

**Prayer of the Week:**

*O God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as surpass our understanding: Pour into our hearts such love towards you, that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

*(Source: Book of Common Prayer 2019, Collects of the Christian Year, Sixth Sunday of Easter)*

**Prayer of Thanksgiving:**

*Almighty God, Father of all mercies, give you humble thanks for all your goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all whom you have made.*

*We bless you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for your immeasurable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.*

*And, we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies, that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to your service, and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory throughout all ages. Amen.*

**Whatever The Hardship,  
Keep Rising Up**

2 Corinthians 11:21b-30  
(NRSV)

May 17, 2020

**Paul's "Boast"**

Paul recounts his own life beginning with all the reasons he would have to boast in the same style and manner as was typical in Roman culture, but then he turns it on his head. He recounts his suffering! It would be like you and I putting all the reasons we shouldn't be hired on our resume!

Paul does this to make a point. First, he is trying to expose the Roman culture of achievement and boasting by making a parody of it.

Secondly, while he lists these things as comic parody, the suffering throughout his life was very real and he wants to make a point about suffering. Principally, in our weakness, we are strong.

## **Observations**

Two observations that speak into our current context:

1. God does not promise us a shortcut around hardships. He promises his presence and strength through it.

Sometimes Christians say, or imply, that their faith will protect them from getting sick. This is not God's promise and never has been! Refraining from gathering together or hugging your grandma in the midst of a highly contagious and potentially deadly disease is not a lack of faith; it's caring for those around you.

There are stories of our ancient brothers and sisters in the faith caring for the sick when others refused to do so. They didn't care for the sick with the belief that God would protect them from getting sick! Many did get sick and died. They cared for the sick because they belong to the resurrection people of God and refused to fear death because of the hope of resurrection.

2. COVID-19 is teaching all of us what it is like to live without fear...as only hardship can.

It is one thing to say we don't live with fear while we live comfortable lives in our safe neighborhoods, secure jobs, and well-funded 401k's. It is quite another to say we live without fear when faced with a pandemic.

One of the keys ways I've been working my faith is through the way that we pray as a family. We thank God for our health, we pray for God's protection, but we also pray that we would receive whatever comes without fear in the confidence that God's presence and strength will be with us whatever comes to pass.

My faith is not in my ability to sanitize surfaces, wash my hands properly, and not touch my face. My faith is in Jesus who promises his presence and strength regardless of what comes.

## **Conclusion**

*"I wish it need not have happened in my time," said Frodo. "So do I," said Gandalf, "and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us."*

*-J.R.R. Tolkien, The Fellowship of the Ring*

During our time, I pray that despite the hardship, we'll keep rising up! We'll keep rising up with fellowship, discipleship, worship, and partnership. I pray that we'll be stronger as a result because we learn to live without fear and draw upon the strength of God who is in us.