

## Pastor Roy's sermon from July 8, 2018

The lessons this morning give us a message about trouble and failure leading us to grace and faith. The Spirit reminds Ezekiel to faithfully proclaim the message and not worry about the results. His job is to communicate, not to convince. The Spirit will do the convincing as the people make up their minds how they will live their lives.

The Psalmist cries out to God for mercy. It doesn't seem that this is the first time the Psalmist has called out for help. What if nothing changes? Will the Psalmist give up? Or might the Psalmist learn new forms of mercy? **Might the mercy be in the prayer? Might the seeking be the finding? Is the Psalmist learning that those who truly seek mercy have already found it?** In the psalmists words, "Have mercy upon us, O Lord, have mercy." The Jews were praying as they returned from exile, "Help us as we rebuild and rediscover our faith and community." We can pray the same.

On to St. Paul. He finds strength in weakness. He hears the Spirit of Christ saying, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Or, in other words, as soon as he sought grace from God, he received it. Grace brings freedom from debts, trespasses, shame, and anxiety. Of course, all that we do has consequences. We also live with the consequences of others' actions. But the love of God in Christ sets us free. Even from our stubborn pain and suffering caused by relentless shame, bondage to all of the shoulds and oughts which we have acquired from past relationships and experiences—overly negative views of ourselves. Not the kind of conscience that places us on the right path of faithful living, the kind that makes us powerless to do anything but fail, over and over again. I'm not good enough, strong enough, pretty enough, smart enough, old enough, young enough, enough like my sister or brother, on and on. Perhaps seeking and receiving grace in the same breath is the beginning of the undoing of those voices which do not come from God's Spirit. When we see and confess our weakness, it is the beginning of grace and humility. "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

On to Jesus. Early in his ministry, Jesus' healing and preaching tour comes to Nazareth. The experience is so bad, Mark doesn't even mention the name of the town. Jesus is amazed at the unbelief of his own hometown. It's not that they are

closed to Jesus' message of turning to God for mercy. It's that they knew Jesus before his quiet wisdom became public and his gifts became so popular. Who is he to tell them anything? And where did he come up with this stuff?

They were missing the point that weakness is the beginning of strength. That seeking mercy is the start of healing, freedom, and peace. Jesus was becoming great and they were being left behind. They were thinking strength was a rare thing that only a few special people might have. They were missing that strength grows out of weakness and need. Jesus, the Apostles, and Saints throughout the ages have learned and proclaimed that the more we are reminded of how great is our need and confess that, the stronger we become. Not the other way around. Humility, compassion grows out of deep struggle. It's not that we discover a secret greatness or faith, it's that all of our troubles and failures can lead us back to the God who provides for us all that we need from birth to death and beyond. The constant struggle can be the constant reminder that God provides mercy each moment we ask. The mercy is always there, we simply often fail to appreciate it and benefit from God's presence and love for us. So, each time you struggle, let that draw you back to God's mercy and peace. Our faith is strong when we are weak and allow ourselves to fall into the grace of God.

A Benediction:

May today there be peace within.

May you trust God that you are exactly where you are meant to be.

May you not forget the infinite possibilities that are born of faith.

May you use those gifts that you have received, and pass on the love that has been given to you.

May you be content knowing you are a child of God.

Let this presence settle into your bones and allow your soul the freedom to sing, dance, praise, and love. It is there for each of us. –Teresa of Avila