

“May You Be Made Strong”
Rev. Bill Freeman
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Menifee United Church of Christ

A construction site. That's where a strong young man named Chad is goading his co-workers. He's telling them that he is stronger than they are. He is especially picking on one elderly co-worker named Harvey. Finally, Harvey has had enough. Harvey said, "OK, Chad, I'll bet that I can take this wheelbarrow, fill it up, move it over there, and you will not be able to move it back." Chad said, "You're on, old man, I'll take that bet." So then Harvey grabbed the handles of the wheelbarrow and said to Chad, "Get in!" Even Chad isn't strong enough to wheel the wheelbarrow back with himself inside of it.

Strength. Physical strength. We probably often think of that as the most important strength. Physical strength. How much can you lift? How much can you bench press? How many push-ups can you do? How many chin-ups can you do? Physical strength. A few of us the other day used our physical strength to move everything from the sanctuary into the Friendship Hall – Bibles and hymnals, chairs and tables, all the stuff of worship. There was Aimee and Rick, Kathleen and I and our friends from the New Birth church. We needed our physical strength and the next day some of us felt the physical strain of our physical strength. Then last night, because they had a birthday party in here for the pastor of New Birth church, Kathleen and I were here until about midnight, moving tables and chairs and Bibles and hymnals and all the other paraphernalia you see. More physical strength. Physical strength is important. But I want to talk with you today about a different kind of strength.

The apostle Paul tells us about a different kind of strength. Divine strength. Spiritual strength. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul writes, "May you be made strong by the glorious power given by God." And that's what we all need sometimes, is God's glorious power to be made strong. To have divine strength. To have spiritual strength. Jesus said if you have the faith, or I would say the spiritual strength, of just a tiny mustard seed, you can tell this mountain to be thrown into the ocean and it will be.

Spiritual strength. That's what we all need sometimes. King David needed spiritual strength to slay Goliath. Moses needed spiritual strength to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, out of slavery. Jesus needed spiritual strength to defeat the devil in the wilderness. We all need spiritual strength sometimes. Maybe more than sometimes. The Kennedy family, it seems to me, has needed spiritual strength over the years. On Tuesday of this week, it will be the 53rd anniversary of the assassination of President Kennedy. Many people who were alive then remember where they were. (Now you may find it hard to believe, but I was around in 1963.) It seems to me that the country needed spiritual strength then to get through all that. So can you imagine how much spiritual strength, how much divine strength, how much of God's glorious power, the Kennedy family needed to get through that. Then a few years later, Bobby Kennedy was assassinated. Again, the country needed spiritual strength, divine strength, God's glorious power, but so did the Kennedy family. And then, many years after that, John Kennedy, Jr. died in a freak plane crash. Again, the Kennedy family needed spiritual strength to get through that. Then, just a few years ago, Teddy Kennedy died. It seems to me the Kennedys have had more than their share of tragedies, and needed spiritual strength, as we all do when we suffer; whenever we have tragedies we need spiritual strength.

Jesus needed spiritual strength in the garden the night before he was crucified. In the gospel of Luke, Chapter 22, Jesus is praying in the garden and he's praying so strongly that he's not just sweating sweat, he's sweating blood. Droplets of blood are falling from him. He needed spiritual strength as he prayed to God, "Take this cup from me, but not my will, but Thy will, be done." Then, according to the gospel, an angel from heaven came and gave Jesus strength. I wonder how many of us have had an angel from heaven come and give us strength. I know there are those, probably here, who believe in guardian angels. Guardian angels that maybe give us strength and sometimes we need that.

We need divine strength. We need that kind of strength. And God knows that we need that kind of strength, and God gives us that kind of strength. Maybe we need spiritual strength, divine strength, to handle a difficult situation at work with a co-worker or a boss. Maybe we need divine strength or spiritual strength in a relationship to deal with a broken heart or to fix an error that we've made. We sometimes need divine strength, spiritual strength, to deal with life and the suffering of life. We need that sometimes. Members of this congregation, parishioners of this congregation, need spiritual strength sometimes. I know of a parishioner in this congregation who needs a kidney transplant and I believe she's continued on this long because of God's power, God's glorious power, God's spiritual strength, divine strength. A member of this congregation has to deal with dialysis quite frequently, and I believe that God gives him spiritual strength to do that. Divine strength. God's glorious power. A parishioner in this congregation often has severe back pain and I believe he sometimes needs God's spiritual strength to get through, to make it, another day. We all probably are in need of God's spiritual strength sometimes. Maybe we wouldn't be here if we didn't have it. It's important to have spiritual strength.

King David knows where our strength comes from. Our spiritual strength. In Psalm 46 King David writes about how God gives us strength. God is our refuge. God gives us the strength we need. We have to have God's strength sometimes. We can't do it on our own. We need divine strength. Spiritual strength. And God wants us to know that God gives us that. That's why, in verse 10 of Psalm 46, King David, writing on behalf of God, writes, "Be still and know that I am God." God wants us to know that our spiritual strength, our divine strength, comes from God. I don't think that's why we suffer, but I do think that, when we suffer, we know that it's God that gets us through, we couldn't do it just on our own. God knows this and God helps us through it.

Divine strength, we all need sometimes. We need divine strength to help others. God gives us divine strength so that we will help others, so that we'll feed the hungry, so that we'll clothe the naked, so that we'll care for the sick, so that we'll visit the prisoner. God gives us divine strength to do that. People in this congregation, people in this church, have used their God-given strength to provide food for the homeless, the needy, on Thanksgiving. This week we will deliver, as has been mentioned, we'll deliver these canned goods and different perishable items for Thanksgiving for people in need. We've got canned corn and cranberries and a no-bake pumpkin cheesecake, instant potatoes, and, I never knew this existed until recently, but you can get a whole chicken in a can. Not those little tiny Chicken of the Sea, but you can get a whole chicken in a can, cooked in chicken broth. It's not maybe as appropriate as a turkey on Thanksgiving, but I think it'll taste pretty good. So we'll take all that to Survival Ministries, thanks to you all. And we'll do the same thing again at Christmas time. On Christmas week we'll do a similar thing, thanks to you all, and thanks to your divine strength that allows you to do that. It allows you to care for others and not just for yourself. That's what we're supposed to do.

The Hollies had a hit song a few years ago that I think kind of captures the essence of what I'm talking about. You may have heard of the song, "He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother." The Hollies sing, "The road is long, with many a winding turn, to who knows where, who knows where? But I'm strong, strong enough to carry him. He ain't heavy, he's my brother." And she's my sister. And we know that our brothers and sisters are our neighbors, are everyone that we know or that we meet. And that's who God wants us to help. That's why God gives us spiritual strength, divine strength, God's glorious power. So that we can help others.

What about you? What will you use your spiritual strength to do? What do you want your spiritual strength to enable you to do? Now we know you probably don't have enough spiritual strength to carry yourself in a wheelbarrow, as Chad couldn't, but you can use your spiritual strength to help others. You can also use your spiritual strength to get through the dark night of the soul, as Jesus did, in the garden, the night before he was crucified. Sometimes we need to have spiritual strength to do that. Hopefully, not as dark as what Jesus faced, but we all suffer. And we all need spiritual strength. We all need divine strength. And we all need divine strength to help others, to share what we have with others. I believe that's what God wants us to do with our spiritual strength. And that's why, as Paul says, we have been made strong.

Let us pray:
God of love,
Help us to have spiritual strength, divine strength.
Help us to use our divine strength to help others
And help us to have spiritual strength, divine strength, for all of our days.
Now and forevermore.
By the power of the Holy Spirit.
And in the name of Jesus.
Amen.

*(This sermon was delivered without manuscript or notes,
and was transcribed from a tape recording of it.)*