

In Memoriam + John Klinchuch

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

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Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

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The Word of the Lord from Second Corinthians, chapter 12:

And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Cor. 12:7-10)

This is the Word of the Lord.

God gives people all sorts of gifts for their vocations in this life, talents and skills and abilities. There is, of course, always the danger that gifts can be misused. Take, for instance, St. Paul. This was a man whom God gifted with an extraordinary intellect for matters of faith. As a Pharisee, Paul excelled above his peers in knowledge and zeal. He did, of course, use that knowledge and zeal to persecute Christians and try to destroy the Church; so the Lord had to knock him down on the road to Damascus and show him that, while smarts and zeal were nice, they had nothing to do with wisdom and faith. Paul believed, was baptized and became a Christian.

Paul retained his gifts, though now he knew the danger: there was always the real possibility that his intellect or the abundance of the revelations he received would go to his head and lead him astray; but the Lord was merciful to Paul. And in His mercy, the Lord allowed to Paul a thorn in the flesh, something that caused no end of trouble. There have been plenty of guesses as to what it might be, from remorse to poor eyesight; we simply don't know. But we do know that Paul didn't like it very much, and so he prayed three times that the Lord would take away this affliction. The Lord didn't; instead He declared, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Without the thorn, Paul was far more susceptible to pride in his own strength; with the thorn, that daily affliction taught him his limitations and need for the Savior.

Gifts of God for this life are good things, but there's always the danger that they will somehow distract us from our need for the grace that Christ has died to win. Weaknesses show us our need, which is why Paul said, "Therefore, most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." He then went on to make an even more unusual statement: "Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

Truly, our true strength lies not in us, but in our Lord. We keep this in mind as we gather this day in

memory of John Klinchuch.

John was a man gifted with great physical strength; and while you don't have to be extremely strong to be a farmer, it sure doesn't hurt. Tractors will get stuck in mud and engine bolts will freeze up. Cattle will get stubborn and there are always feed bags to move around. No, it doesn't hurt to be strong for a job like that, and the Lord gifted John with great physical strength.

I met John just a few years ago, after that strength had begun to wane-for that is what strength does in this world that is dying of sin. Sin seeks to take every good thing of God and reduce it to nothing. It delights to make keen minds feeble. It looks to reduce beautiful singing to hoarse silence. It seeks to reduce strength to weakness and loss. It doesn't play favorites: all have sinned, and so sin attacks us all. All have sinned, and so all eventually die.

In these past few years that I knew John, sin did its unholy best to rob him of strength. It lashed out to reduce his eyesight so that he could no longer see. It attacked via stroke to rob him of his mobility. It slipped its dagger into his kidneys so that they ceased to function correctly and dialysis became a regular, time-consuming bother. Sin sought to wreak its evil upon John's body, to leave him imprisoned like a Samson-blind, weak, lost.

Now, note how perverse this world has become. In our world today, such afflictions are blamed upon life: life brings about such problems and wears us down, it is said. And if life is to blame, then we run the risk of believing that death becomes the friend who delivers. But it is not so: death hardly a friend, but the wages of sin. Afflictions in this life are not caused by life, but are simply outriders of the grave, declarations that sin and death are most real. The devil would use such trials to convince you and me that God doesn't care, that His Son Jesus Christ has accomplished nothing by His death and resurrection. But the devil is a liar, and this is the Good News we proclaim this day: God's grace is sufficient for you, even as it was for St. John, the strong man of Kuna.

You see, by the grace of God, as these afflictions robbed John of his physical strength and health, they did not leave him doubting the Lord's presence and mercy. Time after time in our visits with one another, he would speak of his suffering. He made it clear that he certainly found no pleasure in the loss of his health, sight and mobility. However, he also freely confessed that these thorns had taught him all the more to trust not in himself, but in the Lord Jesus Christ, whose strength never falters; for, as John witnessed the wages of sin in his body, he came to appreciate and trust in the Lord of life all the more-and this was truly, solely by the grace of God. And this gift of grace and faith led John to speak of one more thing: he was ready to go. He was ready to go home. Although content to remain in this world and thus to remain the Lord's instrument, He was more than ready to be delivered from this world to everlasting life.

In other words, by the grace of God, John would boast in his weaknesses like St. Paul; because where he was weak, there the Lord was perfect in His strength and grace.

And the Lord was strong for John. Where John's health would fail, the Lord's Word did not. Christ Jesus had made John His beloved child in Holy Baptism, placed His name upon him. From then on, John was an heir of the kingdom of heaven, and it was only a matter of time until he ceased being a pilgrim on this earth and entered into that kingdom. Along the way, the Lord spoke His Word of Holy Absolution, continually forgiving the sins of His beloved child and keeping Him in the faith. Likewise, He fed John with His crucified and risen body and blood as John anticipated deliverance

to heaven. Like Simeon, John was thus visited by His Savior, and so with confidence he could depart in peace according to the Word of God; for his eyes had seen the Lord's salvation, and thus he was strengthened and preserved in the one true faith unto life everlasting.

The prophet Isaiah declares this wonderful news of deliverance in the 35th chapter, that in Christ, Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, And the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, And the tongue of the dumb sing (Is. 35:5-6). As Jesus came to redeem the world from sin, so He would remove its wages, and so He did: on His way to the cross, we read in the Gospels how He made the eyes of the blind to see, the ears of the deaf to hear, and the lame to leap for joy. As He did so for those whom He met back then, so also He does for His people today. So also He does for John. Delivered from this sinful world and all of the curse that comes with it, all that is left for John now is to see, to hear, and to leap like a deer. His afflictions are dead, never to rise again. John Klinchuch lives forever, because he is among those redeemed by Jesus Christ.

He and I spoke of Isaiah 35 more than once, even as we spoke of 2 Corinthians 12 often. We also rejoiced in the news of Revelation 21, where we heard the Lord declare this foretaste of heaven: "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new" (Rev. 21:3-5a). And so this is fulfilled for St. John of Kuna, for whom Jesus Christ suffered, died and rose again. The former things have passed away, and for those in heaven there is no more death nor sorrow nor crying. There are no more tears, but only life and health and joy.

We give thanks to the Lord for the gifts He bestowed upon his child, John Klinchuch, including that remarkable strength. And because such strength must inevitably fail in this world, we rejoice all the more in the Lord's declaration that His power is made perfect in weakness. There is no greater weakness than death and grave, but Christ has conquered both by His cross, death and resurrection. Therefore, He uses this last enemy-death-to raise up His people with strength and power unto life everlasting.

"O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (I Cor. 15:55-57) Thanks be to God indeed, because for the sake of Christ that victory is John's.

For the sake of Christ, that victory is yours.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen