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Devotional Thought

**OUR STRENGTH IS IN JESUS**

“If I must boast, I will boast of things that show my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying.”

2 Cor. 11:30–31

by CH (LTC) Steven Hokana
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**So, what’s your “cred”?** Are you physically strong? A veritable beast? You can outscore anyone in your unit on the fitness test? How about smarts? Are you known in the unit as the “go-to” person to fix a problem? How about military skills? If they called out your name, would we know you as the person who exceeds the standards in all things? All this talk of cred! Paul faced the same challenges with the Corinthians. In the end, it’s all about “Christ-Credentials“!

We know what’s going on in 2 Corinthians. The congregations are embarrassed over Paul. He doesn’t shine like the ‘uber Apostles.’ So handsome, articulate, smooth-talking. Telling people what they want to hear. They are not “uber Apostles” but “ersatz Apostles” … fake leaders. We know about these frauds. They attempt to lay out their credentials as being better than Paul. In Acts, these frauds boast! The best education, a deep understanding of Scripture. It’s all about credentials … strong, educated, sophisticated, wise! So, Paul sets forth his credentials and hope in Christ. Credentials have always been very important. They’re not always academic. Having certain credentials gives you respect to lead men and women in winning our nation’s wars.

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My family went on a trip to Great Britain. We visited several places in Wales and England. What beautiful country; some of it seemed so otherworldly. It was like a scene from “Lord of the Rings.”

One of the places we visited was a pub in Abergavenny, Wales. Now, going to a pub may not seem very significant. But it was very important and meaningful to me. This pub was owned by my great-grandfather in the late 1800s. It’s also the place my grandmother Dora (my dad’s mother) was born in 1896 and lived the first few years of her life. The current pub owner let me stand behind the bar and pull a couple of pints from the taps. What a great experience to feel so connected to my family history.

It was awesome. Like time travelers visiting castles, cathedrals and other ancient sites. One place we visited was Gloucester Cathedral in Gloucester, England. The church dates to the year 679 when it was founded as St. Peter’s Abbey. This site is the location of the coronation of Henry III, the only English monarch not crowned in Westminster Abbey. (Henry’s son, Edward I, known as “Longshanks,” was the English king who fought William Wallace of Scotland, as portrayed in the movie “Braveheart.” Edward’s son, Edward II — also in “Braveheart” — is buried in Gloucester Cathedral. You may be interested to know parts of the cathedral were in the Harry Potter movies.)

While there are many more historical points of interest about Gloucester Cathedral, I was struck most by the fact that this site has been continually used for Christian worship since its founding over 1,300 years ago. While I felt a connection to my ancestors in a small pub in Wales, I realized I was connected to an even larger family in this ancient cathedral.

Walking through this centuries-old house of worship, I couldn’t help but think of these words from the Nicene Creed: “And I believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church.” This is an important article of faith. It reminds us we belong to something much bigger than a congregation or a chapel. And this largeness transcends time and space because it includes all Christians alive in the world today as well as all believers who are with Christ now in heaven — going all the way back to the first death in history, Abel, who was murdered by his brother Cain. Hebrews 11 recounts a host of Old Testament saints, beginning with Abel. After mentioning a variety of saints — both named and unnamed — the author writes: “And all these, though commended through their faith, did...
not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect. Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 11:39–12:2).

**THE REASON THESE SAINTS — AND WE — ARE PART OF THE “ONE HOLY CHRISTIAN AND APOSTOLIC CHURCH”** is not because of anything they or we have done. It’s solely because of the founder and perfecter of our faith, Jesus Christ — the one who endured the cross so we wouldn’t have to. The one who received God the Father’s wrath, the wrath all humans deserve. And we are told the outcome of Christ’s cross brought — brings — Him great joy. That outcome is our salvation, yours, mine, Adam’s, Eve’s, Abel’s, Abraham’s and many others. That great cloud of witnesses is uncountable by us, but not to God. He knows who belongs to Him. I’m certain part of the holy Christian Church worshiped at Gloucester Cathedral centuries ago, and part it worships there now.

Next time you are in Divine Service and recite the Creed, remember the phrase “one holy Christian and apostolic Church” is not just mere words. It describes the people of God in every place, in every time, and in eternity. It’s your family purchased by the blood of Christ. And it’s you. May the Lord of the Church keep us all in His grace until He returns to finally bring us home.

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When life happens and “Murphy” shows up where do we go for help? Unfortunately, and for a whole myriad of reasons, asking for help, especially in the military, is seen as a sign of weakness so we march on alone through the pain. Some may even congratulate us on our toughness, grit and determination. But over time those accolades don’t lessen the pain. So when the pain is overwhelming where do we go for help? When we are tired of fighting the battle alone who can we turn to? Besides all the helping agencies available to members of the military we as Christians also have an additional source of help, strength and comfort.

The psalmist declares:

> “I lift my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth” (Ps. 121:1–2).

We don’t need to fight the pain alone. The Lord comes to us in Word and Sacrament. He comes to us at our lowest points to lift us up with His grace and forgiveness. He comes to us in our weakness with His strength. He is our help.

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Here’s what I mean, if you want to serve in an airborne unit, your credentials are on your chest and feet. Silver wings on your chest awarded by the grueling Army Airborne school. Boots designed only for paratroopers. If in an Airborne unit and you don’t have boots or the wings, no one has time for you. It doesn’t matter if you are as powerful as Hercules, as intelligent as Socrates, your credential is on your chest and on your feet.

Another credential in the Army is worn on your right shoulder. If you’ve been in war, you wear a “combat patch”. It acknowledges that you’re a warrior. If wearing anything on your uniform not earned, whether boots, wings or patch, you lose credibility, get thrown out of the Army or go to prison. Then no one wants anything to do with you.

So, what are Paul’s credentials? When compared to the false apostles, he was not handsome or wealthy. Paul, none the less, has two amazing credentials — weakness and Jesus! The list of feebleness in 2 Cor. 11:23–28 is extensive:

“Far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brethren; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.”

But Paul knows, and we know, our strength is in weakness! Our strength is in Jesus, the promised Savior of the nations, the sacrificial Lamb, the loving Savior, the King and source of our joy. Our credentials to bear witness to Christ are therefore better than wings on our chest, boots on our feet or a patch of fabric on our right shoulder. Our credentials are in the wounds Christ endured on the cross. His death brought us peace; the shedding of his blood brought us life. Our Baptism reminds us of our credentials … Old Adam has drowned and the new Adam arises. So, no matter how weak, how tired, how sick, we “race” to the words of Paul in 2 Cor. 9:12:

“‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

What comfort! In Christ you have all the credentials needed to accomplish our Christ-like purpose, even to life everlasting. In that you boast! Amen.

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