



FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

NEWPORT-MT. OLIVET

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

February 18, 2018 11:00 a.m.

GATHERING & PRAISE

PRELUDE Holly Carroll & Connie Sublett

GREETING & ANNOUNCEMENTS Doug Martin, *Lay Leader*

* INTROIT *Spirit of the Living God* UMH 393

* CALL TO WORSHIP

One: The journey of discipleship is difficult.

All: Sometimes the burden feels too heavy; life seems all too real.

One: Incessant doubts gnaw at our faith, leading us to wonder if you are still with us.

**All: We come to find strength from the gathered community,
united in our human labors.**

One: We come to lay our questions before the altar of mercy—
daring to enter into the mystery of faith once more.

All: We come to find assurance as we hear salvation's story once again.

One: O Lord, we believe!

All: Help our unbelief!

* HYMN OF PRAISE *To God Be the Glory* UMH 98

* PRAYER OF ILLUMINATION

One: Let us pray:

**All: Loving God, our faces are sometimes lined with worry,
our days full of stress and struggle.**

Yet we come today grateful,

**that in the midst of this crowded and troubled world,
the birds still sing and the flowers still bloom.**

Spring follows winter and children laugh and play.

Hope ever springs eternal.

Grace us now with your presence;
renew our sense of wonder;
keep us open to the gift of your Holy Spirit,
ever-present in our singing, praying, speaking, and living.
In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

PROCLAMATION & RESPONSE

SCRIPTURE LESSON *A Dramatic Presentation* Mark 9:14-29

Narrator: *Cheryl Miller*

Jesus: *Ron Angert*

Father: *Mike Miller*

Disciple: *Pam Humphrey*

RESPONSIVE LITANY Insert

* PASSING THE PEACE

* GATHERING MUSIC *This Is the Day* UMH 657

CHILDREN'S MOMENT

SUNG RESPONSE *Jesus Loves Me* UMH 191 (v. 1)

EMBRACING THE UNCERTAIN

THE DESPERATE FATHER & THE UNCERTAINTY OF FAITH

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

THANKSGIVING

OFFERTORY

* DOXOLOGY *Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow* UMH 95

* PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

* THE LORD'S PRAYER UMH 895

RESPONSIVE LITANY

One: Lord God, you spoke into darkness and chaos and then there was light.
You imagined this earth in its complexity and beauty and called it into being.
You created humanity in your own image and gave us a home to live in.
We believe you can do miracles

All: But even if you don't, you are still God.

One: You walked with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego through the fiery furnace.
You shut the mouths of hungry lions and kept Daniel safe until morning.
You gave Hannah a family when she despaired of ever having a child.
We believe you can do miracles.

All: But even if you don't, you are still God.

One: You changed water into wine, so the wedding party could continue.
You calmed a storm and your disciples with words of quiet authority.
You transformed a boy's picnic into a meal for a multitude with plenty left over.
We believe you can do miracles.

All: But even if you don't, you are still God.

One: You healed a woman from twelve years of bleeding and rejection.
You asked Bartimaeus what he wanted and then restored his sight.
You watched a paralyzed man being lowered through the roof
and helped him to his feet.
We believe you can do miracles.

All: But even if you don't, you are still God

One: You called Lazarus from the tomb and restored him to life.
You walked past the mourners at Jairus' house
and gave his daughter back to him.
You suffered a horrendous crucifixion
in order to defeat sin and death and give us life.
We believe you can do miracles.

All: But even if you don't, you are still God.

One: You told your disciples that they would do greater things than you had done.
We hear and read stories of miracles in our world—
of you healing the sick, setting prisoners free,
releasing drug addicts from their addiction,
providing what is needed when it's needed the most.
We believe you can do miracles.

All: But even if you don't, you are still God.

One: And yet, Lord, we don't see many miracles happening around us.
We have friends who are sick, and we pray, and they are not healed.
Our doubt is mixed with faith.

Our trust is accompanied by questions.

We acknowledge the mystery of faith and prayer,
and the ways in which they are connected.

We acknowledge that you often do things differently
than the way we would do them.

While we long to know you better and to understand your ways,
help us to weather with patience the mysteries of life and faith.

And we believe you can do miracles.

All: But even if you don't, you are still God.

One: Lord we believe.

All: Help our unbelief.

Thoughts about Unbelief...

The most genuine expression of prayer is found in the father's heartfelt cry for compassion. "I believe! Help me in my unbelief." In prayer we journey toward the hidden places of being where, if we are honest with ourselves, we encounter our brokenness and lack of freedom. There, in the ambiguous depths of the human heart, we encounter unbelief.

What shape does this unbelief take? For Mark, unbelief is not incorrect doctrine or an imperfect attitude. For Mark, unbelief is the despair that is dictated to us by the powers and principalities of this world. Unbelief is a life script that is fixed and says to us that nothing can really change. If we accept this life script and the despair that comes with it, the revolutionary vision and practice of the gospel are rendered impotent.

Prayer for Mark is that personal and communal struggle against the temptation to despair. It is wrestling with the demons within us that tempt us to abandon the way of Jesus. Prayer is naming and casting out the demons that silence us and make us docile before the status quo of self and society.

Without prayer and a spiritual foundation, prophetic anger becomes disconnected from love, ideals become empty routines, social analysis becomes cynicism, values lose their passion. The despair and unbelief that tempt us to hopelessness will not be disarmed until we name and face them together.

Say to This Mountain: Mark's Story of Discipleship,
Ched Myers, et al., Orbis: New York, 1996, pg. 115.