

SERMON FOR SUN. JULY 4 AND WED. JULY 7 2021

Pent 6B 2 Cor 12:7-10 “Strength in Weakness.”

Dear fellow redeemed of, by and for Christ, 245 years ago our forefathers signed the declaration of **independence**. That document began with the words, “**When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary to dissolve the political bands which have connected them to one another...**”

Now, it’s one thing to declare independence from a foreign power, it’s quite another to assert one’s independence from God.

That’s why today’s text is a timely reminder, for it emphasizes our utter **dependance** upon God.

To the eyes of the world, being weak and dependent is not a virtue, but a character defect. It is the strong who are glorified and looked up to. Strong athletes, personalities, and wills, so it is thought, are the folks who get noticed and get ahead.

But what about before God? **Must I be strong before God?** Sadly, for many, the answer is yes. Far too many people today are, in effect, declaring their independence from God.

Like Job, some stand before God and question why He’s doing what He’s doing! As if they can somehow fully comprehend His ways, and think they can chart a better course.

Some stand before God and question the truth of His Word, preferring to follow the example of Adam and Eve, believing what Satan, our world and society say is true.

In all their so-called wisdom, some decide that abiding by God’s Word gets in the way of getting ahead in this world.

They believe they won’t get where they want to go unless they bend the rules a little bit. Defying God’s word to love one’s neighbor, they do whatever it takes to get ahead. It’s a dog-eat-dog world, and to the strong, to the victors, go the spoils.

But it’s not just **they** who assert their independence from God, is it? We do it too.

Thinking that we have to be strong for God and cannot be weak. Believing that if my faith is strong, my prayers are strong, and my life strong, then God will surely reward me.

“**Strong is good; weak is bad.**” It’s been so ingrained in us, that’s how we act. That’s the way we think. That’s the way we are. We’re ashamed to be weak and dependent.

None of this is new to us and our generation – we heard it today as God sent Ezekiel to be His prophet to His people but warns Him, “**they are impudent and stubborn.**” Or in other words, they were strong-minded and strong-willed.

And we heard it when the people in Jesus' hometown reject Him. So strong in what they considered wisdom that they couldn't see Jesus as anything more than how they knew him to be, **“a carpenter, and the son of Mary and the brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon.”**

And not even word of Jesus' *miracles* could convince them otherwise! And so, **“they took offense at him.”**

That's just Jesus. He was so ordinary. So *weak-looking*. Jesus' humanity was a stumbling block to them.

And so it has been all along. All of us, to one degree or another, following in the footsteps of our parents Adam and Eve.

We want to be independent, standing on the strength of our wisdom, our experience, our opinion; the strength of what seems to be right to us, standing up to God instead of relying on Him.

Needing to be strong, we're afraid to be weak. And that, brothers and sisters is sin, rejecting the Creator's grace and mercy and deluding ourselves into thinking that if we are strong enough to find happiness in this world and earn our salvation.

That's why God's Word to St. Paul is an essential reminder for us today. Paul's inspired words were radically opposite of all this worldly thinking!

When Paul cried out for relief from the thorn in his side, God told him, **“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.**

So, Paul was inspired to tell us, **“Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.**

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.”

And so, while the world, Satan, and that little voice inside each of us is telling us to **be strong**, God is saying, **why?**

That's not My way! In fact, your desire for strength is a stumbling block to my blessing you with true strength.

Your so-called wisdom is a stumbling block to understanding the absolute truth of my Word.

No, my child, if you want to be strong, truly strong, then ***be weak so that my power can be made perfect.***

In effect, God is saying, **“Trust Me. Don't rely on your strength, which is really no strength at all! But rely on Me. Put your trust and faith and confidence in Me, and I will be strong for you! For my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”**

And so, to be weak here means to put your faith and trust and confidence in God alone. Not in your own strength. Not in your own thoughts and opinions.

Not in what seems right to you. Not in your own will-power, or determination, or anything you can do. But in God alone.

Even when you do not know where He is leading you. Even when you do not understand what He is doing in your life.

You see, that's what the people in the Old Testament at the time of Ezekiel couldn't do, and ***the results were disastrous; they were sent into exile in Babylon.***

And that's what the people in Jesus' hometown couldn't do, and ***the results weren't good, so instead of receiving the ultimate blessing of salvation by grace through faith in Him, Jesus could only heal a few sick people.***

To emphasize our utter dependence upon God, Jesus then sends the 12 out on a missionary journey without so much as a shekel or a piece of bread, and God provided for them and they were able to cast out many demons and heal sick people.

Brothers and sisters, when we try to be strong for ourselves, when we try to do things our way, when we hang a "Do not disturb" sign on our hearts and minds and, in effect, tell God, "I'll handle this one." ***The results aren't good.***

No, God says. ***"Be weak! For I am strong for you."***

For where does true strength lie after all?

Our wisdom or God's wisdom?

Our inclinations and opinions, or His perfect Word?

Our strength to resist sin, or Jesus' taking it into himself, paying the price of sin by dying on a cross for forgiveness?

Our delusional attempts to try to justify ourselves or to repent in the Spirit's power and so receive His absolution?

To try and make it in this world on our own, or to live in communion with His children born again in Holy Baptism?

To be self-sufficient, or to come to this altar each week weak in faith and sin and death, and receive the strength and life and forgiveness given us in our Savior's body and blood?

To come to Him needing nothing, or to come needing everything and receive all we really need according to God's promises in Christ Jesus?

Now, you'd think with such promises – of forgiveness and community and strength and grace – that being weak before God, depending on Him, wouldn't be a problem for us!

And yet, it is, isn't it? And it will *always* be a struggle. It is the struggle of faith against that sinful person inside each of us that is afraid to be weak and wants to be strong!

That's why as we gather here each week, we gather at the foot of the cross. We gather at this icon of weakness, humility, pain, and death. **And we**

see there our God. That One there, hanging in weakness, bleeding and dying.” For me.

So that you and I may believe that **“God’s power is made perfect in weakness!”** For in the weakness of the cross, God’s power is brought to its goal and completion.

For there, in weakness, our Savior was strong. In humility, He was exalted. In death, there was life.

In defeat, He was triumphant! His curse was our blessing. His condemnation meant forgiveness for us.

And so again and again, each week, the Holy Spirit brings us here to know, and believe, that it is better to be weak than strong before God. It is better to die and rise in Christ, than rise up defiantly against God and die.

My friends, living under the cross, under Christ **for you**, you do not have to fear being weak.

Christ’s strength shown in our weakness enables us to admit it when we’re wrong.

The power of the Holy Spirit enables us to not demand from others but to do for others. To love and not hate. To not take control. To honor and serve.

And like St. Paul, to boast in nothing but the grace and forgiveness of your Savior.

In all of that, the world sees weakness. But here, it is different. For what looks like weakness is really not weakness at all – **but faith.**

Faith which knows that God’s grace in Christ Jesus is sufficient for us; that when we are weak, Christ is strong in us; and that as long as we live in this world, we live under the cross. And that there is no better place to be.

Brothers and sisters, I freely admit that I am weak. And so are you, it’s what we confess to be true.

But the forgiveness and strength of the One once crucified, but now risen from the dead in glory, who lives and reigns to all eternity – He is our strength.

And not only now, but forever. In Him, we have nothing to fear. In Christ, **it’s good to be weak! AMEN**