

Communion
July 4, 2021

“The Gift Nobody Wants”

Have you ever known someone who struggled with a propensity to unearned confidence and bravado? Someone who could talk a good game but lacked follow through? Will Ferrell has said that he made a career out of playing such people in movies. The church in Corinth, to whom Paul writes today shares some of this quality. They easily felt superior to their neighbor. They believed their faith gave them a pass on life’s thorny questions and challenges. Paul knew better.

Three times Paul asked of the Lord to remove his thorn in the flesh from him. I don’t know about you, but I have had challenges and threats I prayed a whole lot more than three times about, with no more benefit than Paul received...*if the only measure is if the pain or challenge is taken away.* And this is really the crux of this mistaken approach. We desperately want God’s grace and love to stop like Kevlar the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune which come our way.

Paul doesn’t seem to think so. Yet, the number of people who have had their relationship with the living God ruined by this Corinthian mistake is tragically large. *If we believe faith means life is going to be easy and we will catch all the breaks,* it isn’t long before we don’t believe in God. Perhaps because we ran into an overwhelming challenge we now find the whole idea of God feeling ridiculous - and perhaps because we did catch the breaks and we aren’t really sure there was a God involved in life going well.

Ironic really - a cosmic damned if you do and damned if you don’t. No matter what happens our relationship with God is a casualty because we started out with the assumption that God’s life being tied up with ours somehow means life should be, well, different.

The text goes on; “*My power is made perfect in your weakness.*” *This is how the power of God becomes the gift no one wants.* This is how the power

of God is the gift we can't live without.

Don't set aside the strengths God has given you for living. Don't go looking for weakness, disappointment, and challenge. They find us all. Ernest Hemingway observed, "*The world breaks everyone, and afterward, some are strong at the broken places.*" Even when we do it well, life is hard. But we can be open to the presence and purposes of God. Neither spiritual pride nor self-defeat leads us where we want to go. Yet, we seem to pick one or the other naturally.

Paul urges us not to imagine life will be too neat and clean. The choice we have is to discover Grace and possibility in the real messiness of this life. Let's reject the *Corinthian Conundrum*: if we fail God is absent - if we succeed God isn't necessary. Let's believe instead that, especially in our weakness, God's power is everywhere.

Back on July 4th, 1776, there were bells ringing throughout Philadelphia to announce that the Declaration of Independence had been signed. Kind of a funny day to celebrate, isn't it? The British were firmly in control of the colonies. As the bells rang in Philadelphia, the British were landing in New York. The English army was the most formidable fighting machine in the world. Yet, celebrate we did – and do.

We celebrate the date on which there was a whole lot yet to be done. All our forebears had was a declaration and the beginning of a plan. "Let's ask George, he'll do it!" And there was celebration.

Too often we have believed because there is work to be done - God is absent. Paul and the experience of our nation teach us to reject cynicism and believe the work can be worth it - that God is on the move. *God's grace is sufficient for us. Even if it's a gift nobody wants.*