

June 12, 2022 A Strange Delight 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Surely the apostle Paul cannot be serious. “Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me..... I delight in weaknesses.” I mean, he has to be kidding! Doesn’t he? The truth is, he is very serious. He means it. And I have to admit that takes me up short. I mean I’m always short. I stand beside Bryan Hupe, or John McGurk. They tower over me. I’m trying to be funny. Paul is not. He is very serious. “I delight in weaknesses.” How can he say that and mean it?

In fact it is really quite simple. When we are confident, and feeling physically strong, we tend to think we can handle anything. We tend to be positive that we have things under control. Being a senior citizen is the time of life when for a host of different reasons, you are forced to learn that being in control is a bit of an illusion. One fall can prove catastrophic. One wrong decision when you are operating on limited means, can mean having to face a whole array financial difficulties. The bills pile up and they keep on coming with merciless regularity.

I’m right handed. And my right arm has always been the one I could depend on when doing physical work. I fell on some ice at the Zwick Park Dog’s Park a number of years ago. I did the physio and I was disciplined about doing the exercises. But the fact is my left arm and shoulder is now stronger than my right. And it is not that I am growing weaker,

it is the fact that my recovery was never complete. Just holding my right hand above my head is difficult beyond a few minutes. I find it hard to think of delighting in my weakness. And then there is the other fact that if I do any kind of physical work in the morning, by mid afternoon I am a spent force.

But here is what Paul is getting at. Insults, hardships, persecutions, difficulties. He makes an observation that you and I are tempted to dismiss as so much dreaming..."For when I am weak, then I am strong." Is this possible? Yes it is. Yes it is! We have a tendency to think that weakness is the same as dependency. That's not true. And particularly when it comes to matters of faith, faithful living, taking care of your own spiritual journey, dependency is key. Paul learned a lesson about the Lordship of Jesus. When I am weak, then I am strong." How does that work?

Fact. When I am weak, I need help. I need the assistance of others. I have had to recognize that I am approaching that time when I will no longer be able to pretend that I can go on as I have done for the balance of my life. I can see the time is coming when I am going to have to give up this life of ministry that has been mine for the better part of 57 years. I really want to resist the need to accept change, brought on by age.

The truth is when I can no longer argue that I am weak, I can let go and seek help. The help of my friends. The help of my brothers and sisters in the church. The help of God

HIMSELF. A time of weakness is driving me to my knees. I am having to be more dependent on the Lord my God than I have ever been in the greater part of my life. I am used to saying, "I can do that!" Whereas I am now approaching the time when I am going to have to admit....I can't. And the help I need is not simply that of my friends, but the help of my truest friend, Jesus. I remember counselling a dear friend, a man I had worked with for twenty years. He said, "I feel like I am losing control of everything." And I said the words so easily. "Control is an illusion. Rob, the truth is you are seeing things very clearly. What we have to figure out is how to find a way forward."

That is the genius of the apostle Paul in this part of the 2nd Corinthian letter. He has found the secret and he shares the secret of the way forward as it becomes obvious that control over our circumstances is and always has been an illusion. "That is why for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses. In insults." He has been insulted. "In hardships." He has been through hard times and they are going to get harder. "In persecutions." Paul has been persecuted by his own race, to some degree he has been persecuted by the church in Corinth. He is being persecuted and will be persecuted by the Roman Empire of which he is a citizen. "In difficulties." He has faced difficult circumstances again and again, and that is not about to change. So what has he said? "I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me....For when I am weak, then I am strong."

He is going to face the truth about himself and his circumstances and he is going to lean all the more on Jesus. To the very end. Death in Rome in 67 A.D. What he is saying is, his life is not his. It was given him by God. Jesus opened his eyes on the Road to Damascus by making him physically blind. Given back his sight he has poured his energy into the cause of telling people about the love of God in Jesus Christ, no matter what the circumstances happen to be. He recognizes his string is running out. So what does he do? He puts himself in the hands of his Lord and Saviour, come what may.

We recognize him as one of the strongest proponents of the faith. Most of us want to learn to be like him, following Jesus, come what may. No matter what. To the end of his days. 67 A.D. in Rome. We wonder how he could be so strong. How he could do that. In a time of weakness, he recognized he was no longer in control if he ever was in control. In fact he believed he was living his God given destiny. So are you. So am I. And when I am weak, I need to submit to the will of the God who made me, the Lord who redeemed me, the Holy Spirit who comforts me...and let HIM lead me forward. "That is why for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses."

And when I say that is a strange delight I mean, what the Oxford Dictionary includes in its list of meanings for strange. Novel, singular, surprising, unexpected. For when I am weak....then I am strong.

Let us pray;

Dear Lord Jesus. We love to give you the credit when circumstances unfold according to what we thought was our plan. When we delight in what we think we brought together and saw through to its conclusion. But if our lives are truly in your control, that means we have to praise you when it is a hard time, a challenging time, a time we would rather not face. Help me...help us to submit to what is unfolding when we do not want to accept it. Lead us in a time of challenge and change. For when we are weak...in your marvelous name we can be stronger than ever we were in times that were easy. Amen