

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Jun 20th 2015

“I will rather boast most gladly of my weaknesses,
in order that the power of Christ may dwell with me.”

(2 Corinthians 12: 9)

The Christians at Corinth were divided. In his letters, Paul ministered to this community in crisis. He established his authority as a servant of Christ but not in the usual way. From childhood, we learn to boast about what sets us above others: rich friends, winning plays, top ranking, flashy electronics, big houses, fast cars. Neither wealth nor powerful allies serve as Paul's credentials. Paul boasts in new and humorous ways. Speaking of himself in the third person, he acclaims the man who reportedly was lifted up into Paradise, where he directly encountered the mystery of God. But as for himself, it is his weakness of which he boasts. But who prizes loss and failure? This absurdity catches his readers' attention and we listen.

Jesus knows us well. Much of our time is spent worrying. War or economic struggle leaves us precarious. But even peace and prosperity do not stop the brain from sounding alarms about what might occur. We may mistake this vigilance for virtue. Jesus sounds like a flower child who tells this barking brain to cut it out. There is another way to live. We can taste the beauty of the world. We can see God's goodness in our faulty selves. We can seek the will of our higher power in what the day brings.

For some, the ideal of history is when each self becomes its own master. Kant recognizes the sublime in the moral law that each person legislates on her own. Autonomy is a great human achievement. But freedom means more than this. Jesus points out the bondage in making the self with its needs and choices the center of things. Being right and justified is not the furthest reach of being human. More important are faith, hope, and love. What is believed? Who is trusted? What is risked? Do I give myself to the one who is greater?

Along the way we hear that failure leaves us outcasts. So we flee it like the plague. Some are willing to admit: I would have acted differently, if I knew then what I now know. Few say: I was wrong. I lied. I manipulated others. Paul reveals his secret. In facing failure, we make room for God in our lives. At last we realize who is sick and desperate for healing. We are.

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