

In the name of our Creator, and the Son, our Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit, our Comforter. Amen

I believe I have told you that the Apostle Paul and I have not ever found much we could share together in a sermon. We seem to be on a different wavelength when it comes to his letters to the churches of the known world in the early days of Christianity and where I find myself, today. However, on occasion, Paul's letters do provide some nuggets of inspiration for me. Today is one of those occasions.

In today's reading from Second Corinthians, Paul speaks to the people of Corinth about his own weaknesses before God. He does this, not to be boastful of Paul's own character, but rather to point to the strength of God working through Paul, for the advancement of the kingdom of heaven.

Our human condition makes it commonplace for weakness to have a natural place in our lives. Simply stated, we can not be strong in every aspect of our daily lives even though we might like that to be true. Unfortunately, in our society and in many cultures around this planet, being seen as "weak" is to be discouraged. Being weak is thought to be bad and is viewed as a failing of one's character. Weakness of character is often seen as being "bad news" for advancement on someone's career path.

Or, even worse, being weak often is seen as a reason why someone is not accepted as a member in some communities. From an early age, we are taught to hide our weaknesses, to keep them under wraps. And for heaven's sake, to never share them with anyone else, especially someone who might have something to say about your acceptance as part of some group or society, or what have you.

Yet, weakness is an important part of our faith. In 2 Corinthians, chapter 12, Paul is trying to tell the reader that God gives us the strength to endure the pain of our weakness. Our weaknesses, very much like St. Paul's own weakness, the weaknesses which he himself admits are part of his personality, are where we can find a source of strength in our own lives. Strength that comes not from within our own being, but strength that comes through the grace of our Creator.

So how do we tap into God's strength? Well, that is easy - by praying to our Creator. Prayer is our link, our conduit, our path to God. God's grace for us provides all we need to endure our weaknesses. It is grace that helps us to find the strength to love, the strength to speak out against the inequities of life, and the racial intolerance we know exists all around us, and the lack of reconciliation with our sisters and brothers of every nation and peoples. The list we find in this passage from Paul's letter to the church at Corinth names but a few of the weaknesses we know can impact our lives almost daily.

God's grace gives us the power to speak out against these acts of selfishness, fear, judgement of others, the desire to have the better place in life over that of the next person, and in not being willing to step up and admit the wrongs we have done in the past. Wrongs often done in the name of God and country. Part of the healing we can have, means admitting our actions can be wrong, destructive, and go against everything our Redeemer, Jesus Christ came to teach us.

In our gospel reading for today, Jesus is rejected by his own townsfolk and more importantly, by his own family – his own sisters, brothers, and from what the scripture tells us, by his own mother. That's a hard pill to swallow, being rejected by one's own family. To my thinking, this is one of the most difficult things anyone might be called on to accept. Rejection by family, rejection by ones own blood, that's pretty harsh, isn't it?

Jesus could do no mighty work in his own hometown because those who were there, his family and the community he had grown up in, lacked faith that Jesus could do these works. Their lack of faith was driven by their familiarity with Jesus. They knew where he came from, who were his parents, what his questionable birthright was all about, and what they perceived as his lack of worth to the community. They lacked the faith to believe that he could heal.

Thinking back to last week's gospel passage, we have just the opposite being shown by the woman who had been ill for twelve years and believed she would be healed if only she could touch Jesus' clothing. And again in the action of the Synagogue leader, Jairus, who believed his daughter could be brought back from the dead by Jesus. Both the unnamed woman and Jairus had great faith, faith which was responded to by Jesus.

Jesus' power to heal, his power to cure, was lost on his own family and on the community of his youth. His family lacked any sense of esteem for what he was doing and who he was. They lost all faith in his mission. And the people of Nazareth, they had decided that it was not worth making the effort to follow after him, because he would come to no good end. Yet, even in the face of such rejection, Jesus found strength in the grace of God flowing into himself, and then through him into all creation. He did not despair but moved on to other places where people were ready to accept him and to believe he could do great things in their presence. And that is because they had faith unlike his own kinfolk.

In Mark's gospel, faith is a critical element in the healing ministry of Jesus. And faith is essential to the will of God being lived out in our lives. For the twelve disciples Jesus sent out on their mission to spread the good news about God's kingdom, and to cure and heal, it was an opportunity to discover the power of God's grace working in and through them. It was also

an opportunity for these disciples to discover that the world would reject them and their message, a lesson which they would carry with them for the rest of their ministries.

The cross on which Jesus suffered and died is the paramount image of what weakness and rejection looks like for anyone living in first century Palestine. Death on a cross was the worst form of punishment reserved for criminals and those who would overthrow the good order of the state. Yet, God has turned that same cross into the ultimate symbol of love and strength. Our faith in the power of Jesus Christ as Saviour, through our own weaknesses and difficulties of life, is the path to becoming one with our Creator. Our faith in the power of the Creator to bless our lives allows God to take our weakness and use it through the gift of His grace to be a source of strength for us and for all creation.

The discoveries of unmarked graves which are coming to light throughout our country and in the communities of our first nations sisters and brothers, have exposed the failings of our past. Our humanity has been exposed for its weakness and failure by causing these tragic events which have been visited upon our sisters and brothers. Creation has revealed to this nation of Canada yet another of the many weaknesses of the doctrine of discovery which our forebearers visited upon the good people of Turtle Island, all because the settlers, arriving from distant lands, thought they knew best, better than the

peoples who had lived and worshipped the Creator in their own way for millennia. How wrong they were. And we as children of God must recognize the pain and loss which the first nations continue to experience. And we need to seek forgiveness for these wrongs, even today. Even though it was not we ourselves who did these things.

Yes, we are weak, weak in our commitment to reconciliation, and weak in our faithfulness to God's will and God's command that we should love one another. But God is not done with us yet. God can turn our weaknesses, our losses, and our failures, into moments of sharing, moments of grace, and into a new age of commitment to reconciliation, not just with our sisters and brothers of every nation, but with all God's creation.

Pray to our Creator. Turn to God. Turn to his loving presence and accept the grace He gives each of us, every day. Turn to God and allow the Creator to give you the strength to endure your own weaknesses. Turn to God and be healed. Pray that all humanity will recognize the pain and suffering we, as humans, have caused in the past. Pray that all God's children will accept their failings and that we can find the strength to admit the wrongs done, and to apologize for what has been done before, in the name of God and country.

Amen