

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY - B - JULY 5, 2015

"POWER IS MADE PERFECT IN WEAKNESS" AND "WHEN I AM WEAK, THEN I AM STRONG"

ACCORDING TO ONE AUTHOR THESE ARE TWO OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT STATEMENTS IN ALL OF CHRISTIAN LITERATURE...

TODAY I WANT TO FOCUS ON OUR SECOND READING - WHICH IS RATHER UNUSUAL FOR ME....I USUALLY FOCUS ON THE GOSPEL...

HOWEVER, THIS READING FROM PAUL'S 2ND LETTER TO THE COMMUNITY AT CORINTH HAS BEEN A LIFESAVER FOR ME SO OFTEN... IT IS RIGHT UP THERE WITH THE SEQUENCE PRAYER I SPOKE ABOUT ON PENTECOST SUNDAY...THE COME HOLY SPIRIT...

LIKE THAT PRAYER, I HAVE FOUND THAT PRAYING OVER THIS PASSAGE HAS BEEN A LIFELINE FOR ME IN TIMES OF DIFFICULTY, IN TIMES OF CRISIS IN MY LIFE....IN TIMES OF WEAKNESS....

IT BEGINS WITH PAUL SAYING "...A THORN IN THE FLESH WAS GIVEN TO ME...."

IF YOU DO A GOOGLE SEARCH ON THE PHRASE YOU GET THE FOLLOWING:

"THORN IN THE FLESH" IS A COLLOQUIALISM USED TO DESCRIBE A CHRONIC INFIRMITY, ANNOYANCE, OR TROUBLE IN ONE'S LIFE"

SO WE ALL HAVE SOME KIND OF THORN IN THE FLESH - BY THAT DEFINITION DON'T WE? IT A BIG OR SMALL THORN....

AS WE KNOW EVEN JESUS CHRIST HAD SEVERAL "THORNS IN THE FLESH" - AMONG THEM HIS NEIGHBORS WHO REJECTED HIM IN TODAY'S

GOSPEL

**WE HAVE NO IDEA WHAT PAUL'S "THORN IN THE FLESH" WAS FOR HIM...
EVIDENTLY MOST COMMENTATORS TODAY BELIEVE IT WAS MALARIA - A
CONDITION THAT COMES AND GOES, BUT ALWAYS LEAVES SOMEONE IN
A WEAKENED CONDITION, UNABLE TO ACCOMPLISH WHAT THEY INTEND
TO ACCOMPLISH....**

**OTHERS BELIEVE THAT IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN A PERSON, OR PERSONS
WHO FOLLOWED PAUL AROUND AND HARASSED HIM.....**

**E.G. THAT LADY AT THE CORNER OF BROWN AND STUART WHO HAS
APPEARED WEEKLY FOR YEARS HOLDING A BIG SIGN COMPLAINING OF
UNFAIR TREATMENT YEARS AGO BY UD.....**

**OTHERS SUGGEST PAUL'S THORN IN THE FLESH MAY HAVE BEEN A
SPEECH IMPEDIMENT, POOR EYESIGHT OR VIOLENT TEMPTATIONS....**

**THE TRUTH IS WE DON'T KNOW....AND I THINK THAT IS FORTUNATE
BECAUSE EVERYONE HAS A "THORN IN THE FLESH" AT SOME TIME IN
THEIR LIFE....WE ALMOST ALWAYS HAVE AT LEAST A SMALL ONE**

E.G. PERHAPS A CO-WORKER WE CAN'T GET ALONG WITH

**E.G. FOR ME I THINK OF "HEARING LOSS".....I THINK OF ARTHRITIS THAT
SEEMS TO BE ADVANCING WITH EVERY BIRTHDAY.....**

**I'M SURE YOU CAN IDENTIFY YOUR OWN "THORN IN THE FLESH" -
PROBABLY MUCH MORE PAINFUL THAT MY OWN....**

**E.G. I THINK OF MY SISTERS AND THE HEALTH ISSUES OF MY BROTHERS
IN LAW.....**

I'M SURE FOR MY SISTERS IT IS A THORN IN THE FLESH....

E.G. PARKINSON DISEASE, ALZHEIMER DISEASE, MORE THAN 6 MOS IN A HOSPITAL WITH A CHRONIC RESPIRATORY CONDITION THAT LEADS TO SEVERE WEAKNESS - WHICH PREVENTS DOING THE NECESSARY SURGERY.....

I KNOW A NUMBER OF YOU ARE DEALING WITH SIMILAR SITUATIONS, EITHER YOURSELF OR YOUR SPOUSE OR YOUR PARENT OR YOUR CHILD....

A "THORN IN THE FLESH" COMES IN MANY FORMS AND MANY SIZES

WHAT IS TOTALLY UNIQUE IS PAUL'S RESPONSE TO THE "THORN IN THE FLESH AFTER HE PRAYS THREE TIMES, BEGS THAT IT MIGHT LEAAVE HIM....

THREE TIMESYOU CAN READ THAT AS MEANING OVER AND OVER, SEVERAL TIMES.....WITHOUT AN ANSWER THAT HE WANTED BUT THE FOLLOWING: "MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT FOR YOU, FOR POWER IS MADE PERFECT IN WEAKNESS"

CERTAINLY NOT THE ANSWER HE WAS HOPING FOR.....

AND CERTAINLY NOT THE ANSWER WE WOULD HOPE FOR EITHER....

BUT THE ANSWER THAT ENABLES HIM EVENTUALLY TO SEE THE "THORN IN THE FLESH" AS A GIFT.....

WHICH IS ABSOLUTELY AMAZING....WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT IT

A GIFT....REMEMBER HE SAYS...

"A THORN IN THE FLESH WAS GIVEN TO ME....."

AND THE ANSWER ALSO ENABLES HIM TO RESPOND "I WILL BOAST MOST

*GLADLY OF MY WEAKNESS, IN ORDER THAT THE POWER OF
CHRIST MAY DWELL WITH ME"*

WOW! QUITE A STATEMENT....

*AND "I AM CONTENT WITH WEAKNESSES, HARDSHIPS....AND
CONSTRAINTS FOR THE SAKE OF CHRIST; FOR WHEN I AM WEAK, THEN I
AM STRONG"*

WOW AGAIN!!!

NOT ANYTHING ANYONE OF US ARE OVER JOYED TO HEAR IS IT?

WHEN WE ARE HONEST.....ESP. ON A 4TH OF JULY WEEKEND...

WEAKNESS IS NOT VERY AMERICAN.....

WE TRY TO AVOID WEAKNESS AND HARDSHIPS AND CONSTRAINTS

ANYWAY WE CAN.....

LET US BE CLEAR ABOUT ONE THING, HOWEVER....

*PAUL'S CONCLUSION THAT HE IS CONTENT WITH WEAKNESSES, INSULTS
AND PERSECUTIONS IS NOT A BASIS FOR SOMEONE STAYING IN AN
ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP OR FOR THE VICTIM OF A BULLY TO STAY QUIET
AND PUT UP WITH BEING TORMENTED....*

*THIS CLEARLY APPLIES TO SITUATIONS - AFTER REPEATED EFFORT AND
PRAYER - WE CANNOT CHANGE IT AS HARD AS WE TRY*

E.G. A CHRONIC ILLNESS

THE CHALLENGE THEN BECOMES - CAN WE CHANGE????

CAN WE COME TO SEE THIS "THORN" SOMEHOW AS A GIFT??.

AND CAN WE SEE OUR WEAKNESS, OUR LIMITATIONS, AS AN

*OPPORTUNITY TO WELCOME INTO OUR HEARTS THE POWER, THE
GRACE, THE SPIRIT OF JESUS CHRIST - A TRANSFORMING POWER
A POWER THAT CAN TRANSFORM US, TRANSFORM THE SITUATION, AND
TRANSFORM THOSE AROUND US....*

A SURPRISING POWER.....

BUT IT USUALLY DOESN'T HAPPEN OVERNITE....THAT'S MY EXPERIENCE...

BUT IT CAN BE FRUITFUL TO CONTINUALLY PRAY IT OVER AND OVER....

ON A DAILY BASIS.....

CRYING OUT DEEP IN OUR SOUL, DEEP IN OUR HEART...

OVER AND OVER...

*"MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT FOR YOU, FOR POWER IS MADE PERFECT IN
WEAKNESS....*

*THEREFORE I WILL BOAST MOST GLADLY OF MY WEAKNESSES, IN ORDER
THAT THE POWER OF CHRIST MAY DWELL WITH ME....*

*THEREFORE, I AM CONTENT WITH WEAKNESSES, HARDSHIPS,
CONSTRAINTS, FOR THE SAKE OF CHRIST....*

FOR WHEN I AM WEAK, THEN I AM STRONG.....

AMEN....MAY IT BE SO