

2nd Sunday after Epiphany – Year C
January 24, 2010
Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY
Ephesians 3:14-21

Pastor Paul Horn

"Rely on the Power God Provides"

¹⁴ For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶ I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

²⁰ Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Did you know that it takes 2 weeks to establish a habit? It's been three weeks since the first of the month already, so I'm going to follow up and ask you, "How's that going?" Have you been able to commit every day for at least two weeks to make that New Year's resolution a go? Whether or not your resolution dealt with physical exercise, you've been bombarded by the importance of staying physically fit. The Biggest Loser competition is airing on television, the new Taco Bell diet was released and fitness equipment is still on sale. What does it take to get to the point where you say, "I really need to do this?" A look at yourself in mirror and you're disgusted by what you see? Huffing and puffing after climbing a single flight of stairs? or the doctor says, "You need to do something about your weight or you're gonna die." That will motivate you.

What about your spiritual body? Did you make any resolutions to get spiritually fit? What does it take to get on the treadmill of God's Word and run with God everyday? Have you been doing spiritual pushups and sit ups with faithful attendance at Bible Class? Have you been swimming laps to get your heart in shape with faithful participation in the Sacraments? Have you made it your goal to increase your faith and trust and love in God?

You might hear that from the pulpit that you need to get in shape spiritually, that you need to grow; grow in power, knowledge, and love. But you might be inclined to question, "Why?" Because we all have to admit that there is room to grow. We don't know it all. We have to admit that we could increase our trust in God and build our spiritual muscles so that we might cling to him a bit tighter. But we know the truth, and the truth is we never will know it all. We never will get to that point where we can love God perfectly, not until we reach the gates of heaven. So why

bother? Why bother studying when I don't understand it all? Why bother when I forget what I just studied? Why grow? Why get spiritually fit?

Because of events like Haiti. What if something similar happened here? How would your spiritual body respond? Why stay spiritually fit? Because of news reports that Muslim families are increasing at an alarming rate and the population of Muslims are taking over large cities of the world. Have you ever stopped to think what that could mean for your children and grandchildren? Did you ever think that you might need to get your family in shape for possible persecution? Why get in shape? Because of false doctrine that is constantly streamed onto our computer screens, piped into our radios and television sets. But perhaps the real danger is within us.

The real danger is when we admit, "I don't see need for it." It's the I-can-do-this-all-by-myself attitude. I don't need God, don't need church (not every Sunday), I don't need a pastor to rebuke me, to instruct me, build me up. I'm fine by myself thank you very much. What then has become the source of your strength? You! When we don't see the need to stay rooted in God's Word, and don't see the necessity of building and reinforcing that foundation, and then the earthquakes of life hit, your faith will be like the buildings in Haiti. Your faith will crumble and be destroyed, and you will be left destitute forever.

The Apostle Paul didn't want that to happen to the congregation of believers in Ephesus. As your shepherd, I don't want this to happen to you, either. You are children of God, and I love you, and I pray for each of you by name, that you also might grow in power and knowledge and increase in love. Paul's prayer for the Ephesians is my prayer for each of you.

In our lesson from Paul's letter to the Ephesians, the apostle tells the believers that he kneels before the Father. Here we have the picture of a little child, kneeling at the edge of his bed, folded hands, eyes closed, bending the ear of his Father in heaven, that he might be with the people he loves. But Paul was not comfy-cozy in his bedroom offering this prayer. He was in prison, surrounded by stone walls, kneeling on a cold, earthen floor no doubt. But he prayed for the Christians in Ephesus, that God would bless his children in Ephesus. They needed it. The congregation had been attacked by false teachers and folks who dabbled in sorcery and magic threatened to lead the faithful away from the truth.

Paul prays to God **that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power.** He doesn't appeal to what the Ephesians had done, but to God's mercy. He asks that God would bring out of his rich storehouses filled with his heavenly treasures, to strengthen them. Perhaps you recall Paul's famous words in Philippians 4.13, "**I can do everything through him who gives me strength.**" Not GNC power protein shakes, not the caliber of the handgun in your house, not your own personal resolve, but God is your power. God is your strength. He alone can grant it to you.

What is this power that he strengthens you with? Paul says in Romans 1.16, “**I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.**” The Gospel is power, the good news that Jesus Christ, by his perfect life, and innocent death secured the forgiveness of your sins and won heaven for you - that good news is power. Paul tells us how God builds the muscles of our spiritual bodies with this power, **he may strengthen you with power through the Holy Spirit.** If I wanted to bulk up, I might get a membership at a gym, maybe even hire a personal trainer, who will instruct me in the best way to become strong. As Christians you want your spiritual body to be strong. You do not have to get a membership at E-town Swim and Fitness to get that personal spiritual trainer. The Holy Spirit works as your personal trainer, and he’s free! You find him at church whenever the sacraments are administered, whenever the gospel is proclaimed in worship and Bible study. You even find him at home when you read your Bibles, and have devotion with your spouse or children. There he is, building the muscles of your spiritual body, making it strong with the power of the gospel.

Paul uses a unique name for your spiritual body, he prays that God **may strengthen you with power through the Holy Spirit in your inner being.** Your inner being, your heart, your new self, created in you at your baptism. This new self, inner being, delights in God’s Word.. It has the desire to carry out God’s will. It looks only to pleasing God, and its purpose is to grow and increase in strength. It is so very necessary that your inner being bulk up spiritually, because of another person that resides in you, who has been with you since your conception and birth: your sinful nature. That sinful flesh was drowned at your baptism, but it will still rear its ugly head as long as you have this flesh. The sinful nature hates God. It is the motivation behind the sinful attitudes we spoke of before. The sinful flesh does not see the need to grow, it does not need God nor does it seek his help in times of trouble. It is necessary that we bulk up the inner being so that the sinful nature might be put to death everyday.

Comfort for us Christians as we grow weak in our battle again the sinful flesh is found in what Paul prays next, that God **may strengthen you with power through the Holy Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith.** It would be one thing to have a poster of Arnold Schwarzenegger’s body building routine pinned on your wall, and quite another to have the Governor actually living in your home training with you. How much more so that Jesus lives in your hearts! What great news! Jesus already defeated your sinful nature when he nailed it to the cross and there it died with him. Through your baptism he gave you this victory. This same One, who holds the power over your sinful nature, lives in your heart by faith. Christ gives you the power to punch Satan in the face when he comes to tempt, to kick temptation away, and put that sinful nature in a headlock and so that you remain steadfast to God’s will for your Christian living. Christ dwells in your hearts by the HS working through Word and Sacraments.

About this time last year our homes, power lines, driveways and trees were covered with inches of ice. A week later, after the thaw, we went out and inspected the damage. Some of the trees had been uprooted because of the weight of the ice and the wind beating against them. But you and I will not be like that. We will take a beating because of our Christian faith, because of the effects of sin in this world, but because the Holy Spirit strengthens you, because Christ lives in you, Paul expects you as God's people to **be rooted and established in love**. It's interesting to note that Paul is not talking about Christ's love for us, but our love for Christ - that we be rooted and established in our love for our Savior. That love, of course, is born out of God's love for us, displayed through his Son Jesus' offering on the cross. We know that God's love for us isn't going anywhere. But Paul prays for the Ephesians, and I pray for you, that your love for Christ will be rooted and established so that it doesn't go anywhere.

When we bulk up our spiritual bodies with faithful exercise in God's Word and Sacraments our love for God becomes deeply grounded like the roots of a tree. We will increase in our faith and trust and love for God so that when the ice storms of life come pelting down on us, we will endure. Disease, sickness, death, persecution, attacks from false doctrine, wars and political unrest, even the future (because it is unknown), threaten to take us down. But we will remain resolute, established in our love for our Lord Jesus, even in the face of death, for the Holy Spirit strengthens us with power of the gospel, Christ lives in us, and he has promised us, **he who stands firm to the end will be saved**. (Matt 24.13) For not only has he destroyed our sinful nature, he has destroyed death by his resurrection from the grave. And so we face all things, even death, with the power that God provides through his Son Jesus.

I have to admit, I didn't make a New Year's Resolution to start exercising. The fact is I had been exercising before the New Year. I don't need the Biggest Loser, Taco Bell or stores selling me new fitness equipment to tell me that I have to stay in shape for the sake of my body, my family and my job. But I did realize this New Year that I needed to make some changes to my daily spiritual exercise routine. And like the contestants on The Biggest Loser, I have some help. the Holy Spirit strengthens me through the Gospel, Christ lives in me, and I have some people keeping me honest to my goals; my elder and the three girls in my confirmation class. It is my prayer for you that you also see the need for daily spiritual exercise, so that you build up those spiritual muscles with the power that God provides through his Holy Spirit so that Christ may dwell in you forever and ever. Amen.