



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

February 13, 2022

Pastor Randy Ott

6th Sunday after Epiphany

First Lesson: [Deuteronomy 30:1-10](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 37

Second Lesson/Sermon Text: [2 Corinthians 12:7-10](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Luke 6:17-26](#)

Jesus' Power is Revealed in Weakness

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus:
Amen.

In Christ, dear fellow redeemed:

When I was 17 years old, the day after I graduated from high school, I got on a plane with 12 other kids and a chaperone and flew to Europe. I lived in Berlin for three weeks with a family. I lived 100 yards from the Berlin Wall. It was still up way back then. I never worried about it at all. I rode bike all over town. And I remember sitting at a bus stop one time at about 1a.m. or 2a.m. waiting for public transportation. I wasn't worried a bit. It was a part of Berlin I had never been in but it didn't faze me or worry me at all. That was when I was 17. I'm not 17 anymore. The older I get the more I worry. The more I stress about stuff. The more I envision everything that could possibly go wrong.

A week and a half ago I went to St. Croix to see my son Tim and his wife Sheila. We were flying out of Chicago. Winter Storm Landon comes at the same time, so of course I'm worried about how *we're not going to be able fly out. This isn't going to go right. That isn't going to go right.* And I start stressing about everything under the sun that is absolutely out of my control. I have never been able to control the weather and yet I still worry about it all the time. We get there, we make it; we were able to get on the plane. But poor Paula, her flight got canceled. She had to drive through the night to get to the Twin Cities to fly out of Minneapolis/St. Paul at 3:00a.m. instead of flying out of Fargo. I don't think I would have been able to handle that. I would have gone home and crawled under my covers. But then she joined us in Chicago and we got there and everything went fine. Then I was stressing on the way back about what is going to go wrong and how I was going to screw up my negative Covid test papers. *I'll probably lose them and I'll be stuck sitting at the airport right there on the beach or something*

like that. I can envision everything that can possibly go wrong. I worry a lot more the older I get. It's not healthy. It's not good. I wish I could quit doing it. With the Lord's help, hopefully I can get a little better at it.

Maybe when Paul was first serving the Lord he was so wrapped up and so enthused in this knowledge that the God he had been persecuting came to him, showed him that He was the promised Savior and gave him the gift of faith that now he wanted to share that gift of faith with everyone. He traveled all over the world. And in fact, if you read through [2 Corinthians 11-12](#) earlier on than what I read to you today, he was talking about some of the difficulties he faced. He gladly faced them because he wanted to make sure there was more message of Jesus to more people more often. That's what he was all about.

I don't know exactly how long this was after Paul had been a missionary, but he had been serving the Lord for a while. Paul was getting older as a missionary and he was defending his ministry against the so-called Super Apostles in Corinth who were attacking Paul and said, "What Paul taught you was a good start. But we've got some hidden knowledge from God, which is way better, and we know more than that Paul fella." He was defending himself by talking about what he endured for the Gospel. He was defending himself by talking about these incredible revelations God had given him. Then he said "But I'm not going to boast in those." He was going to boast in weakness and he describes his weakness.

Perhaps as he got older as a missionary, he had this thorn in the flesh (which he called a messenger from Satan) that was sent to torment him. We don't know what it was. There are some different ideas. It seems to be a thorn in the flesh that sounds like some kind of chronic, physical problem. But the older he got he thought *if this problem was gone, maybe I could be a better missionary. Maybe I could serve Jesus more faithfully. Maybe I could reach more people.* So he says three times he pleaded with God to take that away. I wonder if the older he got he wasn't as focused on getting out and talking about Jesus and he started focusing more on himself and everything that could have been better. I don't know. Some think this thorn in the flesh might have been his bad eyes from when he was struck blind because at the end of Galatians and the end of the number of his letters he'll say "I write this greeting with my own hand. See what large letters I use. This is the mark of all my letters." The rest of the letter was dictated to someone else. Some think it might have been some of the physical ailments he went through that had lingering effects from his journey. He was beaten and left for dead a couple times. That might be the mark. But like I said, we don't know.

But he was convinced from his point of view that if this thorn in the flesh, whatever it might have been, was gone he could be a better missionary. ***"Three times I pleaded with God to take this thorn in the flesh, this messenger of Satan, away from me. God answered, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in***

weakness.” So I guess His answer was a big N and a big O: NO. “I’m not taking it away because you need to remember it’s not about you, Paul. It’s not about your ability. It’s not about the things you do. It’s about the things I empower you to do.” So the thing he thought was a hindrance he came to understand it was put there to keep him from becoming conceited by thinking that it was all about him. As sinful human beings, we’re not like that at all, are we? To start thinking it’s all about us, that the world doesn’t really revolve around the sun but it revolves around us. This weakness, whatever this thorn in the flesh was, he was convinced then it was to keep him from becoming conceited about all the incredible things God was doing through him and to remind him it wasn’t about him but it was about God.

The question now becomes, in our lives as a congregation and in your life as an individual Christian, where are you tempted to become conceited and think that it’s all about you? And where do you need to remember that your strength, however great it might be in any area, is nowhere near as strong as you could be when your eyes are on Jesus instead of on yourself. That becomes what is pivotal for us as Christians because **when I am weak, then I am strong?** That doesn’t make sense. I delight in insults and hardships and persecutions? I don’t delight in those things, unless my eyes are on the One I am willing to endure them for because I’ve been called every name under the sun and it’s not fun. But then you have to remind yourself; what did Jesus say when you are persecuted BECAUSE of the Son of Man? Not just because you’re a jerk, but because you’re doing what is right before God. When you suffer insults, persecutions, hardships and that, keep your eyes on Jesus and then He will give you a strength that is beyond your own. That’s a hard lesson for us Christians to learn because we’re still convinced it’s all about us.

Have you ever experienced that? Where you rely on Jesus and you look back at something and you wonder, *where did those words come from? How did I get through that? How did I do that? How did I share Jesus with that person that I was talking to because that’s something that really scares me at times?* Did you ever have experiences like that?

The last thing I wanted to do with my life was to be a public speaker. I’ve told you this before; I HATE talking in public. Ask me to emcee a banquet or something and I’d rather start my hair on fire and just let it burn. But preaching is different because preaching isn’t about me. It’s about Jesus. So have I ever had those experiences where I think, *where did those words come from?* Yes, I call it a sermon, every week. Quite often I don’t know what is going to come out when I stand up here and start talking to you. But God helps me to do it. Sometimes when I’ve been sitting in the bar in South Shore and I’m talking to someone who I see is hurting, they are desperately hurting, and they don’t know grace. They don’t know grace from the drink in their hand. And I get the chance to share grace with them, I sometimes think *man, where did those words come from?* I’m convinced that it ain’t just me because I’m not that bright. You all

know me. You've heard my English. You know I'm not that bright. God helps us, when we rely on Him, to do things we never think we could do.

The devil is going to be incredibly happy if you stay focused on yourself. If you stay focused on yourself, you're not going to put yourself out there and risk talking about Jesus with someone who is hurting because you might sound like a religious nut job. You're not going to put yourself out there and tell someone that what they are doing is wrong before God and you're concerned about their relationship with God because it might hurt your relationship and it's about you and your relationship, not that person and their relationship to Jesus. The devil is incredibly happy when you're focused on your own comfort and your own being at peace with everything because that means your eyes aren't on Jesus.

When we recognize that these things make us weak and these things make us uncomfortable and then we say "Lord, I need your help. Help me to do this. Help me to live for you. Help me to be transformed to be your disciple who lives for you, not just when I'm sitting on a red-padded cushion, but so I live for you every day of the week and want to do all things to your glory! Lord, help me to be that" and you keep your eyes on Jesus as you see the opportunities He puts before you and you seize the opportunities He puts before you to talk about Jesus, to share Jesus, to comfort, to console, to encourage, to show mercy, that's when we're strong. When it's not about us but it's about Jesus. It's not about my rights as membership (we'll look at that in Bible Class today). Man, do we have what membership in the church means all messed up.

We are God's gift to one another. That's what God says. When we rely on His strength, we can be a gift that transforms each other and the community as we share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He does the work. We are the conduits of His grace. When we focus on Him and not on our weakness, we can have a strength that goes beyond what we would ever imagine. ***Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine...*** ([Ephesians 3:20](#)). That's in Scripture. Do you really believe that? Or do you just say "Oh yeah, those are nice words"? If you're going to rely on His strength instead of focusing on yourself, He can do more than you could ask for or imagine through you! That's what He says. If you want to call Him a liar, go ahead. You're going to lose the argument. If you want to rely on His strength instead of your weakness, instead of seeing all the things that possibly can go wrong with connecting flights and the like, and instead look at Him and His love, we'll be able to do great things for the kingdom of God. That's His promise. Amen.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ([Philippians 4:7](#).) Amen.