

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

A reading from Mark, Nine, Verses 21 through 24.

"Jesus asked the boy's father, 'How long has your son been like this? How long has your son been suffering with this condition?' The father answered, 'From childhood, but if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.' Jesus responded, 'If you can. Everything is possible for one who believes.' Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, 'I believe, Jesus, but help my unbelief.'"

Beloved, I do not mean to burst your bubble this morning, but it is okay to not be okay. It is okay to trust in God, but also question God. It is okay to have faith in God, but struggle with the existential realities of life. Beloved, it is okay to ask, "God, where are You?" It is okay to say, "God, I trust You as a healer, but it seems like COVID-19 and sickness are ever so pervasive." It is okay to say, "God, I know You are a savior. I know You are a redeemer. I know You are a deliverer, but it appears that everything around me is crumbling."

Have you ever been there? Or are you there now? If so, it is okay to not be okay. Faith is not ignoring reality. Faith is not ignoring the uncertainty of life. Faith is not ignoring the plight of others. Faith is not having a theology that ignores pain and suffering. Faith is not having a theology that says that everything is going to be all right, get over it. But faith is one's ability to say, "God, I honor You. I believe in You. I trust You, but, God, right now I am not okay. My community is not okay. Our nation is not okay. Our world is not okay. I believe, but help my unbelief."

This brings me to the man in the text this morning. Beloved, this man most likely was a great usher in the Temple. He was a faithful member of Bible study readings of the Torah. He came to Temple faithfully on Sabbath morning. He was religious and devout, but his son, who he loved so dearly, had been sick and possessed with the spirit ever since he was a child. It appeared that the God that this man believed or served was antithetical to his reality. This man was not okay. He struggled. He could not believe that an all-loving God could allow his son to suffer like this.

Beloved, I don't know what you may be going through today, but contrary to popular belief, just because you are a Christian that doesn't mean that you should ignore your tears. This man did not ignore his tears. He did not ignore his pain. He did not overlook his feelings. He engaged them. And when Jesus questioned his faith, the man said, "Jesus, I do believe, but help my unbelief." In other words, this man said, "Yes, I am a religious person. Yes, I do come to morning prayers. Yes, I am faithful at the Memorial Church, but sometimes I'm not okay."

Some may say that this is a contradiction or a paradox, rather I posit that this embodies and exemplifies the heart of a number of us. We know that God is Jehovah-Jireh, Jehovah-Rapha, Jehovah-Nissi, Jehovah Tsidkenu, Jehovah-Shammah, we believe in the power of God, but sometimes life hits and we are not okay. In a period of such uncertainty, where lives are yet being taken by COVID-19, where refugees are still at our borders longing for safety and hope, we are not okay. When women and children are yet suffering in Afghanistan, we are not okay. When global warming is at an all time high, we are not okay. When cancer, sickness, depression, anxiety, seemingly comes to rob our lives, it is okay to not be okay.

But as Jesus offers a presence to this man in his moment of uncertainty, God invites you to not run away from your pain, God invites us to not rush from our emotions, but to sit in it, knowing that God is present. Please stand as you are able and let us pray.

Holy and most merciful God, remind us that it is okay to not be okay. It is okay to believe and to struggle with our unbelief. But God help us to remember, as You were present with this man and his son, that You are a present help in the time of trouble. Together let us recite the prayer that Jesus taught us by saying, "Our father who art in heaven, hallowed by Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will

be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom, the power, the glory, forever and ever, Amen."

Let us sing the hymn, I Love Thy Kingdom Lord, number 271 found in your Crimson Harvard Hymnal.

Congregation:

(Singing)

The Calvin Jones:

As we got forth unto this day, we thank you Lord for all the joy You bring, and for our wonderful times together. May we walk with You as each new day begins. This day forever, Amen.