

Title: A Spirituality Grounded in Our Humanity

Subtitle: God's strength perfected in weakness

Video URL: <https://youtu.be/Kt1MQHVRPuU>

Our Gospel today opens with Jesus coming “...*to his hometown.*”¹ Coming home is a popular experience, especially during the Fourth of July weekends. In years gone by, when my parents were still with us, about 80 to 90 of my family and distant relatives gathered together on this holiday to celebrate not only our nation's independence but also our family roots in America, which can be traced back to the mid-1700s. With all of the festivities that our reunions represented, there have always been some ambivalent feelings lying not far from the surface.

Families know a lot about each other, both the good and the bad. My father, for example, relished telling stories about my mischievous behavior as a child. Then there were my five brothers, with whom there was always a sense of competition in the form of who was doing better than the next. In that respect, I was always regarded as “the poor one” in the family. Choosing to serve the Lord early in my life meant that there were sacrifices made, especially when it came to acquiring wealth.

At first, I was embarrassed, always feeling like I was not the best provider. But later, I discovered how those sacrifices paid off when it came to building lasting and life-fulfilling relationships.

There were, of course, other comparisons that were also painful, but in looking back, I can see how God had a way of redeeming everything in my life, even things that I once despised about myself, as a way of forging humility and building character.

The same is true for our nation. We live in an age where some people would like to rewrite our nation's history due to the obvious blemishes of racism and slavery. But instead of rewriting history, I think it is helpful to

¹ Mark 6:1

go back and learn from it as much as we can. For example, at the first Constitutional Convention, which took place in 1787, a frail eighty-one-year-old man rose to seek recognition. In his speech to our nation's leaders, he said,

At the beginning of the contest with Great Britain, when we were sensible of danger, we had our daily prayer. . . . Our prayers, sir, were heard, and they were graciously answered. All of us who were engaged in the struggle must have observed frequent instances of a superintending Providence in our favor. . . . I have lived, sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth: that *God governs* in the affairs of men. If a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid? I believe that without His concurring aid, we shall succeed no better than the builders of Babel. We shall be divided by our partial, local interests; our projects will be confounded . . . I move that we pray.”

The author of that motion was none other than Benjamin Franklin, and the chairman of the Constitutional Congress was George Washington. The motion was passed, and prayers were said then and at subsequent meetings.

The secret of the greatness of our nation has been its dependency on the sovereignty of God. Our nation, at its conception, was very aware of its humble circumstances as they faced formidable odds in its quest for independence and freedom.

Jesus, too, had humble beginnings, and some, in his hometown, could never let him forget it. They were accustomed to seeing Jesus only in ways that they had always known him. They exclaimed, “*Is this not the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?*”² Their prejudices limited him to such a degree that they “*took offense at him.*”³ The original word, “to take offense,” comes from the Greek word from which the

² Mark 6:3

³ Ibid.

English word “scandal”⁴ is derived. His fellow townspeople were repelled and even offended at the idea that Jesus might be uniquely special, regardless of his wisdom or how well he spoke in the synagogue that day. He was too ordinary to be considered as anything other than ordinary.

“Then Jesus said to them: ‘Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.’ And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief.”⁵

The Apostle Paul also had a similar reaction from the people in Corinth. They were so busy judging and comparing his outward appearance with others who commended themselves that they couldn’t hear the Gospel his life represented. Paul takes advantage of their scornful attitude and admits how his thorn in the flesh may have caused their disdain. But he also explains the good that came from such an infirmity. It not only prevented him from boasting but it also gave him an opportunity to trust in God’s power to help him. Therefore, from a prophetic point of view, his torn, no matter how painful, was a blessing. He naturally wanted deliverance from its painful effects, but God spoke to him and said, ***“My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.”***⁶

Offering such insights is what prophets do. They take present circumstances and painful situations and point out how God may want to use those very things to get our attention and cause us to hear something that we usually don’t want to hear. In a similar way, Paul came to the church at Corinth, speaking the truth they needed in ways that were startling and upsetting. Yet, when received with meekness, his words imparted a new way of seeing everything.

We all have things in our lives that are hard to look at. Yet when the darkness that lies beneath the surface is exposed, healing can take place. In my own experience, this is precisely where the supernatural begins to break

⁴ Strong’s Concordance, #4624, *skandalizomai*, cause to stumble and become indignant, shock, or offend.

⁵ Mark 6:4-6

⁶ 2 Corinthians 12:9

into the natural. And when it does, something entirely new and unexpected comes forth.

You may have noticed that I try to share personal stories from my life each week in my sermons. The risk I take in exposing some of my foibles is that some may think less of me. But, I am a firm believer that my spirituality is grounded in my humanity.

The truth of God will always reveal our faults, failures, and weaknesses. But the cross of Christ liberates us from the fear of that exposure. Therefore Paul boldly affirms, ***“this is a faithful saying, worthy of all to be received, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst.”***⁷ Paul didn’t hide from his sinfulness because he knew that in Christ, he was redeemed. This humble admission also kept him from boasting. In his epistle to the Galatians, Paul exclaimed, ***“May I never boast except in the cross of Christ.”***⁸ The cross breaks the prideful power of the world over us and within us, and it gives us the freedom to accept ourselves regardless of what others may think. We are redeemed, sinners. The Apostle John described this transformation when he wrote, ***“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God. And that is what we now are. The reason the world does not know us is that they did not know him.”***⁹ Such prophetic insights allow us to see ourselves in the light of who God has made us. We are no longer sinners who have been forgiven, but we also saints. Saints who are saved alone by grace, with nothing to boast about except the love and unmerited favor of God.

So may this acknowledgement be our boast. And when we see our weaknesses, let’s view them as a call to prayer. And when we see our country’s weaknesses, present or past, may we also view them as a call to prayer. Let us pray that God may build this nation and uphold and strengthen us so that we may bring him glory. In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

⁷ 1 Timothy 1:15

⁸ Galatians 6:14

⁹ 1 John 3:1-2

Reflection Questions:

- What might it look like for us to be disrupted by Jesus' prophetic ministry in the hometown of our lives?
- What are the weaknesses in your life that cause you to see your dependence upon God?