

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 9 Yr B: July 9, 2006: Ez. 2:1-7; Psalm 123; 2 Cor. 12:2-10; Mark 6:1-6

As I watch the commercials on television and see the ads on billboards and even in the television programs themselves—over and over again the message is: You must be powerful, you must be successful, if you are to show your worth and value then you will have to come out on top—no matter what the cost.

A new season of the popular virtual reality show “Big Brother” has just begun. This is a program where 14 strangers live in a house on a movie lot for about 3 months; shut away from the world and each week they vote someone out of the house until only 2 remain and then the final winner is arrived at by a variety of sources, I think they generally allow the viewing audience to make the final decision along with those houseguests who have been evicted previously. This season, is an All-Star program, where they have brought back 14 former houseguests, decided by the viewing audience from a pool of 20 possible. While I haven’t seen all of the former programs, the one thing that is different this time is that there isn’t much time for getting acquainted before the backstabbing and manipulating begins, after all \$500,000.00 is at stake. On the opening night of the program people were already jockeying for position and trying to wield their power of persuasion to their advantage and to turn the house against a couple of players in order to advance themselves in the eyes of the community present. Well, it didn’t work, in fact it backfired—the person who was doing this ended up being the one who was nominated for eviction and now will have to win a competition in order to try to win the ability to remove herself before she is voted out of the house.

Well, I am sure you are wondering why I am sharing all of this trivial info about a silly tv program with you. I do this because it says so much about how we, as a society, have come to think. We have been convinced that the important thing in life is to be first, to be the most powerful, the most beautiful, the wealthiest, the thinnest, the most successful and the cost is irrelevant in terms of relationships or anything else.

So here we arrive today and we hear the apostle Paul tell us that he too has and does struggle with his former afflictions and because of this he believes that his temptation or thorn as he calls it, serves a very useful purpose—it keeps reminding him that alone he really has no power. He doesn’t arrive at this conclusion alone, it comes from asking God to remove the thorn at least three times and the message he received from God was that “Nope! It stays! God’s grace in all things is all Paul need be concerned about, besides, because of Paul’s affliction—God’s power is made evident.”

Here is Paul, a powerful man among the Pharisees. He had been a man feared by Christians and Jews alike because of the power and authority he had attained. Here is a man who had perfected his manner of living and finds himself now in need of being thankful for and in fact bragging about his weaknesses, silently standing by and allowing others, of lower social standing and higher social standing to sling insults at him; he is happy for the hardships he faces, the persecutions he may have to endure and the calamities that are part and parcel of being a follower of Christ, Paul understands that when he has the courage to allow all of who he had come to believe he was is allowed to be put aside, then God can take all of those qualities that the world deems as useless and a sign of a wimpy human being and make them powerful tools for the kingdom of God.

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Now there is a statement that runs completely counter to what the world expects of us—“Power is made perfect in weakness”.

Letting Go and Letting God is a statement that has been encapsulated in 12 step programs of recovery—the power in allowing ourselves to admit our weakness in order to gain strength over them has saved many a life that was headed for destruction.

I'll say it again—“the power in allowing ourselves to admit our weakness in order to gain strength over them has saved many a life that was headed for destruction.

You see, we are a lot like the houseguests on Big Brother—we may begin our journey together meek and mild, but soon we too begin to seek the things that make us feel as though we are on the top of the heap of society and the view we have often does not include one of being a person who is content to be weak or insulted or a person who is inflicted with hardships or persecutions or calamities. You see we do not really believe that when we are weak—then we are strong. That is counter to what we have been taught, that is counter to what we have witnessed of successful people in the world.

But the reality is that our weaknesses, that go unrecognized can and do often become the point where our lives take a turn toward those things that are not loving or life giving. When we fail to see those parts about ourselves that can derail us we will step right into them and justify it anyway we can. If we fail to see that we are prone to gossip and justify it by saying we just trying to make people understand us. If we fail to see we are prone to being more concerned with what people think, than doing what is right we can become victims of our own power and strength.

Jesus was the powerful omnipotent, omniscient creator enfleshed and yet allowed himself to be ridiculed, humiliated and killed in the most dreadful manner known so that he might show how God's power is ultimate. He emptied himself in order for God's will to be fulfilled—no matter what it cost him personally.

Are we able to allow our weakness to show, so that God's power can be evidenced to the world. Remember what you recall most about Paul. What he is most remembered for is his ability to say to the world—‘Hey, I was wrong—Jesus Christ is the Son of God’ I was a terrible person and I am thankful that God showed me my faults and weaknesses so that I might live in him and he in me.

Amen.