

I am Weak but Thou art Strong

**Based on 2 Corinthians
12:1-10**

I must go on boasting! (2 Cor 12:1)

Well there's an auspicious way to begin a speech! Rather like that slippery cousin every family has, who always appears at the annual reunion: voice too loud for the occasion, chest puffed out, cheerfully telling anyone who will listen about how wonderful his life is, how successful his career is, how many toys he has in his three car garage, attached to his mansion of a home. *I don't want to toot my own horn, you know,*" as he leans in and whispers conspiratorially in your ear, *"but I've got things pretty wrapped up. Just gonna' coast my way to retirement. Eye-balling to purchase a small island if the price is right!"*

It reminds me of a scene from a now dated movie, "Weekend at Bernie's". But I have met one or two of these characters in my career. Always makes me want to wash my hands before I head to the buffet table. But the point is, this is how Paul began his speech to the Corinthians. And there is some irony to the whole scene: a sometimes badly behaving apostle talking to a

sometimes badly behaving congregation in Corinth. Sounds like the blind leading the blind. And speaking of blind, we quickly move to the heart of Paul's conversation:

"For when I am weak, then I am strong." (2 Cor 12:10)

Arrogance was not new to Paul. In an ancient world with few privileges, Paul was born on the right side of the tracks. He was educated, well positioned, and well respected in his circle of influence. He was a big man about town, and when those pesky early Christian believers were become something of a nuisance, he offered to do something about it, and get paid quite nicely for his efforts. Paul was best known for his skills at tormenting and torturing early Christians, and even having them sent to jail for their beliefs. He took great pride in the fear he instilled just by walking down the street. Just the kind of man you want your daughter to bring home and introduce to the family!

But somewhere along the road to Damascus, Paul's world was turned upside down. It is likely that he fell, or perhaps was thrown from a horse. Today we would call it a head injury or concussion. In the midst of all the commotion, Paul had a vision. Most unexpected. As he returned to his reality at

the side of the road, he discovered he was temporarily blinded. Perhaps for the first time in his life, Paul was not in control. He had to be guided to an inn, fed his food, cared for like a child, unable to make his way even to the washroom without help. We can imagine this foreign and formidable feeling for Paul: that of being helpless, weak.

A few days later, his sight returned, but his focus had changed. Instead of tearing churches apart, Paul was going to build them instead: in places no one had even considered building them before. So now we fast forward some years, and find ourselves at today's scripture lesson. Paul was still boasting, but now, he was speaking on the Lord's behalf, directing that energy previously chewed up in pride and arrogance, to now be a fierce and passionate leader of the faith. The events on the road to Damascus reminded him, that only in humility, when the world sees you as weak, must you rely on the One greater than yourself, and stepping into communion with the Great One, discover a strength, greater than any power, position, or personal island.

Yet, even Paul knew that he had to be careful with himself. He was an arrogant and boastful man, by nature.

It would be easy to allow that arrogance to get out of hand, pride at his accomplishments to blur the lines of good leadership, vanity of his reputation clouding his judgment on how to best serve the Lord. While scholars have debated for years on just what the 'thorn in Paul's side' was: temptation, money, scandalous affair, I think the answer has always been in front of us. Paul's thorn was his own inclinations to become boastful, arrogant, and conceited.

"Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you..." (v8-9a)

Paul needed God's grace, time and time again, to help his heart, return to a place of humility, of 'weakness', in order to lead with 'strength.'

The world says that strength comes from having more than others, being better than others, having the largest corporate profit, or

your name on the top of Forbes list of millionaires. The world often suggests that the need for faith, or church life is a sign of weakness. But we know differently, now don't we?

The faith journey connects us to our inner self in a way no other activity of the day does. It forces us to have an honest conversation about ourselves with ourselves: our moments of arrogance, our bit of boastfulness. It offers us the opportunity to share with our Creator, those things in life we cannot solve on our own. It creates glimpses of the holy, here and there, which land on your heart with an intimate understanding of the unique relationship you have with your God. While the world may see this sort of introspection as 'weak', I would suggest to you the opposite. For it is often the small glimpses, and the quiet moments, which give us the fortitude to carry on in difficult times, and hold us gently when we want to give up. It is in these moments,

that you discover the amazing gift of grace. In our humanity, we may sometimes fail. In our humility, we discover God's grace.

Know that you are not weak because you need God. Despite what others might say or think of you, and your faith, and your church, know that you are stronger every day because of your faithful attention to your relationship with the Creator. Know that humility, in the current world climate, seems to me, to be something to be highly valued and praised. And if you falter, (for trust me, in my humble opinion, Paul did more than once) know that grace is yours also.

I am weak but Thou art strong; Jesus, keep me from all wrong;

Daily walking close to Thee, let it be, dear Lord, let it be.

~Anonymous