

Sixth Sunday After Pentecost

2 Cor. 12: 1-10

July 5, 2015

My Fellow Redeemed In Christ,

“No One Goes To That Restaurant..... It’s Too Crowded”; **“What A Pity That Youth Must Be Wasted On The Young”;** **“Deep Down You’re Really Shallow”;** **“I Know That I Know Nothing.”**

These Statements Are Known As Paradoxes....Statements That Seem To Be Contradictory Or Opposed To Common Sense...And Yet Are True. Here Is Another Paradox: Did You Know That Standing Actually Makes A Person More Tired Than Walking Does? Our Christian Faith Is Filled With Paradoxes. Our Lord Jesus Often Spoke In Paradox: **“Whoever Seeks To Preserve His Life Will Lose It, But Whoever Loses His Life Will Keep It’ (Luke 17: 33, Esv);** Here's Another One, **“Behold, Some Are Last Who Will Be First, And Some Are First Who Will Be Last” (Luke 13: 30, Esv).** Even The Gospel Is A Paradox..... For Us To Have Eternal Life...Someone Had To Die..... Our Christian Faith Has Many Paradoxes. And So In Our Text For This Morning The Apostle Paul Tells Us Yet Another Paradox ..That We Are **“Strong When We Are Weak”**

I. Now That’s A Paradox! Strength And Weakness Are Opposites. Who Wants To Be Weak? The Way Of The World Is To Be Strong, Independent And Self-Sufficient. Indeed, This Is Why We Don’t Like To Get Sick And Why We Dread Getting Old.....To Be Weak Is To Be Dependent On Others.....And We Don’t Like It.

A. And So It Is With God. People Think That They Are Strong When They Are Independent From God. Ah, That’s What The Garden Of Eden Was All About....To Be Strong And Independent From God. And We Have Inherited This Same Tendency Which S Leads To Self-Centeredness And Conceit As Martin Luther Once Said: **“In Short, The Misery And Woe Of Conceit Comes From The Apple In Paradise When Adam And Eve Wanted To Become Gods In The Devil’s Name. This Apple [Of Conceit] Still Lies Heavy In Everyone’s Stomach, Causes Constant Belching And Will Not Be Digested, For Even The True Saints Still Have At Least Something Of The Core In Them” [What Luther Says, Vol Iii, P. 1133, Cph, 1972].** Yes, This Apple Of Conceit Causes Us All To Belch At One Time Or Another. We Can’t Get Out Of Elementary School Much Less Junior And Senior High School Without Having Some Kind Of Superior Attitude Towards Someone. . Conceit Comes From Thinking That Whatever Is Good About Us Is Our Doing And It Is So Subtle That It Can Be Found In Something As Innocent Sounding As Saying, **“I’ve Worked Hard For What I Have.”** That’s Conceit? Well, Maybe Not From The World’s Perspective...But Notice That There Are Two References To **“I”** In That Sentence And Not One Mention Of God. It’s Not Quite The Same As Saying: **“God Has Blessed Me In So Many Ways.”**....But Not Even

The Great Apostle Paul Could Prevent This Belching Caused By The Apple Of Conceit.... And He Certainly Had Every Reason To Be Conceited. He Was Not Only Picked By Jesus To Be An Apostle But In Some Way Beyond His Understanding He Had Actually Gone To Paradise And Heard Things That He Was Forbidden To Repeat To Anyone Else.

B. And So In Order To Keep Paul From Constantly Belching Over The Apple Of Conceit God Allowed Satan To Afflict Paul With Something That He Called **“A Thorn ...In The Flesh”**. We're Not Sure What This Thorn Was..... Educated Guesses Are Poor Eyesight Or Poor Health. Satan Can Only Do What God Allows Him To Do. So Paul's Thorn In The Flesh Was Caused By Satan But Allowed By God. And Why Would God Allow Such A Thing? Paul Tells Us: To Keep Him Humble And Dependent On God Instead Of Trusting In Himself As Paul Says: **“So To Keep Me From Being Too Elated...A Thorn Was Given Me In The Flesh, A Messenger Of Satan To Harass Me” (V. 7).** And So It Is With Us. God Treats Us The Same Way By Allowing **“Thorns”** To Come Into Our Lives. What Has God Allowed In Your Life To Keep You From Belching The Apple Of Conceit And To Remind You Just How Weak You Really Are....How Dependent You Are On Him? Have You Admitted To God Just How Weak You Are? Have You Learned From Life's Experiences Just How Dependent You Really Are On God?

ii. So Here Is The Paradox. God Can Work In Our Lives Only When We Are Weak, Humble And Dependent On Him. If We Think We Are Strong Without God, Then We Don't Need God...And He Becomes At Best A Second String Player In Our Lives And At Worst...He Has No Role In Our Lives At All. And If We Think That We Are On Control Of Our Lives Guess Who Gets All The Credit And Glory? Well, We Do, Of Course. And This Is What Leads To Conceit. Paul Asked The Lord Three Times To Take His **Thorn In The Flesh** Away. Perhaps You Have Prayed Such A Prayer: **“Lord, Please Take It Away”**.....I Have Prayed Such A Prayer.

A. And What Was The Lord's Answer To Paul: **“My Grace Is Sufficient For You, For My Power Is Made Perfect In Weakness.”** In Other Words, **“No...I'm Not Going To Take It Away.”** And Why Not? Because This Thorn Kept Paul's Conceit Under Control By Making Him Humble And Dependent On God... And God Alone. That's Grace. God's Power Works In Our Lives Only By His Grace. And Grace Is God's **“Underserved Love And Kindness.”** The Key Word Here Is **“Undeserved”**. There Might Be Times When We Think That We Have The Favor And Kindness Of God, That Life Is Going So Well....Well.... Because We Deserve It...And In The Same Way When We Have Problems....We Can Complain....And Why? Because We Think We Don't Deserve Those Problems And It's Not Fair That We Have Them. But In His Love God Sends Those Thorns To Show Us Just How Weak We Really Are....He Sends Them To Keep Us Dependent On Him. And God Can Accomplish Many Things Through Weakness....And The Cross Is The Greatest Example. What Could Look Weaker Than A Crucified Man? Can You See Him There On The Cross In Your Mind?And Yet In The Weakness Of That Crucifixion God Overcame Satan, Sin, And

Death. We Do Nothing....We Only Receive What God Has Done For Us In Jesus Christ Through Such Weak Things As Words, Water, Bread And Wine. You See? God Can Work In Our Lives Only When We See Ourselves As Poor Miserable Sinners Unable To Do Anything About Sin And Death As We Confessed At The Beginning Of The Service: **"...And We Cannot Free Ourselves From Our Sinful Condition"**. Grace Is Seeing How God Works In Our Lives When We Have Run Out Of Answers And Solutions, Dropping To Our Knees And Seeking God's Help And Mercy. And Trusting In God.. As Peter Says In His First Letter: **God Opposes The Proud But Gives Grace To The Humble" (5:5, Esv)**. So Then As The Thorns Of Life Humble Us.....God Will Give Us Grace To Do Things We Never Thought We Were Capable Of Doing.

B. And This Leads To One Final Paradox As Paul Says: **"I Will Boast All The More Gladly Of My Weakness, So That The Power Of Christ May Rest Upon Me. For The Sake Of Christ, Then, I Am Content With Weakness, Insults, Hardships, Persecutions, And Calamities. For When I Am Weak Then I Am Strong."** Boasting About Our Weakness? Being Content With Our Problems? Easier Said Than Done. But We Are Either Boasting In Ourselves Or We Are Boasting About God In Jesus Christ. And The Difference Is Whether We Are Relying On Ourselves...Or On God. And To Be Content Can Even Be More Difficult. To Be Content With What We Have In Life....To See All The Good Things That We Have Instead Of Seeing What Do Not Have. Do We See The Glass Of Our Life Half Full.....Or Half Empty? And It Is Important That We Learn This Lesson Of Being Strong Only When We Are Weak....Because We Will Be Better Prepared For Death. On That Day We Will Be Weak, Not Even Being Able To Get Out Of Our Bed.....On That Day Everything That We Have Will Be Taken Away From Us... And Yet Because Of Jesus Christ We Will Be Strong...Knowing That Not Even Death Can Separate Us From God's Love In Jesus Christ Who Gives Us Peace With God Through The Forgiveness Of Our Sins And The Certainty Of The Resurrection From The Dead To Eternal Life.

Conclusion: **"Strength Through Weakness"** And So Jesus Says To Each One Of Us As He Did To Paul Long Ago: **"My Grace Is Sufficient For You, For My Power Is Made Perfect In Weakness."** Only Those Who Are Weak Can Know This Power Of Jesus Christ..... That's A Paradox. And This Lesson Is Not Learned By Reading Or By Even Hearing This Sermon.....This Lesson Of Strength Through Weakness Is Taught And Learned In Our Daily Living....Daily Experiencing The Thorns Of Life That Leave Us No Choice To But To Look To Our Gracious And Loving God In Jesus Christ. And We Know That We Are Learning This Lesson As We Boast Less About Ourselves And We Boast More About Jesus Christ.....And We Also Know That We Are Learning To Be Strong In Weakness As We Become More Content With Our Lives. And This Lesson Is Never Really Over....It's A Life Long.....But It Is Never Too Late To Start Learning. Amen.