

Strength In Weakness, Week 3 of “Stepping Into The Upside Down” Series

Presented by Rev. Kristen Lowe on 03-04-18
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2 Corinthians 12: 9-10 Mark 14: 32-40

He said to me, “My grace is enough for you, because power is made perfect in weakness.” So I’ll gladly spend my time bragging about my weaknesses so that Christ’s power can rest on me. Therefore, I’m all right with weaknesses, insults, disasters, harassments, and stressful situations for the sake of Christ, because when I’m weak, then I’m strong.

Mark 14: 32-40

Jesus and his disciples came to a place called Gethsemane. Jesus said to them, “Sit here while I pray.” He took Peter, James, and John along with him. He began to feel despair and was anxious. He said to them, “I’m very sad. It’s as if I’m dying. Stay here and keep alert.” Then he went a short distance farther and fell to the ground. He prayed that, if possible, he might be spared the time of suffering. He said, “Abba, Father, for you all things are possible. Take this cup of suffering away from me. However—not what I want but what you want.”

He came and found them sleeping. He said to Peter, “Simon, are you asleep? Couldn’t you stay alert for one hour? Stay alert and pray so that you won’t give in to temptation. The spirit is eager, but the flesh is weak.” Again, he left them and prayed, repeating the same words. And, again, when he came back, he found them sleeping, for they couldn’t keep their eyes open, and they didn’t know how to respond to him.

Lent is like advent. We get advent, looking forward to Christmas and the birth. However, the message of lent is much different, and much harder to understand. It is a message of suffering, of depriving ourselves, it is a message of looking into our own souls, it is a message of reflecting on our sinfulness it is a message of reflecting on our sinfulness, our temptations, realizing our weakness, finding strength in scripture, and ultimately looking to the cross of Christ and seeing our sin being nailed there. Our punishment being taken away by Christ.

To really prepare for Easter, to really prepare for that “hallelujah” on Easter morning, we must know what Christ did for us. We absolutely have to these 40 days as Christ walked those 40 days, we must identify with Christ in his walk, so that when we look to the cross during holy week we do not just see Christ upon the cross, **we see ourselves** and understand the price Jesus really paid for us. During lent, there are three things that each one of us should reflect on:

- **First** - we should realize our own temptations - and know that Jesus suffered temptations too. He was fully human. Weakness is part of the human plight.
- **Second** - strength can be found in scripture - as Jesus showed us by his example of turning to scripture as a weapon against temptation.
- **Third** - we should look to the cross - for it is there that Jesus takes all of our failings upon himself, and saves us from their burden.

Christ desperately wanted to help the poor and feed the hungry, and Satan tells him, “just look to these rocks at your feet, you can have bread for yourself and for the entire world, if you will just abuse your power this little bit.” Isn’t that the allure of sin... we believe that just dipping our toe in the water isn’t going to be that big of a deal. Everything Christ ever really wanted, on a silver platter, the fast track to achieving what he came to earth to do. Just for a moment. I want you to step into that situation and identify with Christ, even as he is identifying with you.

Imagine this is door number one being dangled in front of you... do this one simple thing and you will have all you want... the poor will be fed, the oppressed will be freed, everyone will love and worship you... it’s just a little thing, and really, you’re not hurting anybody, right? You’d accomplish far more than you can by doing it your way!

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Or door number two, where there is pain, rejection, everyone you love dearly turning their back on you, and to top it all off a very painful death - waiting for you on a cross. Door number one or door number two? Which do you choose? The easy path or the hard path? Jesus knew that in order to be strong, he would first have to make himself weak. And, he does that by being born in human flesh and making himself vulnerable to all the things we are vulnerable to.

Flash forward to Christ at the garden of Gethsemane. Remember how he prayed so hard that his sweat falls like great drops of blood, we hear him weeping, “Father, I don’t want to do this.” Hey, door number one looked downright wonderful.

Christ knows what it is like for you and for me, he knows the power of sin and the hold it has. And in our humanity, we are weak and can easily be pulled into trouble. He knows what it is like to have temptation drown your every thought and turn your every desire. He knows that it is a power we cannot withstand, control, or resist. And we need to realize the same thing.

The pull of temptation is a mighty and powerful thing that we often underestimate. Have you ever been there? Underestimating how powerful a temptation is?

Have you heard of great tuna run of 1998? You see, the tuna were running for the first time in 47 years, only 30 miles off Cape Cod. And they were biting! All you needed to catch one was a sharp hook and some bait. And the rewards for doing so were substantial. Rumor had it that Japanese buyers would pay \$50,000 for a nice blue fin!

That’s why many would-be fishermen ignored coast guard warnings and headed out to sea in small boats. But what these new fishermen didn’t realize - was the problem is not catching a tuna—the problem comes after they’re caught.

On September 23, the Christi Anne, a 19-foot boat, capsized while doing battle with a tuna. That same day the 27-foot boat basic instinct suffered the same fate, while official business, a 28-footer, was swamped after it hooked onto a 600-pound tuna. The tuna pulled it under water.

These fishermen underestimated the power of the fish they were trying to catch. They weren’t strong enough.

That is what temptation does to us. It takes us by surprise. It looks manageable on the surface. Only after we hook into it do we discover its strength, and by then it is too late. We find ourselves being pulled under. Here’s where lent ministers to our Christian hearts. When we realize our temptations, and admit them, we can finally face them. However we cannot face them alone. Using the illustration of the giant tunas pulling us under, I pull a quote from the classic movie Jaws “We need a bigger boat!” It’s name is “God’s word through scripture.” We are weak. But god gives us the power to be strong through him. And when that happens, others can see the power of god at work.

This is what we need to remember most this lent... Jesus didn’t take the easy road and give into temptation so that he could avoid the horribleness that awaited him. He took the hard road... giving each one of us eternal and everlasting life. We need to remember this truth as we walk these 40 days of lent... each day getting closer and closer to the day that Jesus died on the cross. And if we can identify with Jesus’ journey to the cross even a little bit, we will be able to experience the true depth of what happens on the cross, and then truly feel the power behind the joy on Easter morning as we declare “Hallelujah, Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed!” And that’s a strength that we can count on!