

Sunday, Oct 21, 2018 - Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost – Sermon on Isaiah 53:10-12

True Strength is Found in Weakness

Intro:

Martin Luther once said, “The citizenship and home of Christians is not in this world but in heaven. This is correctly taught, but not easily learned; rightly preached, but not so soon believed; well said but poorly practiced. Were we to confess the truth, we would have to admit that we seldom think of the fact that we must at last depart and leave this life.”

I might argue with Dr. Luther and say, not just death, sir – but any weakness. The weakness and frailty of our own lives. The weakness of the world around us. The weakness of those that we love and the things that we love. Overall, I think Luther’s statement is quite right. We get caught up in thinking about in our lives right now, that we forget that we have not been baptized into this life – we have been baptized into eternal life.

And our Lord Jesus Christ won that eternal life for you, not by some might show of strength, but in weakness. The ultimate display of humility. This is what we meditate on today as we focus on the Word of God from the Prophet Isaiah: that True Strength, is not found in the strong and mighty things of this world – but rather in the weakness of this life.

Part 1: Found in the Suffering Servant

God operates on a level that we can’t understand, and can hardly imagine. This is evident in these words from Isaiah 53. They are so contrary to our reasoning, our way of understanding, that this can only be the inspired word of God. Apart from the fact that Isaiah recorded this very vivid description of Christ, 700 years before he walked the earth. Consider the subject matter in verse 10.

Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.

It was the will of the Lord to crush him. The Hebrew is not as nice as English. Literally the word is it was the Lord’s pleasure to crush him. It was the Lord’s Will and pleasure to put him to grief. To make him experience all the weakness of this life that we experience. Finally, it was God’s will that his soul be offered up as a guilt offering.

A guilt offering? Hmm? What’s that. Lev. 7:2 ***The guilt offering is to be slaughtered in the place where the burnt offering is slaughtered, and its blood is to be splashed against the sides of the altar.***

How does the Will of the Lord prosper if his champion, his servant is killed and has his blood splashed on the sides of the altar? How does he prolong his days if he is dead? How does he gain offspring if he is cut off from the land of the living?

What Isaiah is getting at is that the Lord doesn’t operate on our level of thinking. I mean if you or I were God and we were at war with sin, death and Satan – what do we do? I would storm the gates of Hell with ten thousand legions of angels. Set up a massive kingdom here on earth and draw all people that way. But this is an earthly understanding of strength and power.

God shames all earthly notions of what it means to be prosperous, successful, powerful, or strong. As St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians, ***But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.***

Jesus, the servant of the Lord, went through shame to glory, through death to life. He conquers when he falls; he rules after being enslaved; he lives after he has died; he completes his work after he himself has been apparently cut off – His glory shines out of the deepest pit of humiliation.

Part II

Isaiah hints at this in v. 11. ***Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.***

From that deepest anguish, his most profound weakness, the weakness of the cross – Jesus sees and is satisfied! It was in that most utter weakness that Christ was strongest. Triumphant over sin, death, and the devil – with that loud triumphant cry, “It is finished.” True strength is found in his weakness.

What does this tell us about our own weakness? A medical diagnosis that shakes us to the core, financial hole that we can’t ever seem to get out of – the loss of someone that we love; a parent or a child. And the memories that flood back to us, the memory of what once was – when you/they were strong – on your own two feet.

A few days ago, I was visiting a friend in the hospital. And without going into detail, it’s enough to say that his life is falling apart around him. He’s in the hospital, so he can’t work, so he can’t pay his rent or his car payment. He’s basically a prisoner in his own flesh, confined to his hospital room. I went in that room thinking that I might talk to him about Luke 12:7 “all the hairs of your head are numbered.” But when I sat down and heard him talk, it became blatantly obvious that this poor man was in the throes of most profound weakness in life. And the verse I just read, v. 11 jumped into my head.

What a pleasure it was, and a privilege to tell him that he has a brother in Jesus who bore his iniquities, as the verse says. Any effect of sin, sickness, grief, poverty or weakness – these things Jesus knows for he bore them himself.

Brothers and sisters, seemingly strength is the illusion, weakness is the reality. For we are all bound to these bodies that will grow old, or succumb to sickness and death. We don’t need to deny that. These verses are not here to slap a band-aid on a broken heart or a crushed spirit. They are here that we might see the reality – That true strength is found in weakness.

Weakness is where God shows his strength. What a comfort it is to know that he does not operate on our terms or by our understanding. He finds us in our weakness. He knows it for he experienced it himself. It was through a display of weakness, by all human accounts, that God did the mightiest act in the history of the world. By the nails in his Hands, the Will of the Lord succeeded, the many were declared righteous.

Part III

And it’s because of that weakness, my friends in Christ; that in the face of Satan, sin, death, any weakness that plagues us in this life – we are mighty, we are strong. As the final verse for our consideration says today, ***“Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.”***

Who are the many? Who are the strong? Isaiah is not suddenly talking about some other group of people! The many who were transgressors, the many who were unrighteous, are now the many who are strong. The Lord’s Servant, Jesus, was numbered with us, that we might be numbered with him!

In the gospel for today, we saw James and John seeking a place of greatness at Jesus side. Truly, they didn’t know what they were asking because WE HAVE IT! We are numbered amongst the great because of Christ. WE who were/are sinners born in weakness, are raised mighty!

This is what Isaiah is talking about back in v. 10 when he says, ***“he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.”***

Because Jesus, the servant of the Lord, went through shame to glory, through death to life. He conquers when he falls; he rules after being enslaved; he lives after he has died – so we shall too! From his weakness now we have been made mighty!

Conclusion:

Our Lord Jesus sits at the head of a great and mighty army – of which you and I are a part. We will divide the spoils and conquer along with our king. As the writer of Psalm 110 says, ***“The Lord will extend your mighty scepter from Zion, saying, “Rule in the midst of your enemies!” Your troops will be willing on your day of battle. Arrayed in holy splendor!”***

So come what may! Death, sickness, disease – name it! You are a citizen soldier in the kingdom of Heaven. You have a king that, in his weakness - shames the things this world calls strong. You have true strength in the face of sickness, grief, and death – because of his weakness. Amen.