

POWER IN WEAKNESS

5th in a Series on "Spiritual Leadership"

Communion – February 6, 2011 – 2 Corinthians 12: 1-10 -- The Church of the Covenant

God is calling Moses to leadership and Moses is disagreeing with the Almighty. Its sort of like when the Nominating Committee calls you on the phone and says, "We believe God has called you to be an elder." We come up with the 42 reasons why that can't be – "I'm too busy; there must be someone else; I'm going through a rough time right now; certainly someone is more qualified than am I to be a spiritual leader in the life of this congregation." I've heard them all over the years. All of them are just expressions of our fears and worries and anxieties and weaknesses. When God says to Moses that he is to be a spiritual leader for his people Moses responds: *"Oh, my Lord, send, I pray, some other person."* (Exodus 4: 13) Omygod, please, please, please choose someone else! And Moses offers up his brother, Aaron, as an alternative. You should pick Fred or Betty for elder; they'd be better. Moses says to God, Aaron is the good speaker, not I, pick him. Moses says: *"I am not eloquent...I am slow of speech and of tongue."* (Exodus 4: 10) See, it didn't start with you, these feelings of inadequacy and weakness and feeling as if you are not entirely qualified to be a spiritual leader in the life of Christ's church. Its been going on for thousands and thousands and thousands of years...

You have heard the expression –**God doesn't choose the qualified; God qualifies the chosen.** Exactly. So God says to Moses –*"Who has made man's mouth?...Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak."* (Exodus 4: 12) There was a woman in a former congregation of mine who felt called to be a minister but kept putting off going to seminary because she was just sure she couldn't preach; she'd find excuse after excuse why she couldn't go; she delayed over and over again and when she finally went she once withdrew right before having to take her first preaching course. But in her field ed church she had to preach at least one sermon and she fretted about it for months and was almost about to leave seminary again and then she actually preached and realized what God told Moses thousands of years ago was so – "I (the Lord God) will be with you and with your mouth and will TEACH you exactly what to say and exactly what you shall speak. What is too difficult for God?"

Indeed, God chooses to pour God's power not through our strengths but through our weaknesses. It is when we know we don't have it all figured out that indeed God can act and use us in our life. It is when we are humbled and yielded and surrendered to HIM in our weakness that then we become useable and teachable and fit vessels for the Kingdom of God. Lord, just wait till I have all this figured out and THEN I'll become a leader. WRONG –if you wait to figure God out you'll wait your whole life and never do even one thing for the Lord. Lord, when I get more time THEN I'll step forward and I'll become a spiritual leader for you. WRONG –you're never going to then have enough time for God and by the way when you do step forward when think you don't have the time God will give you the time because God is not only the Lord of our Mouth He is also the potentate of TIME as well. Lord, I'm feeling down right now, I'm feeling weak, I don't have my spiritual act together yet, when I do THEN I'll live my life for you. WRONG –the Apostle Paul, no slouch in the speaking or spiritual leadership department for that matter says this –*"When I am weak, then I am strong."* (2 Corinthians 12: 10) When I am WEAK then I am strong –what kind of doubletalk is that? How can that be? That makes no sense, Apostle....What the Apostle means is this –when I am WEAK in my own self then God can use me and pour His Holy Spirit through me and have me be more and more led by the Head and Cornerstone of the Church, the Lord Jesus Christ. You know, all you have to do is to go through some trouble in your own life, some sickness, something you can't handle on your own, some issue with a loved one or a child, some problem, some issue, something that seems impossible or un-fixable. When you're in the midst of that kind of time GOD HAS YOUR ATTENTION. You pray more than you ever do at any other period of time. Our ego is

diminished and God is on the throne. The “I” of self grows small and the “Thou” of God grows large. When the “I” of self grows weak then it is the “THOU” of God can grow strong within us. We become just yielded earthen vessels, as the Apostle says elsewhere, malleable and useful and teachable, because we are more open to Jesus and more open to the Spirit of God. When I (everything that I think makes me smart, clever, wise, experienced, powerful, knowledgeable) is WEAK then God can use me and God (the Holy Spirit, the Living Presence of the Lord Jesus Christ) can be at work in, around and through me.

Through our WEAKNESS not our STRENGTH God pours God’s power out into the world. *“When I am weak, then I am strong”.* There is much debate in Biblical circles about what the Apostle Paul is referring to when he says: *“a thorn was given me in the flesh” (2 Corinthians 12: 7)* and whatever this “thorn” is happens to be the very thing that keeps Paul humble and yielded, weak in his own might that he might be strong in the might of God. Paul writes that he sought the Lord three times about this thorn that *“it should leave me”* and God heard his prayer but instead of answering it the way Paul wanted, God answered it this way: (the parenthesis around these words mean that the Apostle received these words as a direct word from God) God answered Paul’s prayer thusly –*“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Corinthians 12: 9)* The debate has raged for years and years about Paul’s “thorn in the flesh”; what was his particular weakness; some scholars argue that it was a physical infirmity, that Paul had bad eyesight and asked to be healed but was not. I am more in line with those who note that a “thorn” in scripture is always a Biblical metaphor for sin. When Adam and Eve are kicked out of the Garden of Eden it is then that “thorns infest the ground”. The crown of thorns plaited and placed on the head of Jesus on the cross as a symbol of our sin and shame was to be transformed by the power of His cross into a crown of victory. The “thorn in the flesh” was some unresolved sin of the Apostle that remained with him throughout his life to remind him that the Lord’s grace was sufficient for him and that out of this very weakness, through a humbled Apostle, God could and would pour His Almighty power. You mean, God can even take and use my sin, my shame, my failings, the things of which I am not proud of in my life, you mean that God can take even these and use them for His glory and can pour His power through my weakness. Yes, beloved, that is what Paul is saying.

Think about it. Jesus goes to the cross. He is naked and ashamed. Mocked by his enemies. Scourged and rendered powerless. He is seemingly a failure on Good Friday; the cross, the ultimate sign and symbol of human weakness. But God chooses to pour God’s power through the cross of His Son Jesus. God chooses to use what appears to be weakness to pour out all of His might and strength out into the world. Spiritual leaders, use your strengths and abilities for the Lord, to be sure. Ah, but also give God permission to use your weaknesses, your failings and your faults, for even these, poured out at the foot of the cross, can give glory to God. God can, *will* pour His Holy Power through our weakness. He uses everything; not one thing wasted. Everything we give and yield to Him He uses for the glory of His Son!

You know, Moses was slow of speech but it was He who brought down the Ten Commandments from Sinai and led the people through the wilderness and became one of the greatest spiritual leaders ever. It was Aaron, the eloquent brother, who fashioned the golden calf and led the people astray and away from God. Does God know what He is doing? When God chose Moses, not Aaron, God sure did. When He chooses you to lead may you trust that even those things that feel like weaknesses He can transform by His power and turn into glory for His Son, Jesus Christ. **Come to this table.** Lay DOWN your weaknesses and your failings and your sins at the foot of the cross of Jesus and just see what Jesus Christ can do. He will lift you UP! *For when I am weak...then HE is strong in me!!!!* Amen.

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IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!