.31.
- The word used for "betrayed" or "delivered" in vs. 31 (*paradōmi*) is also the word used to describe the unhappy fate of many Jewish prophets. It is also the same word used for John the Baptist's arrest and Judas Iscariot's betrayal. For the gospel's first readers, this word would evoke both Jesus' death and their own potential sufferings. Given these associations, how does this word relate to Jesus' teachings in 8.34-9.1 and in 9.35?
- What does the disciples' conversation in vs. 33-34 reveal about their misunderstanding of Jesus' message?
- Williamson notes that the word for "child" in vs. 36 "is the same as that used for the suffering servant of the Lord in the Greek version of Isa. 53.2 ('We heralded him as a child')" (170). When Jesus speaks of kindness toward children here, whom does he mean?

3. Vs. 38-50 are a compilation of sayings that have been condensed into one passage, hence their somewhat disjointed character.

- vs. 38-41: Compare the passage of the exorcist with Numbers 11. 24-30, particularly in Joshua's and Jesus' reactions.

- Do Mark 9.40 and Matthew 12.30 contradict each other? Explain how the two relate.
4. Vs. 42-48: How do the “little ones” in vs. 42 relate to the children in vs. 36-37?
- The word Jesus uses for “hell” in this passage is “Gehenna,” a steep valley outside of Jerusalem that had been a center for idol worship, a place where children were sacrificed to Molech, and a “valley of slaughter,” according to Jeremiah. In Jesus’ day, it was the garbage dump for Jerusalem; the corpses of crucified criminals were thrown there, and a perpetual fire burned to consume the rubbish. Jesus, then, gives a contemporary reference to explain what hell would be like, which provides his listeners a vivid frame of reference. We generally regard Jesus’ words in 43-47 as hyperbole, but they do emphasize the extent to which his disciples should address causes of sin in their lives. What practical actions should we take if faced with the propensity to sin?
5. Vs. 49-50: Saltiness
- Read Leviticus 2.13 to help interpret vs. 49.
 - Methodius also offers an explication: “According to levitical law, every gift, unless it be seasoned with salt, is forbidden to be offered as an oblation to the Lord God. Now the whole spiritual meditation of the Scriptures is given to us as salt which stings in order to benefit. Without this disinfection, it is impossible for a soul, by means of reason, to be brought to the Almighty.” How are we an offering salted with fire? How is Jesus such an offering?
 - Describe the qualities of saltiness that this passage points to.