

Meditation "Strength and Weakness"

Sunday, July 8, 2018

Scripture II Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10, Mark 6:1-13

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Our first scripture reading is II Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10. The Old Testament lectionary continues to trace ancient Israel's transition from tribal confederation to monarchy. Following the death of King Saul, David is anointed shepherd king of Israel. David has grown into a strong and savvy political leader. And in spite of his weaknesses, he fulfills the covenantal union between God and Israel. Hear now the Holy Word of God.

Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron, and said, "Look, we are your bone and flesh. ² For some time, while Saul was king over us, it was you who led out Israel and brought it in. The LORD said to you: It is you who shall be shepherd of my people Israel, you who shall be ruler over Israel." ³ So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron; and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the LORD, and they anointed David king over Israel. ⁴ David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years. ⁵ At Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months; and at Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah thirty-three years.

⁹ David occupied the stronghold, and named it the city of David. David built the city all around from the Millo inward. ¹⁰ And David became greater and greater, for the LORD, the God of hosts, was with him. Amen.

Our second scripture reading is Mark 6:1-13. The gospel lectionary combines the story of Jesus' rejection in his hometown of Nazareth with the ordaining and sending of the twelve for a mission that will also meet rejection. The Apostle Paul will later affirm in II Corinthians 12:10 that he is *content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions and calamities for the sake of Christ*; for whenever he is weak, then he is strong. Hear now God's Holy word.

He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. ² On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, "Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! ³ Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary^[a] and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense^[b] at him. ⁴ Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." ⁵ And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. ⁶ And he was amazed at their unbelief. Then he went about among the villages teaching. ⁷ He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. ⁸ He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; ⁹ but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. ¹⁰ He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. ¹¹ If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." ¹² So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. ¹³ They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them. Amen.

The title of the meditation: Strength and Weakness

Text: "Therefore I am content with weaknesses... for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong. II Corinthians 12:10

Let us pray: Holy and loving God, you are our strength when we are weak. You are the treasure that we seek. You are our all in all. Make us mindful of your loving and empowering presence in this time and place. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts be acceptable in your sight.

This year's Vacation Bible School theme was "Hero Central." The curriculum was theologically sound, well-written, and a venue to teach the characteristics of a hero from God's perspective. Our first story was Samuel's surprising anointing of David as a young boy who would become the shepherd king of Israel. We learned that God's criteria for choosing a leader are different from the world's. God chose David because of his heart rather than his physical size or strength. As the story of David's kingship unfolds we celebrate the strength of his heart and we also witness how David's strength becomes his weakness.

This is true for all of us, something I often remind myself and those with whom I live and work. There is a fine line between one's strength and one's weakness. For instance, the strength of perfectionism can become the weakness of obsession and compulsion. The strength of confidence can become the weakness of arrogance. The strength of compassion can become the weakness of over-indulgence. The strength of humility can become the weakness of timidity. The strength of beauty can become the weakness of vanity.

As the Bible story leader I had the distinct privilege of assuming the role of Mrs. Incredible, also known as Elastigirl. Pixar recently released a sequel to the 2004 film "The Incredibles," which is a story about a family of super heroes with a history of working together for good in the struggle against evil. As part of an undercover protection program they live in anonymity and are challenged to restrain their superpowers, which ironically reflect their weaknesses. For instance, Mr. Incredible, a little bit past his prime, is incredibly strong. Too often, he uses his physical strength instead of his mind and finds himself in trouble. His wife, Elastigirl is strengthened in every different direction in an effort to accomplish all the tasks within her family. Her strength of stretching compensates for a sense of being overwhelmed and overcommitted. Violet, the teenage daughter has the power to disappear and create forces. These powers reflect her desire to be invisible as a timid pre-adolescent and to keep people at a distance. Dash, the younger son has tremendous quickness and his hyperactivity and impulsivity often get him in trouble.

It becomes clear that the family needs all their powers in the struggle against the evil "Wantabee" who actually has no superpower of his own but who has created illusions of power through his wealth. It is a delightful story about family members discovering the incredible gifts they each contribute to the good they are called to do.

In George Conway's book, Giving Good Gifts, he talks about the superpowers and spiritual gifts we can give to our children as parents. One of them is the gift of "timshel." Timshel is a derivative of the Hebrew phrase, which captures the biblical teaching that within us is a good greater than any evil in the world. Timshel is the ability to choose good over evil. This reservoir of spiritual power in overcoming evil is indispensable for their spiritual health.

Timshel, a reservoir of spiritual strength and health, is important for the hero in each one of us as we navigate the unexpected in life. The strength of knowing who we are and to whom we belong is imperative when we confront insults, hardships, persecutions and calamities along the way. The strength of knowing who we are and to whom we belong sustains us, as it did Christ, when those closest to us or from our hometowns cannot celebrate who we become and who God calls us to be.

This sense of ourselves as God's children has a lot more to do with recognizing our humanity than projecting an image of being a superhero. The paradox of faith is that strength is found in our weakness. By embracing our humanity in the incarnation, Christ reminds us that our vulnerability and frailty are not weaknesses, rather the strength of faith. True weakness is refusing to acknowledge our humanity and our need for forgiveness and healing. It is that striving, that insistence on a closed, stubborn, self-sufficiency, a pride that demands we earn our place in the world, that is, in itself, at the heart of our weakness. Salvation through faith is letting go of the illusion that one can save oneself, and no longer striving to do so.

Paul speaks to this kind of strength in his letter to the Corinthians: "Whenever I am weak, then I am strong." King David affirms this kind of strength in the psalms when he proclaimed, "The joy of the Lord is my strength."

As we come to the table of Christ for nourishment and the superpower of timshel, we come with strength and weakness, we come with gratitude and joy, and we come to partake in the grace, the forgiveness, and the healing of our loving God. Let us give thanks. Amen.