

Proper 9b: 7/8/18
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*Paraphrased from our namesake, St. Paul's,
Second Letter to the Corinthians:
God's grace is sufficient for us;
God's power is made perfect in our weakness.*

The parents who've lost a child
rush to comfort total strangers who experience
that same unspeakable tragedy.

The person who's relied on prayers of healing
just to get by week to week
offers them most passionately on behalf of others.

The child who knows what it's like
to be one of the last kids picked for the team
reaches out to the new kid.

The recovering alcoholic sponsors others in need of recovery.

It doesn't always work out this way.
When bad things (inevitably) happen,
we can choose to be bitter,
to draw in upon ourselves or lash out in anger.
But it also happens –
by the grace of God, I'd like to think it happens more often than not --
that those who've been profoundly hurt in some way
come out of that very place to help others.

Does this mean that God wills bad stuff --
hoping upon hope that some good will somehow come out of it?

NO. I don't believe for one minute that God is so conniving
as to wish suffering on anyone.

I do believe that God is so strong and loving
as to uphold us whatever befalls us.

I do believe that God is so kind and merciful
as to forgive us the consequences of whatever lousy choices we make.

I do believe that God is so wise and creative
as to take whatever mess we're in and help us dig our way out of it
(maybe even helping us learn a little something along the way.)

God heals, transforms and redeems all things. Even us.

Because God understands we're mere mortals
as it's said repeatedly in that first reading from the prophet Ezekiel.
It's not that God is sending out Ezekiel because he's perfect.
By telling him to "stand up on his feet"
it's pretty clear God knows that Ezekiel has fallen flat on his face.

Yet the Lord God knows exactly what he's getting into
by sending out this mortal Ezekiel.
Because, really, who else is there?
Who else to rally God's people from defeat and despair
than someone who's "been there"?

So stand up, says the Lord God to Ezekiel.
Don't be afraid, O mortal.

Even Jesus seems to have a little crisis of confidence
in today's gospel when he returns to his hometown.
On one hand, they're astounded by his teaching.
On the other, not so much . . .

Never mind that Jesus, as we heard last week,
has just restored a 12-year-old girl to life and
healed a hemorrhaging woman by the touch of this garment.
Rather than being impressed, the folks back home
wonder if he's gotten "too big for his britches".

This becomes the occasion for Jesus to utter
that oft-quoted saying
about a prophet not being without honor in his hometown.
Otherwise, he doesn't much pause to lick his wounded ego.

Because although Jesus is a mortal like us,
he's not a *mere* mortal like us.
He takes the opportunity to empower the disciples
to go out preaching and healing and
encouraging one another in his name.
Not to be perfect, because as mere mortals *they can't*.
Not because everyone will accept them,
because *they won't*.

Each one of us, even on our best days, is going to come up short.
Like Ezekiel, we're going to fall on our faces.
We'll fall apart sometimes.

We're mere mortals.
God made us that way and sends us out just the same,
just as Jesus sent out the disciples from his humble hometown.
God uses us to proclaim good news – sometimes, out of bad.
Sometimes the best news of all
is that if I can get through whatever I'm bearing,
then surely, by the grace of God, you can too.

Come, let's carry it together.

*For God's grace is sufficient for us.
God's power is made perfect in our weakness.*

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