

Children sermon 7-5-09

Show the children a clock radio and ask them if it can play music and show the time if it's unplugged. No! Plug it into an outlet. Then show the children the time display and turn on the radio. Emphasize that the radio cannot work all by itself but needs a source of power. Point out that we sometimes think we can work all by ourselves, but the truth is that we need a source of power also. Tell them that the apostle Paul discovered that he needed to plug himself into Jesus, and when he did, Jesus said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). Explain that Jesus gave Paul grace, which is God's free gift of love, acceptance, forgiveness and power. Ask the children if they would like this free gift as well. Point out that they can plug into Jesus by trusting him. Then they will be filled with "the power of Christ," which will make them strong enough to handle all kinds of troubles (vv. 9-10). Hold up the clock radio power cord, and remind children that they cannot work all by themselves. They need to plug into Jesus.

Strength in Weakness 6 Pentecost B

What good can come from weakness? Children are taught to be strong so they will not let other children run over them. I was taught this by my mother when a bunch of bullies were waiting to fight me outside our New York City apartment at the age of five. My mom was the referee and my cheerleader. The bullies were allowed to fight me one at a time. Afterward, my mom served as peacemaker and she made us all shake hands.

No one likes to feel weak. I am no different. Being dependent is not part of my DNA. I have struggled with my pride, just like anyone else. Trust me; it took a long time to ask anyone for help with being a more complete shepherd of the sheep. It took time for me to see that leading a community of volunteer Christians must involve others including our diocese. Christians need other Christians for strength, encouragement and ideas. One can not practice this faith as a soloist but as an orchestra.

I sense from Paul's letter to the church of Corinth that he too struggled with his ego and pride. To further complicate matters Paul had a problem that few of us have. Paul was a thoroughbred man of faith and his accomplishments and origin brought out his pedigree. Paul felt special! He felt so good about himself after a series of heavenly experiences that he wrote that he could not talk about them. There is nothing worse than a braggart that thinks he has a secret. Paul was not sure if he was in his right mind when he saw what he saw. God saw to it that Paul would not stumble and brag about how special he was. God has a remedy for people who are too proud. Sometimes the remedy is someone in our own family.

My wife Robyn tells me a story that cured her of some of her pride when she was 16. Robyn had entered the Junior Miss Beauty Pageant. After weeks of photo shoots, evening gown, interviews and talent trials, Robyn was voted by the judges as "Miss Photogenic". During the weeks preceding the actual judging, Robyn's mom, Lola, had begun to notice that her daughter was quite full of herself. She was all smiles and so proud the day of the Beauty Pageant. Lola's response took the air out of her sails. She showed Robyn that just because she was "special", didn't mean she could escape the hardships of real life. Lola, made her daughter scrub the kitchen floor until she had worked off some of that pride.

God's remedy for pride can take the form of a trial. For Paul, that trial was the "thorn in the flesh." He called this thorn a "messenger of Satan" sent to keep Paul from becoming too proud and preoccupied with himself. After all, Paul was special. Few people had seen what Paul saw. Paul it seems was tired of "scrubbing the floors" and asked for a reprieve from his "thorn in the flesh."

Three times he made his appeal to the Lord to release him from this nagging handicap. From the answer Paul received I suspect that he had this thorn for the rest

of his natural life. “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.” God’s answer to Paul was sustaining. That kind of power that makes perfect in weakness would see Paul through his entire career as an apostle and evangelist.

What about you – does God say to you, “My grace is sufficient for you?” Healing may not come in the form we choose for ourselves. But God’s grace is sufficient. Power is made perfect in weakness. When we are weak we will discover new strength that we never knew we had, if we but turn to God. New strength may be getting a stronger character. New strength may mean being able to empathize with others. Or it may mean to be more compassionate and thoughtful in other ways. Best of all, our new strength might be an intimate experience that God *is truly with us* in our times of need. How might God’s grace sustain you now in your present state of mind?

Is this the secret that Paul learned in his vision? Is the true nature of power revealed as weakness? Jesus and others taught this truth. Our Savior taught the world this truth from the cross. Jesus humbled himself and took on the form of a servant that power might be shown in weakness. It is a pity that his hometown would not accept the deeds of power that came from the hands of a humble carpenter. The deeds Jesus had done elsewhere he could not do among his own people. His authority to do wonders went to others. The proverb is true: “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”

Let us search our own hearts to see how we may be hindering the power of God in our lives. Is power made perfect in your weaknesses, or are you too busy trying to “be powerful and important” by yourself? Let us ask God to reveal what His desire is for our lives. Let us be willing to accept the sustaining grace that God has made all sufficient for our need. Let us go forth rejoicing in the power of the Spirit! And we will find strength in our time of need. Amen.