

All Around the Altar Service Trinity Sunday – 7th June 2020

Sermon by Jenny Warrington

Introduction:

To introduce our Theme this morning I'm going to do a little experiment....You can do this too later if you'd like to have a go.

Have you heard of reinforced concrete? You see concrete is a pretty strong material, but it can be reinforced, it can be made stronger by putting iron rods down the middle of it.

So today, I'm going to show how this works – using paper.

Here's my concrete post – made of a piece of A4 paper made into a cylinder and held together with sticky tape. It's quite strong, quite sturdy.

But if I put a heavy book on it - the post quickly crumples under the pressure.

That's a bit like us, isn't it – we can seem pretty strong, pretty sturdy on the outside – but add a bit of weight, a bit of pressure, an extra burden, we can crumple, can't we?

But if I add a series of inner strengthening bars – and as it's Trinity Sunday – I've got three here! With extra strength inside the post can hold lots more weight.

And we too can be strengthened from within....and I'll talk about that once we've had our reading.

Talk:

I'm going to start with a couple of questions.

Firstly,

How are you feeling?

Do you feel a bit like my empty pillar – a bit flimsy, a bit flaky. This lock-down does seem to be going on and on and even with some relaxation of the rules, there are still so many uncertainties, so many unknowns, so many unanswered questions...that can make us feel a little, flaky, a little nervous. Some of you may have gone back to school or gone back to work. How are you feeling?

Second question,

How are you doing with God?

Has this time brought you closer to God, have you found yourself reading the bible more and praying or have you had more trouble focusing on Him these days? Have you felt God is rather distant?

Today we're going to look together and consider how we can be strengthened on the inside and brought closer to God....

So, let's pray as we delve deeper into this passage of scripture together.

Father we pray that out of your glorious riches we may be strengthened with power in our inner most being. Help us today to know you more clearly, follow you more nearly and love you more dearly. In the name of Jesus, Amen

As it is Trinity Sunday, the talk will be in three sections

Firstly, we'll take a look at
God the Father – who strengthens us as family

Secondly, we'll consider
God the Spirit – who strengthens us with power

And finally
God the Son – who strengthens us with special love

And then I'll add a little bit at the end about what's on offer once we're strengthened....

The passage begins – 'for this reason'. For this reason! – for what reason?

Well Paul has just been writing about the Gospel, the good news about Jesus, and just two verses earlier he wrote

'In him (in Jesus) and through faith in him (through faith in Jesus) we may approach God with freedom and confidence.'

It is because of the Gospel and his absolute faith in Jesus, that Paul is praying with confidence - because he knows that through Jesus we have complete freedom to approach God and there's nothing holding Paul back.... Paul knows that by our understanding of God, and His Spirit and his Son, Jesus, we too can approach God with boldness and we too will be strengthened.

The first way Paul wants us to be strengthened is through an **understanding of God the Father**.

Verses 14 & 15 read, *'For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.'*

Paul tells us that Father is not simply a human metaphor to help us grasp what God is like: God is more than just the best Dad we could ever imagine....

God is the original Father and every human dad is a reflection of him, not the other way around.

God can no more cease to be our loving Father than change his own character. God remains our father AND he is so much more...

When Frances and Elizabeth were tidying the church before the lock-down – they came across a sheet called the God of 1000 names. Now I don't know that there are 1000 names here but there are quite a lot. What can you think of – what names would you give to God?

Adults – how many Hebrew names can you think of for God?

God is so much more than just a glorified human father and yet he is still Our Father, our wonderful, approachable, faithful, ever available, Dad.

and Paul encourages us to pray to Our Father, from whom every family is named.

Knowing who our heavenly father is - strengthens us individually on the inside, and strengthens us, as one big family together.

So, let's put God the Father in our pillar as a sign that we want God the Father to strengthen us.

The second way Paul wants us to be strengthened is through an understanding of what it means to be **filled with the Holy Spirit**.

Verse 16 reads:

'I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being'

Paul began his church plant in Ephesus with a dozen believers who confessed to him, "We have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

When Billy Graham, one of the greatest evangelists of our day, first started out, apparently he was a pretty ordinary preacher. But he knew there was more.

He had the chance to hear a fellow preacher called Stephen Olford –a phenomenal preacher. Stephen Olford preached on God's promise to fill believers with his Holy Spirit.

Now we remember at this stage Billy Graham was a Christian – so Jesus was living in him by the Holy Spirit but he hadn't been filled with the Holy Spirit.

Billy Graham took Stephen Olford aside after he heard him preach and begged him: "You've spoken of something that I don't have. I want the fullness of the Holy Spirit in my life too."

And after much conversation and teaching and prayer – Billy Graham was indeed filled with the Holy spirit. He said, "My heart is so flooded with the Holy Spirit! I'm filled! This is a turning point in my life." And he was indeed a new man. As we know he went on to preach in big rallies and thousands of people came to faith in Jesus through his preaching. Billy Graham looked back on that experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit, as one that completely changed him on the inside.

Two Awesome Andy's preached last Sunday, about Pentecost; the venerable Andy Wooding Jones in the morning and Andy, aka Kat Rice at our Praise Party in the afternoon. We heard that there was such an outpouring of the Holy Spirit that 3000 people believed and were baptised.

Paul writes again and again, in his letters, that God wants to **fill** us with his Holy Spirit, so that we will know for sure that we believe.

And by being filled - he will change us from the inside out. And we need to keep being filled Who of us doesn't think we need more? More love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

The Holy Spirit strengthens us on the inside

Let's put our second reinforcing rod into our flimsy pillar

The third way Paul wants us to be strengthened is through an **understanding of Jesus and his special love for us**.

He says in verse 17 that, by faith – Christ dwells in our hearts and Paul prays that we will be rooted and established in a 'love that surpasses knowledge' – a love that is so vast, so big, that nobody can ever stray outside its boundaries.

Paul uses two technical terms in Greek when he prays that we may be rooted and established in God's love.

The first word was used for the way a massive oak tree is securely grounded deep into the earth,

You know that the roots of an Oak tree go as deep and as wide as the tree itself.

and the second word was used for the way a solid building was held firm by its deep foundations. Have you ever seen a digger digging out deep, deep foundations, filling it with concrete before starting to lay the bricks of a building.

Occasionally the earth may give way to allow an oak tree to fall or a building to wobble, but the love of Jesus will never let you go.

These images Paul gives us can help us to see how important it is to have the love of Jesus strong in our innermost being. The love of Jesus at the very core of who we are and what we do.

Jesus is not just a friend we lean on when we're scared – he, and his all surpassing love, is what we should build our very lives on.

So, let's put our third strengthening rod into our pillar – Jesus's strengthening love for us all.

We have the strengthening security of knowing our heavenly father
We have the strengthening power of the continuing filling of the Holy Spirit
And we have the strengthening knowledge of the huge love Jesus has for us.

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit strengthening us on the inside so we can stand firm.

Stand firm against the Devil's plans – stand firm against all that tries to convince us that we are unworthy of being in our heavenly Father's presence, or that we are the children of the Father of all Fathers.

God is and always will be our Heavenly Father. Stand firm

Stand firm against anything that tries to convince us we don't need the Holy Spirit, that we can achieve everything we need on our own and be perfectly nice people without Him.
The Holy Spirit is our helper, he helps us to develop good qualities in us – he is our source of power. Stand firm

Stand firm against anything that makes us feel unloved or unwanted.
Jesus' love lives within you and is wider, longer, higher and deeper than you could ever know. And he wants you to be filled, completely filled with his love.

We see in verse 21, that the power that is at work within us, that strengthening power within us, will enable God to be glorified in us – but not just in us as individuals but in the church – the church in every generation. Even today – the church will not fail. So stand firm.

Friends, as we are strengthened and stand firm with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit - we are called to pray. And look at the promise at the end of the reading it says... whatever we ask – no, more than that whatever we ask or imagine ... God is able to do immeasurably more....

God hears our prayers and reads our innermost thoughts and longings. He hears them and he acts – he is able to do, to do, to act, to do MORE than we ask or imagine.

That power that is at work within us, the strengthening rods of the father, son and holy spirit enables us to pray with boldness,

So, let's let us pray with power,
let us pray with expectation that we will receive answers,
let's ask, knowing we will receive "immeasurably more."

Before our next song, let's spend a few moments receiving from God, receiving the strengthening power we all need.

And then having been strengthened in your innermost being, may I encourage you to pray with boldness...Tell God what is on your heart and believe that God, is able to do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine.

Sit comfortably, maybe place your hands on your lap, palms upward as I pray;

Holy God, will you send your Holy Spirit and fill us. Will you come in power and strengthen us? Come Holy Spirit.....[pause]

And open your heart to God and let him know your innermost prayer and longing. [pause]
Amen

Our next song reminds us that God is our friend, he does care, and he does listen...he hears us when we call. The song's called 'I am a friend of God!'