

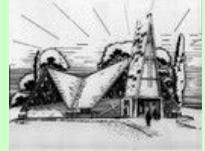


Free Evangelical
Lutheran Synod
in South Africa

Sermon- Sunday Sexagesimae (RH4) 2018

Jesus says:

My power is fulfilled in weakness!



St. John's Lutheran Parish
Shelly Beach

• The Word of God for this Sermon is written in 2Cor 12, 1-10:

- ^{ESV} 1 I must go on boasting. Though there is nothing to be gained by it, I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord.
- 2 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven- whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows.
- 3 And I know that this man was caught up into paradise- whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows-
- 4 and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter.
- 5 On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses.
- 6 Though if I should wish to boast, I would not be a fool, for I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me.
- 7 So to keep me from being too elated by the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from being too elated.
- 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me.
- 9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.
- 10 For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

• ***Let us pray:*** *Come Holy Spirit, open our ears, let Your Word be a light in our hearts and reveal Christ, whose power is fulfilled in weakness. Enlighten us so that we grasp what this means for us and so that we can help others when their world seems to fall apart. Amen.*

• **Dear Beloved of the Lord!**

• It is only in his second letter to the Corinthians, that Paul even mentions the very experiences they, the Corinthians, were craving for: Visions and visible revelations of the Lord. Why didn't Paul preach about those experiences to the Corinthians?

They were really awesome heavenly experiences. How could he not even mention them? Only now, when they were accusing him of not being a true apostle, does he even mention them. And now, when he actually mentions them, he calls them 'boasting'. A boasting with nothing to be gained by it!

• In other words, Paul denies that 'witnessing' about his own personal experiences in actually seeing the Lord in a real vision has any gain for the congregation! It's all boasting. To be sure, Paul is only prepared to boast about him being in Christ, the new creation, and what he experienced as such. But, concerning himself he would much rather boast about his *weaknesses*.

• To keep him grounded so to speak, to keep him humble, God allowed satan to harass him. A thorn was given in his flesh. And three times the apostle prayed to the LORD and that is when Jesus said to him: "*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is fulfilled in weakness!*" God's power is anti-power. It is human common sense that one starts off weak, grows stronger and stronger and in the end success is achieved by the most strength! God's spiritual power works exactly opposite! It begins seemingly strong but it is fulfilled in weakness. It comes to completion, to perfection in weakness. Success in God's spiritual ways is identified with weakness not with strength.

• That is, its true, the power that saves us is the Word of the Cross! Jesus' death on the cross is the fulfilment of God's way of salvation. It comes to conclusion in utter weakness! That is why in the Lord's Supper we also proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. We remind God about His Son's death! The death is the fulfilment, not the resurrection! The resurrection results from His death. It follows from the fulfilment. Can we even say this: Where God is at His weakest, all salvation is completed!

• This is absolutely fascinating, that our God, who made heaven and earth, who created the whole universe, the absolutely formidably fine-tuned cosmos, is prepared to become utterly weak on our behalf! He created the absolutely indescribable galaxies, millions and millions of them, each as you start to investigate them getting more complex and complex so that even the smallest cell is irreducibly complex- He is keeping all of this together. And yet, that is only the beginning of His power. His greatest power, the power that fulfils all things, came to its fullness in his utter weakness on the cross, namely GRACE. Grace is everything!

• Not visions and elated feelings- God used them to shake unbelievers like Paul. But, that was not fulfilment. That was the beginning of Paul's road, not the fulfilment. Fulfilment is not about elated feelings in heaven. That is not what heaven is about. To be sure, we will experience good feelings. No doubt, but that is not what God is about! God is about Grace!

• Remember, the one thing satan cunningly deceived Eve to drop, to not consider any-more was God's Grace! The tree of coming- to- know- good- and- evil all of a sudden was to be desired! That seemed to be fulfilment! Right there, we know from the 9th and 10th Commandments that the wrong desire already breaks not only the 9th and 10th Commandments but also the First Commandment, "*you shall have no other gods*". Right there, even before the act of eating the forbidden fruit, was practised, they were spiritually dead. They had lost their faith in God as loving Father!

• Once bitten by evil, the poison spreads: After taking a bite of evil, after tasting rebellion, revolution, disobedience, they were hooked, for more. But with consequences: THEY ran away from the LORD in the garden!

• There you see the fear in their hearts driving out the love that had been in their hearts towards the LORD.

• The unthinkable happened: THEY ran away from Grace! You see, Grace was not enough, was not sufficient, any more- that is the influence of satan. He wetted their appetite for *more*.

• They wanted to *be* more, than to be recipients of Grace! But, what was the result of striving for more than Grace? Death. Whoever wants more than the loving Father's Grace inevitably desires spiritual death.

• In the garden Adam and Eve had to trust God, they had to believe Him that eating of that tree will bring them death! They couldn't see death. They only knew LIFE. They didn't know what death was. They had never tasted it. They believed without seeing. But, then came satan and deceived them to take a bite of death and see for themselves. And they got stung. Then they knew what it tasted like, they experienced it, they saw it, and gone was faith. Gone was Grace, eternal Life.

• So, we see receiving the Grace of God, receiving the forgiveness of sins is the ultimate we can receive! Life and salvation follow from it. Reconciliation with God is

everything! Grace is sufficient.

• However, Grace is fulfilled in weakness! It is only weakness that receives this Grace of God. God's Grace comes to its fulfilment in us being utterly weak!

• And this, dear congregation is the best we could have wished for. Why? As we get older and *become* weaker, as we grow into Christ's Word we *realise* more and more our own weakness. And this we need to see in the light of the word for today. As our actual weakness grows, and the realisation of it, the Grace of God does not diminish and fade away. The opposite is true. The Grace of God is becoming fuller and fuller, until we finally die! Then it is fulfilled! ***Our death in Christ is the highest victory of God's Grace.*** Someone who dies in Christ most certainly will live forever. It is impossible to touch that person's eternal life!

• That is the wisdom of God which couldn't be more counter-cultural than it is. The Word of God leads us to discover the true weakness of the self and at the same time promises God's Grace.

• This is the amazing way of God to save us, to create true trust in His Grace, which we cannot feel or see- we can hear it, but we cannot see eternal Life. As our weakness grows we realise more and more the formidable greatness and strength of God's Grace! That is true wisdom of God.

• How could we desire more than Grace! How silly is that! How foolish and evil it is! Thanks be to God, for giving us His Word, which reveals to us His wisdom which in the end is stronger and far more gracious than anything humankind could ever come up with. This is what we need. And Grace is available, without cost on our side, in God's facilitated means of Grace! To God, the fountain of Grace, be the glory, forever and ever! **Amen.**

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen. (ESV Eph 3,20-21)