

We all have things we are good at, love to do and we delight in doing them. Then there are others things we almost run away from. I have shared this before but I will always remember Jeannette Cliff George sharing about her call to Christ and how she gave God two lists. One was those things she was good at, delighted in doing and would be more than happy to do them for God. The other was a list of those things she was not good at, hated doing and would probably run if asked. Her comment was that “as far as she knew God had mixed up the lists!” God calls us in our weakness.

Jesus was alone for forty (40) days in the wilderness, a place of temptation. He went without food, his strength was diminished; the NRSV says he is “famished”. He was alone for forty days without anyone to support him. Luke may want us to see the depth of his humanity: he was tempted during his weakest human hours. And the Tempter comes to tempt beginning with his physical need - food/bread. Turn this stone into bread, you know you can do it. Then the test for power and prestige — all the kingdoms of the world. Then a final test. “Do you really believe in God?” Prove it, jump. Jesus displays strength at his weakest moment.

Why this journey into the wilderness? Hebrews 4:15 notes that Jesus was tempted in every way as we are tempted. In all the temptations he found strength to overcome the situation. In our text today he relied on the power of the Word of God. He knew the Word so well he could not be tricked into a misinterpretation of it.

You recall Paul writing in Romans (7:14ff) about the struggle he has with temptation. Paul knows what he should be doing but he doesn't do it. What he does he knows he shouldn't do. Just can't pass up the second piece of pie. It looked so good. We have all been with Paul.

We all have places of weakness. Places where we are most vulnerable. Jesus was at the point of weakness. He needed his strength. He was alone. There was no one to support him and yet in those moments of weakness he found the strength, the empowerment to go forward.

Jesus experienced life. Life as you and I know it. We, too, have been in the wilderness. It was because of this experience, life - that he is able to understand and support us. He knew the loss of an earthly father, Joseph. He lived life as a teen-ager. He knows what it is like to be human. Betrayed by one he loved. Life is not easy. Don't let anyone tell you it is. Yes, we now and then get a day at the mountain top or a few at the beach to enjoy the sun, sand and waves of the sea. However, most of our lives are lived in the valleys. We return home to the problems. There are days when we long for light at the end of the tunnel and it doesn't seem to come. We don't want any more troubles, we have had enough. We grow tired and weak and in those moments temptations come.

Jesus found a strength to meet these moments. He came as an example for us and the strength he found is also available to us. We are not alone, there is one who understands. Dark days can make us stronger. We often look back and wonder how we got through those days, but we did. We had a strength, found a strength to bring us through. It may have come from others around us or from deep within our own being. But it was there and we are made stronger. It is not that we longed to go through those hours but when we look back we see how it has helped us become who we are now.

The strength came, love came. Jesus found his strength in the power of the Word. Not a bad place to start. But to find strength in the Word we must know the Word. It is often distorted by others. It was for Jesus a source of strength and encouragement. And, it is in our weakness that we find strength.

Where does our strength come from? We do not walk this journey alone. When we learn to “play well” with others we discover a strength in them. We build upon one another’s strength and they on ours. I recall a story (not sure from where) of two women in a nursing home, both had strokes. One lost ability on the left side, the other on the right. Both were piano players. A physical therapist had an idea and sat them at the piano. One played the notes for the left hand and the other for the right. Alone they would not make music but together they could make beautiful music.

When we admit we can’t do it alone, that we are weak we find the first step in finding strength.

We have a friend who ministered in a divided community and a divided congregation. They fought about everything. There were major divisions and little divisions. Some hardly even spoke to each other- even in worship. One spring there was a major flood. The community, their homes and church building were in danger of being lost. The only way they survived was in working together and helping one another. At their weakest moment they began to find strength in working together. And, the true miracle was that this lasted well beyond the flood, not only for days but years.

Jesus reminds us that in him we have the strength to become One. It is when we are the weakest that we are made the strongest. God even gives us the strength to love in the midst of weakness. A love that may seem weak but a love that will transform the world.

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NIV, New International Bible Society, Zondervan, 1973, 1978, 1985  
NRSV, Division of Christian Education, NCC, 1989