

Our scripture passages for today, for those listening later online, are Ezekiel 2:1-7, Psalm 123, 2 Corinthians 12:1-10, Mark 6:1-6

I have to say something about the beginning of 2 Corinthians 12. Starting in verse 2 Paul says, ***“I was caught up into the third heaven fourteen years ago. Whether my body was there or just my spirit, I don’t know, only God knows.”***

If you have a question about these verses, I highly suggest that you hold on to them for just 1 week and ask Pastor Brook next week. Just a suggestion, do what you want. 😊

But that chapter continues and we have some of the most well known verses in Scripture. Starting in verse 7, Paul tells about a ***“thorn in his flesh”***, and how despite begging 3 times for it to be removed, the Lord answers, ***“My gracious favor is all you need. My power works best in your weakness.”*** And then Paul writes, ***“So now I am glad to boast about my weakness, so that the power of Christ may work through me.”***

“Since I know it is all for Christ’s good, I am quite content with my weaknesses and with insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

After those tough verses on giving last week, I'm glad this week are the easy ones. ;)

Do you like slogans? I don't know what it is about me, I don't remember them very well. I guess there are a few, like Nike's 'Just do it.' Or anyone remember this one, "Share moments. Share life." (Kodak). "When you care enough to send the very best." (Hallmark). "Finger lickin' good." (KFC)... okay, enough with our Sunday game show....

But when I saw the end of our Epistle reading, Paul writing, "***I am quite content with my weaknesses and with insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.***", I thought, this would make the worst slogan ever. Really, if I wanted to give some bad advice for the communications committee, I'd say, on all promotion material let's say that we are content with our weaknesses, with insults, with hardships, with persecutions, and calamities... I'm sure that would go over well.

But I've always liked these verses, well.... In my head I did, but in my life, I really have never wanted to live them out.

And so I tried to look back at the verses before to see the total context that we have here and we see this speech that Paul starts at the beginning of chapter

11, where he is bouncing back and forth (and you have to read chapter 11 for the full context), but he is bouncing back and forth between saying that he could boast about how great he is, how he has every right to boast and he uses the term, boasting in the flesh and how even in persecution he has the right to boast. But then bouncing back and forth to talking about how foolish it would be to do so.

And as he does this, he shares with us that God has given him this thorn in the flesh to keep him from getting “puffed” up, and through it the Lord has taught that the Lord’s gracious favor is all he needs, that the Lord’s power works best in Paul’s weakness... and because of that, he can be content in anything.

So we see, these verses that I say I like in my head, but don’t really want to live out are the antithesis of **pride**, of thinking too highly about ourselves.

We see warnings of pride in the other readings this morning as well. Our passage in Ezekiel said that the people would not listen because they were completely rebellious. Our Psalm referenced the *derision of the proud*. In our Gospel reading we saw that the people’s unbelief caused them to miss out on who Jesus was and what he was doing and I think their words, “*He’s just a carpenter,*” points to the sin of pride.

Scripture tells us that God hates pride. In Proverbs 8:13 we read, ***“All who fear the LORD will hate evil. Therefore, I hate pride and arrogance, corruption and perverse speech.”*** We also read in Proverbs 16, ***“Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”***

As I looked through Scripture I saw the destructiveness of pride. I saw that pride hinders prayer. I saw how conflict arises from pride. How gossip is the result of pride. I saw how pride led to deceit, how it leads to shame.

And yet, I have a hard time getting my head around pride. I do a good days work and I say, I’m proud of myself. If I’m disciplined and accomplish a goal, I have pride in that. Is it wrong to tell a friend, a loved one that you are proud of them for accomplishing something? I struggled to put this together with Scripture’s message against pride.

And as I looked, I saw how tricky it can be, how insidious pride can be. We see the Pharisee pray in Luke chapter 18, ***“I thank you, God, that I am not a sinner like everyone else.”*** And what do I think? “Whew! Glad I’m not like that Pharisee!” You know, the one who was glad he was not like someone else. In preparing for this sermon, I saw the pride in myself of realizing that if these verses had not be preselected for this day, I would have just dug out my favorite two

sermons that I've preached before. And by favorite, I mean the ones that I got the most kudos for.

So, I had to dig deeper. What does this word mean? How else is it used in Scripture? Are there positive uses of it?

I learned that in Hebrew, there are 10 different words for pride. In Greek, 2.

I looked and saw certain words used often when the word pride is used. Words like haughtiness, and arrogance. And I learned that these words are often there to give us the fuller context of the Hebrew or Greek word being used.

And then I looked, and saw the words pride and proud used in positive contexts, even in 2 Corinthians, just a little earlier.

*In 2 Corinthians chapter 7 we read, "**Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God. Open your hearts to us; we have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have taken advantage of no one. I do not say this to condemn you, for I said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together. I have great confidence in you; I have great **pride** in you**" (2 Corinthians 7:1-4 RSV)*

*In 2 Corinthians chapter 5 we read, "We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to be proud of us, so that you may be able to answer those who pride themselves on a man's position and not on his heart."
(2 Corinthians 5:12 RSV)*

How do I put this in perspective? How do I understand good pride versus evil pride that God hates?

And then I stumbled upon a truth that I was probably told at some point, but the weight of it didn't hit me before. And that is, the first sin we have recorded against God is the sin of pride. Did your minds go straight to the Garden of Eden? Let me take you back further, when Lucifer, in pride, rebelled against God.

Our Old Testament reading today was from Ezekiel, and while later in Ezekiel we see references to Lucifer, I want to take you to Isaiah, chapter 14. Here we see the pride of Lucifer, his sin against God, expressed in his desires. Theologians refer to this as Lucifer's 5 "I will's".

I WILL ASCEND INTO HEAVEN.

I WILL EXALT MY THRONE ABOVE THE STARS OF GOD.

I WILL SIT ALSO UPON THE MOUNT OF THE CONGREGATION.

I WILL ASCEND ABOVE THE HEIGHTS OF THE CLOUDS.

I WILL BE LIKE THE MOST HIGH

Do you notice something about his words? First, they are his desires to have what is not his. But something I noticed for the first time, **they all have to do with a physical position, an outward status or condition.**

This fits how we often see the Bible use the word pride, as substituting our own authority, our plan, our greatness, our human goodness in place of God's.

And this got me thinking, when in scripture do we see the words, "I will" in a positive light. There are many times from God, but He isn't the one suffering from pride so I wanted to see when did people use it?

And I read in Psalm 34, ***"I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth."***

And in Psalm 138, ***"I will praise thee with my whole heart."***

Psalm 9, ***"I will give thanks to the LORD with all my heart"***

Psalm 18, ***"I will love thee, O Lord, my strength"***

And what I noticed was these “I will’s”, these ones that are not full of haughtiness, arrogance, and pride, **they all have to do with a spiritual position, an inward status or condition.**

And then I could finally understand Paul at the end of 2 Corinthians when he said, ***“I am quite content with my weaknesses and with insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”*** For his contentment didn’t come from status, or power, or even physical comfort. But the understanding, the awareness, the experience that God’s gracious favor is all he needed, all we need. That God’s power worked best in his weakness, in our weaknesses. To be content as Paul was content, that is not pride, that is humility, and I love this quote from Scottish missionary to South Africa, Andrew Murray.

“Humility is perfect quietness of heart. It is to expect nothing, to wonder at nothing that is done to me, to feel nothing done against me. It is to be at rest when nobody praises me, and when I am blamed or despised. It is to have a blessed home in the Lord, where I can go in and shut the door, and kneel to my Father in secret, and am at peace as in a deep sea of calmness, when all around and above is trouble.”

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.
