

Sunday, July 8, 2018 – Seventh Sunday after Pentecost
“Perfectly Weak”

2 Corinthians 12: 7-10

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Compare/Contrast

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ, Amen.

The prospect of potentially issuing a call later today has had me thinking a lot about when I've been called. I deliberated three calls in less than a year before accepting the call to Mountain View. Going through the call process you ask questions like, “What has God used me for, and where can He best use me going forward?” It brings up questions of whether things are in a good place where you are, and questions of legacy enter your mind.

Visits with young people dear to me bring this up, too. I'm not a parent yet but to all you without children, know that there are still young people for whom you can leave a legacy. Some good friends of mine from seminary, Will and Mindy have five kids, the oldest of whom, the almost 10 year-old Jacob, is my godson. Of my two godchildren and one nephew, he's the oldest and it's been fun to watch him grow and change. He's already a hugely extraverted kid, like his Dad – he likes structure, he's good with people and he's confident.

A few years ago I was back visiting and fun as it was, there were moments during the week I was just tired. I'm a single guy who walked into a humming machine of a small house with then three small children. I was happy the kids took to me quickly, they wanted me around – which also meant I had three kids grabbing at my arms and hanging on me at quarter to six every morning... quarter to four my time... wanting me to wrestle on the floor or read a book. Will and Mindy felt bad, thought I must be overwhelmed, tried to help set limits with the kids – “Give Uncle Derek some space, he just woke up...” but those questions of legacy kept coming back to me. I accepted responsibility for spiritual fatherhood for Jacob. I live 1,600 miles away and see him only every year or two. How am I, who at this stage has basically all the responsibility to make this relationship functional, going to be a godfather Jacob knows and who knows loves him if I'm squashing his attempt to love me?

Parents and grandparents here, you know this far better than I do in my limited experience as a uncle and a godfather – especially when you're tired, especially when things are hard, strength isn't always found digging just a little deeper down. Real strength comes through dependence.

See, strength isn't centered in physical prowess, brawn or bluster, nor is strength a question of "Who can be most confident or dominating in a social interaction." Strength is centered outside of ourselves.

In 2 Corinthians St. Paul spends the greater part of the 2nd half of the book talking about boasting. He had cause to boast – called directly by Jesus to be the main Gospel preacher to the Gentiles, starting up churches, trusted as the top spiritual advisor by Christians over a huge swath of the planet. He was ridiculed and beaten and suffered at the hands of haters almost as severely as Jesus. He was the real deal – but then he tells us none of these things are reason to boast – "If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness." Which brings us to our text for consideration today: 2 Corinthians 12.

God provides the grace to be our strength when we don't have the strength. No conversation about Christian strength can start if we don't first acknowledge our complete dependence on God. Whether you're the burliest linebacker or the most patient mentor, the source of our strength is *extra nos* – outside ourselves. Maybe you want God to use you to do great things. First remember that as a display of just how powerful God is, He uses the weakest, most broken, most unfit tools to accomplish the greatest things – which is why He chose a random pagan named Abram of Ur in modern day Iraq to be the progenitor of His promised Savior, why He chose an old man named Moses with a speech impediment and a homicide on his rap sheet to be spokesperson to the most powerful man on earth, why He chose the littlest brother, a lowly shepherd boy named David to be King of Israel, why He chose an 8 year old boy named Jeremiah to be a prophet during the darkest days for Judah before they went into exile, why He selected a 13 year old virgin peasant named Mary to give birth to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, why He the modern day equivalent of dock workers, truck drivers and anti-government militiamen to be His disciples and lead His holy Church and why He called that Church's greatest enemy, Saul to become it's greatest evangelist and renamed him Paul.

Folks, whatever good God works through us, whatever strength we find is not in who we are. It's in God whose grace is sufficient for you, who makes His power perfect through our weakness. You may think what God calls you to is insignificant or unimportant compared to

someone else. You may think your little part makes no difference. You may find people opposing you, or mocking you, or maybe people will be downright apathetic and pay you no mind and you may think, “I thought God was going to be powerful through me.” Hear St. Paul again when he says – “Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

I think about Albert Pujols. The once consensus best baseball player on the ballot signed a \$240 million, ten year deal to move to Anaheim and despite a few bright spots in the first couple years of that deal, it has been a terrible contract. Yet on a personal level, getting this point, I’m guessing he’s doing alright. Albert said about the 2006 season, when his Cardinals beat my Tigers that the best part wasn’t winning a ring or setting his career high in homeruns. It was that two teammates he had been evangelizing came to faith in Jesus Christ. That was while he was on top and now, in baseball terms he’s considered a disappointment, not even a “replacement level” player. But if the boasting is still about God and His priorities for Albert today, my guess is there is plenty of reason for him to boast in his weaknesses.

I’d like to leave you with a task today. Only Christ’s power working through us makes us strong. Now be intention – consider, where do you pour that strength into your relationships? Is it gentleness? Vulnerability? Trust? Consider, where are those weaknesses for Christ to speak into: in your marriage. Second, to your children. What does it look like at work? What does it look like at church? If you’re an older the average person, what would it look like for you to seek out another person, maybe someone a few years younger and take them under your wing? It could be a relative, maybe not – but to work at helping develop that person in their own walk, depending on Christ’s strength to enjoy all that God has called them as a man or woman of God to be? In Jesus’ name, Amen.