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Pentecost 7

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

## Jesu Juva

“Strength in Weakness”

Text: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 (Ezekiel 2:1-5; Mark 6:1-6)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

In our world today, to be weak is not good. It is the strong who are glorified and looked up to. Strong athletes, strong personalities, and strong wills, after all, are the ones who get noticed and get ahead. But what about before God? Is it not good to be weak before God? ***Must I be strong before God?***

Many people today are standing up to God and trying to be strong before God. Strong-minded and strong-willed. Some stand before God and question why He's doing what He's doing! As if they can somehow fully comprehend His ways, and think they have a better way. . . . Some stand before God and question the truth of His Word, preferring to believe what our world and society say are true, rather than what God has said is true. . . . Some, in all their wisdom, decide that abiding by God's Word and His Law and the way He said things should be, is inadequate. That they just won't be able to get where they want unless they go ahead and bend the rules a little bit. Unless they do what everyone else is doing. Unless they go along with the ways of the world. . . . But its not just *they*, is it? We do it too. In those ways, and others. Thinking that I have to be strong for God, and cannot be weak. My faith strong, my prayers strong, my life strong! For that's what He expects. And then He will reward me.

*“Strong is good; weak is bad.”* Its been so ingrained in us, that's how we act. That's how we react. That's the way we think. That's the way we are. And we're ashamed to be weak.

But that's not new to us and our generation – we heard it today as God sent Ezekiel to be His prophet to His people, but warns Him, ***“they are impudent and stubborn.”*** Or in other words, strong-minded and strong-willed. And we heard it when the people in Jesus' hometown reject Him. So strong in their wisdom and knowledge are they that Jesus simply cannot be anything more than ***“a carpenter, and the son of Mary and the brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon.”*** And not even word of Jesus' *miracles* could convince them otherwise! And so, ***“they took offense at him.”*** He was so ordinary. *Weak-looking.* Jesus' humanity was a stumbling block to them.

And so it has been all along. All of us, following in the footsteps of our parents Adam and Eve. The strength of our minds, our wisdom, our experience, our opinions; the strength of what seems to be right to us – standing up to God. Battling against God. Needing to be strong. Afraid to be weak. And that's sin, and that's the way we are.

That's why God's Word to St. Paul is important for us today. For there we heard not only something very different, but in fact, quite the opposite of all this! ***“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”*** . . . And so while the world, and Satan, and that little voice inside each of us is telling us to **strong**, and get stronger, and stand up for ourselves in strength – God is saying, **why?** That's *not* the way! That's not My way! In fact, your desire for strength is a stumbling block. Your desire to be self-sufficient is a stumbling block. Your so-called wisdom is a stumbling block. No. Rather, if you want to be strong, truly strong, then *be weak*.

Now, granted, at first hearing, on the surface, that makes no sense at all! And many (and oftentimes we!) take that position – that *strong* position, relying on what seems to be right for us – and resist this Word of God. Because **we know** its not going to work! :-)

But what God is saying here is *“Trust Me. Don't rely on your strength, which is really no strength at all! But rely on Me. Put your trust and faith and confidence in Me, and I will be strong for you! My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”* . . . And so to be weak here means to put your faith and trust and confidence in God alone. Not in your own strength. Not in your own thoughts and opinions. Not in what seems right to you. Not in your own will-power, or determination, or anything you can do. But in God alone. Even when you do not know where He is leading you. Even when you do not understand what He is doing in your life.

You see, that's what the people in the Old Testament at the time of Ezekiel couldn't do, and *the results weren't good*. And that's what the people in Jesus' hometown couldn't do, and *the results weren't good*. And that's what always happens when we try to be strong for ourselves, when we try to do things our way, when we hang a “Do not disturb” sign on our hearts and minds and tell God, “I'll handle this one.” *The results aren't good*. Oh, maybe we do get what we want in the short term . . . but what in the end?

No, God says. *“Be weak! For I am strong for you.”* For what is strong after all? Our wisdom or God's wisdom? Our inclinations and opinions, or His perfect Word? Our strength to resist sin, or His Spirit of power and forgiveness? To justify ourselves, or to

repent and receive His absolution? To be on our own, or to live as His children in Holy Baptism? To be self-sufficient, or to come to this altar each week weak in faith and sin and death, and receive the strength and life and forgiveness given us in our Saviour's body and blood? To come to Him needing nothing, or to come needing everything, and receiving it! According to His promises in Christ Jesus.

Now, you'd think with such promises – of forgiveness and strength and grace and all that we need – that this all wouldn't be a problem for us! *Being weak before God*. And yet, somehow, it is, isn't it? And it will *always* be a struggle. It is the struggle of faith against that sinful person inside each of us that is afraid to be weak and wants to be strong!

That's why as we gather here each week, we gather at the foot of the cross. We gather at this icon of weakness, humility, pain, and death. And we see *there – there is our God. That one there, hanging in weakness, bleeding and dying.*” **For me.** So that you and I may believe that **“God's power is made perfect in weakness!”** For in the weakness of the cross, God's power is brought to its goal and completion. For there, in weakness, our Saviour was strong. In humility, He was exalted. In death, there was life. And in defeat, He was triumphant! His curse was our blessing. His condemnation meant forgiveness for us. And so again and again, each week, we are brought to know, and believe, that it is better to be weak than strong before God. It is better to repent than explain. It is better to die and rise, than rise and die.

And thus living under the cross, under Christ **for you**, you do not have to fear being weak. To forgive and not hold grudges. To admit being wrong. To not demand from others, but do for others. To love and not hate. To not take control. To honor and serve. And boast in nothing but the grace and forgiveness of your Saviour. . . . In all of that the world sees weakness and so avoids doing those things! But here, it is different. For what looks like weakness is really not weakness at all – **but faith**. Faith which knows that God's grace in Christ Jesus is sufficient for us; that when we are weak, Christ is strong in us; and that as long as we live in this world, we live under the cross. And that there is no better place to be.

For I am weak. It is true. But the forgiveness and strength of the One once crucified, but now risen from the dead in glory, who lives and reigns to all eternity – He is my strength. And not only now, but forever. In Him, I have nothing to fear. In Him, *its good to be weak!*

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds

through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.