A sermon preached by the Rev. Jeanne Leinbach
at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, Cleveland Heights, Ohio
on July 8, 2018

2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10; 2 Corinthians 12:2-10; Mark 6:1-13

My Leadership Cleveland class graduated in June. I’ve thinking back to when our class first met last September. There were fifty of us coming together from all sectors of the Cleveland community: government, education, religion, medicine, finance, technology, law, communications, arts, food, community development, and even other sectors. A few people knew each other, but largely, we were 50 strangers coming together for a year-long program to develop a greater appreciation for all that Cleveland has to offer and an appreciation for the complexity of the challenges our community faces. We were 50 individuals who needed to get to know each other, so Leadership Cleveland brought in an organization called Executive Edge to facilitate team building exercises. One of these exercises was for each team to build a free-standing bridge that spanned a two-feet distance between two tables. When finished, the bridge needed to hold a 10-pound weight from the middle of the span. Your score was determined by how long your bridge could hold the weight without collapsing. So, what materials were we given to build the bridge? Two pounds of un-cooked spaghetti and a few hot glue guns. AND, one more rule...we were not allowed to glue the bridge to the tables. It was a fun exercise and it was a great way to get to know your classmates. We learned about the different experiences we were bringing to the class, our skills and expertise, our personalities and styles. Cultivating relationships at the start of the program made for a more enriching program because we were open to listening and to learning from one another.

What became apparent to me through my Leadership Cleveland experience is that successful civic leadership is collaborative leadership. We need to work together across
disciplines and perspectives to improve life for all members of our community. The great news is that collaboration is exciting and rewarding because through collaboration, we make real progress. We’re always more successful as a team than as individuals. “Two are better than one” - that’s right out of Scripture - Ecclesiastes chapter 4, verse 9. Collaboration is good, collaboration feels good because it is exactly how we are supposed to be living our lives – it is what God intends – we are put on this earth for the benefit of one another, to love and to care for and to learn from and to enjoy one another.

We get it, we understand the benefit of team building exercises. So, let’s take a look at Scripture. We heard from Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians: “Power is made perfect in weakness.” Just as an aside, I do have to smile at St. Paul this morning. Did you catch him telling us that he refrains from boasting “even considering the exceptional character of his revelations?” Let’s move past his boasting to hear God’s message: “Power is made perfect in weakness.” This is a theme throughout Scripture. For the past several weeks, we have been hearing in our Old Testament lesson about David – the boy David, who without armor, with just a stone and a sling, kills the mighty, giant Goliath. Power is made perfect in weakness. In our New Testament lesson this morning, Paul talks about the thorn in his flesh. Remember, Paul was previously named Saul. He persecuted the Jews. But, on the road to Damascus, he was struck blind and converted to a life of proclaiming the Good News of Christ. In Acts 9:22, we hear that “Saul became increasingly more powerful and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Messiah.” The thorn in his flesh is a reminder that power is made perfect in weakness.

The importance of the message this morning is understanding the source of power and the purpose of power. We strive to live our lives faithfully…to live our lives according to God’s
purposes. We seek God. We desire to know God, so we might more fully live in God’s love. In
fact, it is part of our nature to seek union with God. But, union with God is not about perfection;
it is about authenticity. Union with God is about authenticity. When we are fully our authentic
selves with God, all that we are, every lived experience: good or bad, every desire: right or
wrong, every aspect of our personality, every strength, every weakness…right there, in our fully
authentic self, we know God’s unconditional, abundant Love. That Love urges us to live our
lives for one another, in thanksgiving, because each and every one of us is loved in the same
way, unconditionally and abundantly. We are all a piece of the same Creator, intimately
connected to one another. We are loved, and so we love. The source of power is weakness,
because in our weakness, we are embraced by God’s Love and swept into the creative force of
Love.

What is the purpose of power? In the verses just following our passage from 2 Samuel
this morning, we hear (5:12): “David then perceived that the Lord had established him king over
Israel, and that he had exalted his kingdom for the sake of his people Israel” – for the sake of his
people. Now is the time to claim our faith. Now is the time to proclaim our faith. Power is not
given to serve the self. Power is given to serve others. Saul became increasingly more powerful
in his service to God’s people, in sharing God’s mercy and love. Power for self is an aberration
of the gift. Power for self is tamping down and covering up self-doubt and insecurity. Power in
its God-given form confronts our own insecurity, experiences God’s unconditional, abundant
love, and, in thanksgiving, serves others. Power in service to others is the power of God’s
Kingdom. It is the power that, ultimately, will triumph.

We need one another. We need different skills to live expansively. We need different
perspectives to live in truth. God’s power is offered to us through our need for one another. The
source is weakness. The purpose is service. We are loved, and so we love. Amen.