



**2 Corinthians 12:2-10; Mark 6:1-13**  
**Reverend Giuseppe Mattei (July 7, 2024)**

Sometimes, reality all around us seems rather dark and evil. The consistent presence of God at work in us and around us seems shadowed and overwhelmed by all that clearly is wrong in the world. Cruelty compounds on cruelty; evil schemes overrun goodness and decency; justice is silenced; the trauma of war shreds populations; and climate catastrophes threaten humanity.

That which we witness seems to be the “real” world and at times it is so powerful and oppressive that we feel disarmed and powerless in its presence. When confronted with what appears to be a huge, complicated, and potentially violent problem, we may become paralyzed and doubt our skillfulness and resources.

And yet, wasn't it Jesus who said, “If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you.” (Matthew 17:20)?

In the Creed we profess, "I believe in the resurrection of the dead and life everlasting." Do we mean to say that resurrection and new life will eventually happen when our life on earth is finally ended? Or do we believe that the encounter with Christ facilitates death and resurrection in us already here on earth?

The fact is, before we proclaim that God reigns among us, we demand evidence of that, and our quick surrender to the "real world" may leave us blind to the evidence we seek.

The evangelist Mark reports that Jesus accomplished very little in hometown. That must have hurt even more than when only one of the 10 cured of leprosy thanked him.

Let's see what happens. Jesus arrives to his hometown (not Nazareth where he grew up but most likely Capernaum, the town of his first disciples, from where he launched his ministry.)

He begins to teach in the synagogue. Jesus doesn't seem to get that the synagogue is not a place friendly to him. Or maybe he doesn't care because he cares for them more! He can see what the people need and is not afraid to give it to them even though some people are not receptive and find his message offensive.

He preaches, and "many are *astounded*." This is not the type of astonishment that leads to awe and worship. This is, in my view, an emotional reaction ripe with jealousy for they wondered:

"Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?"

But *when* does a message become "offensive"? Isn't it when people feel displaced, that is, removed from their place of privilege? Isn't it when their authority and social standing are threatened? Isn't it when they feel challenged, exposed, and shown lacking? Isn't it then that they recoil and assume a defensive stance?

*What* has he possibly said that is so offensive? And is the offence intensified because the message comes to them on a sabbath, the day of the Lord's rest, a day dedicated to physical and spiritual renewal?

Mark doesn't elaborate on Jesus' message now nor on the reason for their offense. He will become more explicit as the holy story progresses.

What Mark does jot down, though, is Jesus' *displeasure* at their lack of faith. Faith, that is, a trustful and open heart, is required for "deeds of power" to happen.

Yet, Mark knows that Jesus' disappointment is not totally true. A modicum of faith is present, *some* people are open and willing even when the large majority is not receptive. The kingdom has a small beginning. In fact, Mark acknowledges, Jesus "laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them." (6:5)

Next, Jesus sends his disciples out two by two. And they are ordered to pack light. In this, Jesus pushes them to the limit to trust God, trust the message of peace, trust the receivers of that message, and, finally, trust themselves. What intrigues me is this: after sending them out nearly penniless, we hear that "They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them."

What accounts for their sensational *success*? According to the Bible's logic, there is an inextricable connection between being totally divested of comforts and becoming vulnerable, and success in ministry.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In Acts 2 and 4 we hear that the first Christians shared possessions – and not coincidentally "Wonders and signs were done... and the Lord added to their number."

The apostle Paul recognizes just as much. He could be boasting of his religious status,<sup>2</sup> his many accomplishments,<sup>3</sup> and his perseverance in persecution,<sup>4</sup> and yet he boasts of following the crucified Christ<sup>5</sup> and of his own weakness as a thorn in his side.<sup>6</sup>

God's grace shines through our weakness and vulnerability.

People in our world do not want to hear about the *power of weakness*. We protect our vulnerable spots. The world admires strong people, and we want to be strong ourselves. Weakness is not attractive but rather something to disdain and improve upon.

But God's message to Paul is the antithesis of all this: "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness."

And Paul understands and accepts it:

So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong."

Because weakness is something we reject, are ashamed of, and try to cover up, Jesus sends us out two-by-two to encourage and support one another, to keep ourselves honest and accountable, and to remind each other who it is who has called and sent us, who and what it is we represent. We cannot be effective alone.

Even though there is darkness all around, let us trust God's power to save. May we know and rejoice in the glory of God who shines through our weakness. Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> Philippians 3:4-6

<sup>3</sup> Three missionary journeys, several churches planted, and at least seven letters.

<sup>4</sup> Acts 9:15-16; 2 Corinthians 4:8-12; 2 Timothy 3:10-11; 2 Corinthians 12:5-10

<sup>5</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:2

<sup>6</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:16-33

7th Sunday after Pentecost