

Clincarthill Parish Church: Reflections for Lent #4 – week beginning Sunday 3rd March 2024

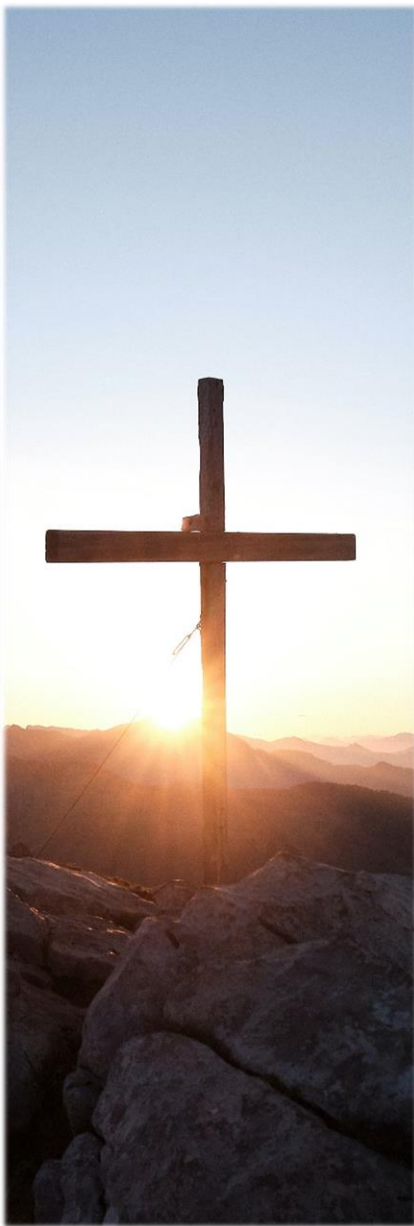


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Before you begin: Take a few slow deep breaths to centre yourself, inviting the Holy Spirit to be present with you as you think and pray.

Read the passage: Mark 9 (NIVUK)

¹⁴When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. ¹⁵As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him. ¹⁶‘What are you arguing with them about?’ he asked. ¹⁷A man in the crowd answered, ‘Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. ¹⁸Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not.’

¹⁹‘You unbelieving generation,’ Jesus replied, ‘how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.’ ²⁰So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth.

²¹Jesus asked the boy’s father, ‘How long has he been like this?’ ‘From childhood,’ he answered. ²²‘It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.’

²³‘‘If you can’’?’ said Jesus. ‘Everything is possible for one who believes.’ ²⁴Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, ‘I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!’

²⁵When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the impure spirit. ‘You deaf and mute spirit,’ he said, ‘I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.’ ²⁶The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, ‘He’s dead.’ ²⁷But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.

Reflection: How can someone believe, yet need help overcoming their unbelief? Surely, that is a contradiction? Not really.

We “believe” in two ways: know it in our heads (factually true) and know it “in our hearts” (experientially true). We may say, “we believe in God” as something we know to be true, because it is revealed in Scripture, for example. We believe this in our heads.

But: do we believe this “in our hearts”? Does this belief shape our living, and our responses to situations? This is harder, especially when circumstances would challenge us to think otherwise. In these moments, we may be tempted to turn against what we believe in our heads, concluding that God either does not exist, or He does not care.

In contrast, the man in Mark 9 shows us wisdom. Instead of rejected what he knows to be true, he confesses it afresh (I DO believe!); while at the same time throwing Himself upon Jesus’ grace, by acknowledging that he is also struggling to believe (HELP ME overcome).

Some questions to consider:

1. What do I know to be true about God? What does Scripture tell me about Him? Can I say about these things, “I do believe”?
2. What most challenges my belief? Can I invite Jesus into these things, asking that He “help me overcome my unbelief”?

Prayer: LORD God, in Your mercy, show me where I am struggling to believe; then grant me the courage to pray, “I do believe, help me overcome my unbelief!”. All for my good, and Your glory. Amen.