

Pentecost #6

7-4-2021

J.V. Trautwein, Pastor

Vicar Karen Pugatch

Celebrate (Introduction)

“Jesus does great deeds of power and give his disciples authority over demons. Yet none of this power is unilateral; it all must be received by faith. Jesus asks his disciples to go out without money or supplies, so that they will be dependent on how others receive them. When we are sent from the assembly to witness and to heal, we are asked to be vulnerable, to be dependent on the reception of others. The Spirit always operates in the ‘between’: between Jesus and his Abba, between Jesus and us, between you and me, between us and those to whom we are sent.”

We come together in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Opening Hymn: [“Before You, Lord, We Bow”](#)

Psalm: Psalm 123

“To thee I lift up my eyes,
O thou who art enthroned in the heavens!
² Behold, as the eyes of servants
look to the hand of their master,
as the eyes of a maid
to the hand of her mistress,
so our eyes look to the Lord our God,
till he have mercy upon us.
³ Have mercy upon us, O Lord, have mercy upon us,
for we have had more than enough of contempt.
⁴ Too long our soul has been sated
with the scorn of those who are at ease,
the contempt of the proud.”

Hymn of Praise: [“Blessing and Honor”](#)

Prayer of the Day

“God of the covenant, in our baptism you call us to proclaim the coming of your kingdom. Give us the courage you gave the apostles, that we may faithfully witness to your love and peace in every circumstance of life, in the name of Jesus Christ, Our Savior and Lord. Amen.”

1st Reading: [Ezekiel 2:1-5](#)

2nd Reading: [2 Corinthians 12:2-10](#)

The Gospel: [Mark 6:1-13](#)

Hymn of the Day: [“Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing”](#)

The Message: ([Video Link](#))

Being the Fourth of July, the celebration of Independence Day, I thought it would be appropriate to begin with an amazing against all odds story of sacrifice. The United States struggle for independence has many stories of sacrifice but one of the most important of these stories saved Washington’s army from annihilation almost immediately after the signing of the Declaration of Independence. It was August 27, 1776, during the Battle of Long Island that Washington’s army was being surrounded by a far numerically superior British army and navy. They faced an almost certain defeat. This would have caused the newly declared nation to be defeated without gaining its actual independence. .

The 1st Maryland Regiment of 270 men, commanded by Mordecai Gist, was chosen to be the rear guard to hold off the British so Washington and his army could cross the east river into Manhattan. Against all odds they accomplished this while losing all but 12 of their men. General Washington from his vantage point has been reported to say, “Good God, what brave fellows I must this day lose.” Washington’s army survived and the new nation given a chance to live. It is incredible that even though handicapped by being way outnumbered by the superiorly trained British army and navy, 270 men, with far less training and experience, saved the newly proclaimed nation. (A side note, the Maryland First Regiment originated out the London Coffee House in Fell’s Point.)

This story, although not given much attention as say the story of the winter encampment at Valley Forge, is the story which helped change the course of history. It is so often that important events throughout history have been determined by the most unlikely person or people with the handicap of overwhelming odds against them. In sports, Jackie Robinson’s odds to become an all-time star in baseball’s highly segregated major leagues was slim to none but he managed to change not only professional baseball but, to a large extent, all major sports. Politics aside, it was a man handicapped from polio and mainly bound to a wheelchair who led this nation out of the great depression, the dust bowl and through WWII- Franklin D. Roosevelt. Many of the most successful people who positively contributed to life had to first overcome the odds of being handicapped in one way or another.

The story of Christianity is not exempt from this reality. Our Epistle lesson gives a great example of this as Paul recounts his life. At first Paul’s life was filled with revenge to the point of him being a leading persecutor of those whom he believed to be heretics, Christians. Paul or Saul had become an obstruction in God’s revelation through Jesus. God then took this obstruction, this adversity to His message, and used it to his great advantage. Through the

conversion experience of Saul on the road to Damascus he turned this adversity into one of His strongest advocates of the Gospel of Christ. What would have been the odds for that happening? It was this conversion experience which Paul relates as being caught up into the third heaven and being given a glimpse into paradise for he came into the very presence of God.

Paul recognized this extraordinary gift that was given to him, which not everyone would experience. It was a personal revelation which was not to be denied. It was a revelation which he had the joy of sharing. He had to be extremely careful that this sharing would not be seen as being boastful for then the message, the revelation of God, would have been compromised. Since this elation of having the conversion experience could get out of hand and easily become boastful, Paul had to be brought into the realm of reality and not to think of himself more highly than he should. The reality check came in the form of a human frailty, a thorn of the flesh, a handicap, which would torment him off and on for the rest of his life.

This thorn, this handicap, evidently was one of extreme physical pain and would at times render him useless. Many theories are given as to what caused this severe pain. Some have said it was epilepsy, some said it was migraines, the brunt of persecutions, or eye problems suffered from the blinding light of his conversion. But, the most likely is that of a virulent malarial fever found in the eastern Mediterranean coastal areas. The headaches caused by this fever were said to be like a red hot rod being thrust into the forehead.

Here was this great missionary who accomplished so much in widely spreading the early Christian Church and he did this in spite of his reoccurring adversity, this weakness of his body, this debilitating handicap. To the contrary, the "thorn in his flesh" helped to drive him to his successful life mission. He could then point to the fact that with such an adversity it had to be God's grace which gave him the power to overcome it.

Paul even appealed to God to be healed of this dreaded condition but the response was, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." The ability to overcome the adversities in life is what gives life its meaning and the strength not only to endure but overcome. God's grace is always there to help and that becomes the strength in weakness. This allowed Paul to conclude, "Therefore, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ, for wherever I am weak, then I am strong." His strength is found in God's grace.

This is a great lesson for all of us, young and old alike. There are, and will be, times of adversity in our lives which will try our very souls. They may come in the form of physical pain, broken spirit, social rejection but, regardless of form, they will come. They may cause momentary failure, depression, anxiety or the feeling that they may be too difficult to overcome. But, if we understand that we are not in it alone and if we understand that God's gifts to us go well beyond the adversity or handicap, then we are on the road to finding strength to overcome all odds. It is through adversity and weaknesses of the body that we will

not only find strength in God's grace but we will find life itself. This is why it is so important to see all of life as a gift from God and all of life as another step towards the fulfillment of our being. Even through those bad times in life there is always the probability, no, reality, that good is present also for God says, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness."

To give in to adversity or handicap, to say this is too difficult for me to overcome or to let it become our pity party, is to lose life itself for we deny God's grace. Unfortunately, during this past year so many fell into this trap. Even more unfortunate and tragic is that many are not willing to guard against remaining in the grasp of the pandemic. In many ways we can be our own worst enemy by denying the realities of life.

The reality is that our lives are not without those times of adversity - that is life. To think otherwise is to deny reality. This denial only leads to heartache, a life full of misery, and hopelessness. We can never afford to roll over and play dead because that is where we just may remain. This need not be for we have example after example to show us otherwise. Needless to say we need not go further than the life of Paul. But, it is through God's grace that we will overcome the difficult times of adversity and weakness. Always be aware that it is through weakness and adversity that God finds his greatest opportunity.

Paul's life as he related it, gives us all hope that God has not and will not leave us alone but is there for us throughout all of life giving us the comfort and strength to overcome even the greatest odds which may be against us. To this end we have been charged by God's love to help each other to overcome the odds which may seem to be against us even if it may cause sacrifice. Just remember what those 270 men did to help us realize our nation's independence.

Anthem: ["O Freedom"](#)

Offering*: ([On-Line giving Link](#))

We give thee but thine own, what e'er the gift may be; all that we have is thine alone, a trust, O Lord, from thee.

The Prayer

Lord God of all, as we celebrate our nation's holiday of independence we are ever mindful that we as a nation and society are striving to overcome the pitfalls of our own making. May we find the will, courage and strength to bring equal justice for all. Open our minds so that we may not be blinded to truth and not what we wish to be true. Lead us out of our egocentric mindsets so truth will begin to bring us out of the quagmire of extremism and divisiveness so that the love you have shown reigns supreme in our lives and within our nation.

We pray for all who need your comforting and healing presence especially Bob and Pat Allen, Heidi Brackbill, Parker Brennan, the Cronin family, the Elshafei family, the Fultz family, the

Johnson Family, Robert Karner, Donna Mayhew, Wendy Neumann, Elise Oliver, Peter Olsen, David Otto, Dottie Reitz, Robert Reitz, Linda Rigby, Colin Shea, Jerry Shea, Jack Smith, the Spiegler family,, Della, Yongyin Sun, Esther and Buck Trautwein, Linda Williamson, Wyatt Lee Wolf, Pastor Jack,

We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen

The Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Lord bless you and keep you;
The Lord make His face shine upon you;
The Lord lift up His presence upon you and give you peace. Amen

And now my brothers and sisters
Live on knowing God's love,
The joy of living this life of love,
And the peace which only comes through the power of His presence within you.
So live on in Love, Joy, Peace, and Power.

Closing Hymn: ["O Beautiful for Spacious Skies"](#)

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Announcements

Services will be outdoors unless inclement weather conditions force us indoors. Face masks and social distancing outdoors are not required. An email will be sent late Saturday afternoons stating whether indoors or outdoors.

*Offering to be sent to:
Bob Brackbill
10274 Raleigh Tavern Road
Ellicott City, MD 21042

Epiphany Lutheran Church
9122 Sybert Drive
Columbia Hills
Ellicott City, MD 21043
<https://www.epiphanylutherancolumbia.org>

Please note that you now have the opportunity of online giving with the link found after the offering designation or here: https://tithe.ly/give_new/www/#/tithely/give-one-time/2627291