

Paradoxes

Mark 9:14-29

The Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost, September 13, 2015

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

A paradox is what happens when opposite things are true simultaneously.

Some paradoxes happen in nature. Light is a paradox. Sometimes when light is observed it behaves as a particle like BBs coming out of a gun. Sometimes when light is observed it behaves like a wave like the waves on your swimming pool. Light behaves as a particle and as a wave all of the time. In spite of the fact that light does this it seems impossible for light to do that. Do the waves on your swimming pool ever behave like BBs coming out of your gun? Do the BBs in your gun ever come out of your gun doing a wave? If they did, they would not be good BBs. So it is impossible for something to exist as both a wave and a particle and yet light exists as both a wave and a particle simultaneously. We can see light behave as a wave when we see the different colors of light knowing that each color has its own wavelength. We can measure light in particles called photons. In God's nature He has created certain things to exist as paradoxes. Light is one of them.

It should be no surprise then that there are other things in creation that exist in paradoxes and it should be no surprise that the Creator Himself exists in a paradox. God is three Persons in one God. Each person is fully God. Each person is distinct from all of the others. Yet there are not three gods, but one God. Each person is not a third of God, but is God in His entirety. Each person is distinct and yet there are not three gods, but one God. The trinity is a paradox. God cannot possibly be three and yet one simultaneously and yet when we encounter Him in the Scriptures that is exactly what He is. Only with God does one plus one plus one equal one. And yet when you take some time to think about it the fact that God exists in a way beyond our understanding is something that we should come to expect. If God were someone whom we could easily explain, then He would not be much of a god.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is a paradox. He is simultaneously God and man in one person. No one can be God and man in one person and yet Jesus Christ is. God is immortal. He cannot be killed. Man is mortal. He is destined to die. How can one person be both mortal and immortal at the same time? It is a mystery and yet our Lord Jesus Christ is alive before He is born and alive after He died. His birth and death are real events. He did not fake them and yet He remains immortal. He is a paradox.

Furthermore the Scriptures state that Jesus knows everything. The Scriptures also state that our Lord grew in stature and in wisdom and in favor with God and man. The Scriptures say this about our Lord when He was a boy. Now how can someone who knows everything genuinely learn something? How can He who knows all including the thoughts of those around Him say, "No one knows the day or the hour, not the angels in heaven, not even the Son. Only the Father knows"? He knows and yet He does not know. He is all powerful and yet He gets hungry. He commands the wind and the sea and yet He grows weary and thirsty. He can feed five thousand people with fives loaves and two fish and yet at the end of fasting is Himself hungry and refuses to change stones into bread. How can He be both all powerful and weak and dependent? I don't know, but He was. Our Lord is a paradox during His earthly ministry.

Furthermore one of our primary encounters with our Lord is done in a paradox. The Sacrament of the Altar is a paradox. The Scriptures call it bread. They also call it the body of the Lord. How can something be both bread and the body of the Lord simultaneously? I don't know, but that is what the Scriptures say. Even after the bread is blessed the Scriptures still call it bread. Christians through the ages have tried to resolve this paradox by either saying it is only bread and not the body of the Lord or it is

only the body of the Lord and it is no longer bread. They have said the same thing about the wine. It is either wine and not the blood of the Lord. Or it is the blood of the Lord and not wine. But the Scriptures do not talk like this. They insist that it is both even though we all know that it cannot be both at the same time. Therefore the Sacrament of the Altar is a supernatural event wherein you eat and drink what is impossible to eat and drink. You do it because the Lord says for you to do it and when the Lord says for you to do it you do it like Peter walking on the water. It is a paradox where two things which cannot possibly be true simultaneously are true simultaneously.

You are a paradox.

That should not be too surprising. After all if God has so many other paradoxes in His creation, it should be no surprise at all that you are a paradox as well. You are a paradox precisely because you believe in Jesus.

You confess that you believe in Jesus. That means that you believe that Jesus will take care of you no matter what. Jesus will see you through all of your troubles. Jesus will forgive all of your sins and has already forgiven them when He died upon the cross. You believe that Jesus will raise you from the dead and give you life everlasting. You genuinely believe these things. When you confess faith in Jesus Christ, you are not lying.

And yet, you fear death. In spite of the fact that you believe that Jesus has promised you life everlasting you fear death. It is a great unknown. You also feel guilty about your sins. You feel guilty about your sins in spite of the fact that Jesus has forgiven all of them. That is why you need to keep coming here to the Divine Service because in spite of the fact that you believe in Jesus and therefore have the forgiveness of all of your sins, your sins still plague your conscience. They produce guilt in your conscience. They defile your conscience. They shame you. So in spite of the fact that you believe that your sins are forgiven, you don't believe that your sins are forgiven. The same thing is true with whether or not Jesus is going to care for you. He says that He will be with you always even to the completion of the age. If He is going to be with you always and if He is almighty and if He has forgiven you of all of your sins, then you should never be afraid of anything ever. And yet all of you are afraid of all kinds of things. The things you fear make you anxious. The things that you fear make you angry. You would never be angry out of fear if you believed in Jesus. So while you believe in Jesus, you don't believe in Jesus either. While you pray you also do not pray. You are a paradox. Two things that cannot possibly be true about you simultaneously are true.

And so the father of the boy who was possessed by a demon stood in front of His Lord and said, "I believe. Help my unbelief." Of course the boy's father believed. He took the time and trouble to seek out the disciples of Jesus. He had heard that our Lord had given them authority to cast out unclean spirits. Jesus was unavailable undergoing His transfiguration and so the man sought out the disciples of Jesus. He asked them to cast the demon out and they could not. He stayed and waited for Jesus to return so that he could ask Jesus to cast it out. If he did not believe in Jesus, he would not have bothered. He would have brought his son to a therapist or a counselor to undergo psychological evaluation, but he would not have brought him to the disciples of the One who casts demons out. It is therefore obvious that the man has faith. And yet in spite of his faith when he finally gets his audience with the Lord and explains his son's condition to the Lord he says, "If you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." And there is his unbelief and the Lord rebukes him immediately, "If you can? All things are possible for those who believe." The father who has just committed an act of unbelief shows his faith by saying, "Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief!" He shows that he has faith by confessing his lack of faith. Only a person who believes in Jesus will turn to Jesus for forgiveness for his lack of faith. The father of the son

who was possessed by a demon is both a believer and an unbeliever simultaneously. The Lord rebukes him for his unbelief and he confesses his unbelief, but only a believer in Jesus would confess the sin of unbelief. Unbelievers don't bother to confess any of their sins only believers do and they even confess the sin of their unbelief. The believers in Jesus are paradoxes. They believe in Jesus and don't believe in Jesus simultaneously. But so it is with those who follow Jesus from Nazareth.

Perhaps an illustration will help. Do you pray? Sometimes you will answer that question yes and sometimes you will answer that question no. If you feel confident about your prayer life you may answer yes. You do pray. But if you do not feel confident about your prayer life you may say no. You may have noticed when the Lord has been answering your prayers and you rejoice in your prayer life. You may have noticed how many times you fail to pray and you may confess that you lack faith in your prayer life or you would pray more. Both are true. Both are true simultaneously. That is just the way that it is with a believer in Jesus. You both believe and don't believe at the same time.

Unbelievers are not that way. They simply do not believe. They simply do not pray at all. Unbelievers face their unclean spirits and pretend like they do not exist. Unbelievers face the unclean spirits and they do not pray. And because they do not pray they are not able to cast the unclean spirits out because unclean spirits can only come out with prayer. Unbelievers are a wicked and adulterous generation who have the answers to all of their problems right in front of them in Jesus Christ, but they cannot be bothered. They do not trouble themselves to ask Jesus to cast their demons out and so the demons remain and hold power over them. Unbelievers are not paradoxes. They lead lives that make perfect sense. Only believers lead lives of paradox where two things are true simultaneously.

Just like light it depends on how you look at a believer in Jesus. Sometimes light is a particle and sometimes it is a wave. Sometimes you see a believer's faith and sometimes you see their lack of faith. They are paradoxes and always will be until Jesus resolves their paradox.

You could resolve your paradox by simply giving up on Jesus altogether. Or you will live with the paradox of believing and not believing until Jesus resolves the paradox. Jesus will resolve your paradox when He raises you from the dead. When Jesus raises you from the dead and you see Him you will never doubt or question Him again. And then all will be well. The paradox of this life will be over and all of your unclean spirits will be cast out.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.