

Pentecost 6-B
7/4/21 CTK

Mark 6:1-13; 2 Cor. 12:2-10

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Amen

Carl Jung the great student of human nature said that there is part of all of us that we don't want others to see, that doesn't fit with our public image. He called that our "shadow self." Whether it's our vulnerability or our negative emotions so-called anger, fear, grief; or even just our own sinfulness. In his practice as a psychoanalyst he came to believe that if we can't accept that shadow part of ourselves, we are cutting ourselves off from part of who we are. But if we can accept our whole selves, it that can give us great strength, especially if we believe that God still accepts and loves us as who we are.

I think this is what Paul is talking about in our reading from 2 Corinthians today, when says "power is made perfect in weakness." "Whenever I am weak, he says, then I am strong." When he faced those parts of himself that he would rather not know about, God was there to forgive his faults, to wrap him in love and grace and give him he the strength he needed for the ministry to which he was called. Because he could never have that strength on his own. He famously said in Romans, "The good I want to do I do not do, but the evil I don't want to do is what I do." Wow!

Paul knew what he was talking about. After a career of persecuting Jesus' followers, the Spirit of Christ met him on the roadway one day and knocked on his butt, then picked him up and turned him into a great apostle. Told him in a vision "My grace is sufficient for you; power is made perfect in weakness."

So Paul could write "Whenever I am weak, I am strong." God was strong in him

I remember when I was very young going on a long train ride. It's a vague memory and I had no idea what it was about until as a teenager I went to visit my oldest brother. He joined the navy when I was about two years old. Part of the reason he left home was because my dad was a violent alcoholic back then apparently. On that visit my brother told me that about a year after he left home he came back on leave one weekend. He came the house he said and it was empty, nobody was there, except for my dad, who he found sitting in a chair in the front room looking out the window, sober. Sounds kind of eerie. What had happened was that my

mom had left my dad because of his drinking, taken me with her on that train trip to stay with my uncle Bob and Aunt Amy. He told me by the time we came back my dad was sober; had joined AA and quit drinking forever. I never saw him touch a drop.

He had hit bottom, the twelve steps might say. Or Paul might say he felt that “thorn in his flesh” as he says today. Paul had a “thorn in the flesh” too. I guess we all do. We don’t know what his was, but whatever it was it was the thing that reminded him all of his life that he needed God. Just like my dad, he had met his “higher power.”

Every three years all the clergy and deacons in the ELCA are required to attend what’s called “Boundary Training” – I went to one this week. We spend the day being put in touch with our own shadow self, or our thorn in the flesh, our own weakness: not respecting other people’s physical boundaries – if you are a hugger, for example, remember that not all people appreciate being hugged. The need to fix other people, solve all their problems for them. To be in control of everything in the church. Or to blab everything on social media - I don’t know enough about social media to do that, but for the younger ones, that part of them could be lurking there in the shadows. Our denomination understands that leaders need to know themselves, both the light and the darkness, the saint and the sinner, the strengths and weaknesses, in order to be strong leaders.

Carl Jung said that having a shadow self, just goes with being human, and Paul said the same in his own way. They understood that if we keep hiding or covering up our shadow and don’t face it and bring it out into the light, it will control us. And we will never know the selves that God accepts and loves even in our sinfulness.

But if we can embrace and love even our shadow selves and those of others and, God’s grace will be sufficient for us, and God’s strength will become perfect in our weakness.

And now that peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen