

July 4, 2021

Texts: Isaiah 12: 1-6; 2 Corinthians 12: 7-10

Title: "For When I Am Weak..."

Today we celebrate Independence Day, the birthday of our nation. So, I hope you take some time to recognize and give God thanks for the blessings we enjoy as a nation. At a July 4th event, a young boy was asked to recite the Pledge of Allegiance, and he got all flustered and he blurted out, "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the republic for which it stands, **one naked individual** with liberty and justice for all." Well, "one naked individual" may be too much liberty for some of us, but I'm sure that this young fellow's heart was in the right place even if his tongue let him down.

But I hope we all will take some time today to consider what virtues have made our nation strong, and what obstacles make us weak, and what part each of us can play in building a nation that will last another 245 years. Our passage from II Corinthians is about weaknesses, personal weaknesses, health weaknesses. We all have them.

The apostle Paul had his weaknesses. One in particular, seemed to bother him which he called his "thorn in the flesh." There is thought that he could be referring to epileptic seizures. Regardless of what it was, he prayed that God would deliver him from it. Three times he prayed about it but God's answer was this, "*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.*" In other words, God seemed to be saying: "I'm not going to take this thing away but I will use your weakness to demonstrate my power." (How can God

demonstrate his power in your weakness?) So Paul learned not only to accept his thorn in the flesh but to see that his weakness could be used by God as a strength.

Our weaknesses, whatever they may be, can become our strengths, for one thing, **if they causes us to grow**. When we do the hard work to grow, with God's help, beyond our fears, beyond self-centeredness, beyond immaturity—then we can reflect God's glory. Someone once said that “God's glory may shimmer in our strengths, but it shines in our weaknesses.”

It's only human to pray for God to fix our troubles but what do you do when problems aren't fixed just like that? Does it seem like God is silent in your struggles? Ask Him to reveal Himself in it. Admit that the only way you will get through this is with God's strength. And look for opportunities to grow in courage and compassion and wisdom. Our weaknesses can become strengths if they help us grow and our growth, if they move us towards recovery, if they empower us to accept the pain but not let it stop us or hold us back. These are ways that God uses our weaknesses for his good purposes.

Most important, our weaknesses may become strengths if they remind us of our dependence on God. Perhaps if it had not been for Paul's thorn in the flesh, he would have leaned more on his own ability rather than the power of God working through him. And you and I would never have heard the name of Paul.

His weakness became his strength. His scar became a star. His hurt became a halo. And the same thing can happen to us—if our weakness helps us to grow, if it makes us more determined to succeed, if our weakness causes us to try new

things, and if our weakness causes us to rely on God.

God has the power, authority and mercy to answer our every prayer and take away our every weakness. He could make our life as smooth and comfy as a velvet blanket. Why doesn't He? Because our life is meant to be a reflection of God's love and power. And God's power is made perfect in weakness. May we have the faith to say with the apostle Paul, "Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong." Amen.