



Luke 9:37–43a

37 The next day, when they came down from the mountain, a large crowd met him. 38 A man in the crowd called out, ‘Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child. 39 A spirit seizes him and he suddenly screams; it throws him into convulsions so that he foams at the mouth. It scarcely ever leaves him and is destroying him. 40 I begged your disciples to drive it out, but they could not.’ 41 ‘You un-

believing and perverse generation,' Jesus replied, 'how long shall I stay with you and put up with you? Bring your son here.' 42 Even while the boy was coming, the demon threw him to the ground in a convulsion. But Jesus rebuked the impure spirit, healed the boy and gave him back to his father. 43 And they were all amazed at the greatness of God.

Reflection

I have often heard it said in preaching circles that the true function of a preacher is to disturb the comfortable and comfort the disturbed. We see Jesus doing both in today's passage from Luke 9:37–43a which I'll read for us now,

37 The next day, when they came down from the mountain, a large crowd met him. 38 A man in the crowd called out, 'Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child. 39 A spirit seizes him and he suddenly screams; it throws him into convulsions so that he foams at the mouth. It scarcely ever leaves him and is destroying him. 40 I begged your disciples to drive it out, but they could not.' 41 'You unbelieving and perverse generation,' Jesus replied, 'how long shall I stay with you and put up with you? Bring your son here.' 42 Even while the boy was coming, the demon threw him to the ground in a convulsion. But Jesus rebuked the impure spirit, healed the boy and gave him back

to his father. 43 And they were all amazed at the greatness of God.

In today's passage Jesus disturbs the comfortable and comforts the disturbed. Let's have a look at both of these in reverse order. So firstly, we see Jesus comforting the disturbed.

Peter, James and John have just witnessed Jesus transfigured on a mountaintop with guest appearance from Moses and Elijah and God's glorious presence himself descending upon them in the form of a cloud. Thirty years later Peter would remember the experience just like yesterday,

16 For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Je-

sus Christ in power, but we were eye-witnesses of his majesty. 17 He received honour and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.' 18 We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.

As Peter, James and John descend the sacred mountain alongside Jesus no doubt their conversation is filled with theology, as they excitedly discussed the heady theological implications of what they have just witnessed. But what they encounter at ground level brings the reality of the fallen world that surrounds us crashes home.

They're confronted by a desperate scene. Combining what we learn from Matthew, Mark and Luke's Gospels the nine disciples who had not accompanied them on the mountain had attempted an exorcism but had failed. A heated argument is going on between them and the teachers of the law. Amidst the raised voices and harsh words comes this impassioned plea directed towards Jesus,

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Piecing it together from all three accounts we find that when the demon seizes the boy the child screams. The spirit throws him to the ground in convulsions so that he foams at the mouth. He grinds his teeth and becomes stiff as a board. Over and over the demon has cast this little child into fire or into water; his little body is covered in scars. Even worse the demon has made him deaf and dumb. He can see what is going on around him, feel what is going on inside him, but he cannot hear or speak with anyone about it. We can only imagine the anguish in his father's voice as he describes his son's condition to Jesus, his little boy robbed of his childhood and fearful for his life,

It scarcely ever leaves him and is destroying him.

Perhaps a modern equivalent might be the epidemic of self-harm amongst teenage girls; mothers and fathers trying to understand and care for the daughter they love and cherish so much who won't stop cutting herself.

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Jesus came to comfort the disturbed. Proving the terrible truth of his father's words the maimed and scarred little boy is suddenly thrown to the ground by the demon.

Grinding his teeth, frothing at the mouth, his back stiff as a board he convulses in the dirt mutely staring with terror filled eyes. Jesus, the author of life, is filled with unspeakable compassion at what sin has done to this little boy that he created. In a heartbeat the one who spoke creation into being, the one who right now is holding all things into being by his powerful word, verse 42,

rebuked the impure spirit, healed the boy and gave him back to his father.

Jesus came to comfort the disturbed. Instantly, the boys mind, hearing, speech, body, boyhood and hope are restored. Not even to mention the effect this would have on his faith and his Father's faith and

the crowd's faith in Jesus. Verse 43,

43 And they were all amazed at the greatness of God.

But secondly, Jesus also came to disturb the comfortable. His compassion for the poor little boy gives rise to a righteous anger. Jesus steps foot off the mount of transfiguration and is engulfed in a bitter argument between the supposed leaders' of God's people – the teachers of the law – and his impotent disciples whose faith in him has wavered to the point that they are no longer able to perform the ministry he entrusted them with. Jesus came to disturb the comfortable.

41 'You unbelieving and perverse generation,' Jesus replied, 'how

long shall I stay with you and put up with you?

But these words are directed more broadly than simply to the teachers of the law and Jesus' disciples. They're addressed to their entire 'unbelieving and perverse generation' and to every similar generation since. Filled with compassion and anger at the ravages of sin on God's good creation, this precious little child of God covered in scars and writhing in mute agony in the dirt, Jesus cries out,

'how long shall I stay with you and put up with you?'

God's patience has limits, his forbearance can last only so long, the year of his favour, the season of grace that Jesus proclaims

must come to a close. At which point he will return to judge the living and the dead. Because his righteous soul is tormented by sin's effects on our world and his hand of judgment is only stayed by his mercy and desire that all would turn and repent before it is too late.

Think & Pray

Jesus came to disturb the comfortable and comfort the disturbed. Perhaps you are in need of comfort this morning. Perhaps your daughter is cutting herself. Perhaps you fear for the well-being of your only child. God knows exactly how you are feeling. His one and only son suffered unspeakable pain to bring an end once-and-for-all to the pain that is afflicting you and your child. Pray to our heavenly Fa-

ther this morning. Take to him whatever it is that is causing you pain. Ask the ‘the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles’ (2 Cor 1:3–4) to send his Holy Spirit, the Comforter, to make real to you the comfort of Jesus Christ who came to comfort the disturbed.

But Jesus also came to disturb the comfortable. Are you comfortable? Do you argue over the finer points of theology like the teachers of the law and Jesus’ disciples, distant and largely oblivious to the pain and suffering of those around us? Tithing your mint and dill but neglecting justice, mercy and faithfulness?

Consider this morning if you mirror Jesus’ compassion and urgency for the margin-

alized, the poor, the orphan, the widow and the lost in your daily walk with God? If not pray bravely this morning that Jesus would disturb your comfort so that you too would be able to bring comfort to the disturbed.