

Calvary United Methodist Church
March 3, 2019

SHINE, JESUS, SHINE
Rev. R. Jeffrey Fisher

Children's Message:

2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2

I invite our children to come forth at this time for our Children's Message. Good morning. Come on up. Good to see you all this morning.

I want to talk a little bit about being in shape. How many of you are in shape? You always keep in shape? Should we pass this around and let you get in shape? Not today? Why do people use these things? (To get stronger.) To get stronger. You know what? That's a great answer because today that's what I'm talking about: getting stronger.

But it is not all about our physical strength, right? There are all kinds of ways we get strong in life and I want to chat a little bit about these and I want you to hear this scripture:

He said to me, "By grace is sufficient for you, my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weakness, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in my weakness, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Most of us don't like insults, when people make fun of us, do we? I don't like that at all, but have you ever insulted anyone? Probably, huh? Made fun of someone? All of us have done that. And yet we should learn not to because it hurts when people do that to us.

And we really don't like hardships like when you want to do something and you are not allowed. That's a hardship; it can be. Or there is no food or there is no place to get warm and things. We don't like that, do we?

And so, the man who wrote this, Paul, was saying that basically when I am weak, when I have problems, I can't solve them by myself, I go to God. And it's very important to us to know that it is good to get strong. A lot of you probably have phys. ed. class, right? I don't know what you call it anymore. Physical education is to make sure that we keep our bodies in shape, right? We exercise, we run, we play, we do hand and eye coordination things, because we want to keep ourselves in shape that we might be the strongest that we can be because strength can be a good thing if we use it.

And other ways we keep strong, I bet your families watch what you eat, right? We don't eat candy all the time, do we? That wouldn't be good. You have to have some other kind of things, right? There are all kinds of those groups of foods that we ought to eat and we have to make sure that we get our vegetables because we need all those things to make us strong.

I bet in this time of the year, like today, we might get...a lot of people are here are excited this afternoon, some of you for snow. Now, do you just run out in the snow without any preparations? When you are going to see snow coming, I bet your families do something to you, right? They say you have to get dressed up. You put on a hat, you put on gloves, you put on boots, you put on warmer jackets, (Snowsuit.) snowsuit because they want to protect you, right? They want to protect you. This is our God...wants to protect us the same ways too.

Some of you like to go to the beach and some of you wish we were going there real soon in the summer, right? And what happens when you go to the beach and the sun's out. Does anyone put this gooey stuff on you? What's that called? It is protecting you again, right? We protect from winter, we protect from the sun because you don't want to look like this. That's called sunburn. It can harm our skin.

And there are all kinds of ways we are protected. If it is going to rain so you run out in the rain like that? Maybe if you are playing, but most of the time we try to cover up, wear raincoats, wear rain boots and all those kinds of things because all of those things can harm us.

Our parents try to protect us; our God tries to protect us. Because when we are having hardships, we feel like this, don't we? If I am not having a good day I feel like that. If we are having, sometimes when people make fun of us we even want to withdraw into our corner because we're sad and this message today is reminding us when we are weak, Jesus can be strong in us and do more through us.

So, one of the greatest things that we can do is to remember that God walks to us through this man named Jesus. We don't always see him, but in your mind and in my mind we always need to remember: I'm never alone. I'm never alone. I can pray to God. I can pray to God wherever I am to know that God is with me.

And a part of the way we do that is getting our sights fixed on Jesus. Sometime we look out for a lot of things. Do you dream a lot about the things you want to do? Like sled riding this afternoon maybe? Or a cup of hot chocolate or something if it is too cold out? We think ahead but we need to think sometimes about God and about His son Jesus and we need to hold on to him.

I don't know about you, but when I was young, I would be afraid. Have you ever been afraid of things? I liked to be near my mom or dad or some adult that I trusted because I felt safe, holding their hand, like crossing the street or being in strange places or going to a dentist or a doctor's office and things like that for the first time. There is something to be said about being close to people that are strong to us. So the closer we get to God, to Jesus, we are going to feel strong. And even when I feel weak and there are times I feel weak and I say, "Please help me." Even adults, all these adults here have moments when we say, "I need some help."

And you know what? When we get help and when I call to Jesus and I feel better inside I feel like this. What transforms? He's not looking very sad, is he? He is saying, "My God is with me." And we feel happy because my God is with me. And we feel happier because God says there is something more you can do.

We get close to God and this season of the year...this week we start a day called Ash Wednesday starts a program called Lent. It is six weeks. And it is to remind us to get close to God. We do that by reading God's Word. We do that by studying. We do it by prayer and when we pray we ask God to be near to us and to teach us that we might be godly. We do it by giving God our heart, to say, "God, I love you," just the way we do our friends and our family. We let God know how much we love God. We express it by loving other people. That's a fun thing, isn't it? Because other people need to know they are loved just the way we need to know that. And when we reach out with who we are and we see other people needing help, what should we do?

If we can we ought to help them, shouldn't we? If we can help people, we should and we ought to be giving and I'm not talking just money here. We give of ourselves. We do things like if you have extra coats or clothing we share with others or shoes or food or shelter or blankets. We do by giving our time to help our neighbors. Maybe today you could help someone shovel snow. See, giving is what we have in our heart. We give of our heart to help other people. And when we do all those things, guess what? We feel happier because we know God is with us and God shines through us that other people will know this.

The Apostle Paul said: When I am weak, then I am strong. So I want you to know when you think of gym class and you think of the things you do to get strong, keep strong because these words will be with you. He says: teaching them to obey everything I commanded you and surely I am with you always to the end of the age. No matter where you go, God is with you and will be your strength.

So, thank you for coming up today. God bless your week and you may each get one of these fruit treats. Thank you again for coming up.

Message:

Shine, Jesus, shine. The day that the disciples were with Jesus up on that mountaintop experience they were seeing a shine they had ever seen before. Have you ever been on a mountaintop experience? Of course you have. And you never want to come down. Graduations, whether it be kindergarten or elementary school or high school or college or university. Other kinds of celebrations and anniversaries and parties that we have in our life. They are so wonderful, so exciting to see those whom we love that we don't want to come off that experience to come back to the normalcy of daily living.

In the midst of that, Jesus told these disciples that they couldn't stay on the mountain. You and I like the mountaintops, but we have to go out into the valleys. We have to go out into

the tough times. We have to go out when it is not always so great. We have to be able to shine even in the midst of the darkness, even in the midst of those difficult times.

This scripture comes up each year about this time because for us it is an opportunity to refocus on why we have to shine. Ash Wednesday is coming this week. You are invited to come early in the morning for ashes or come in the evening for the service or come at lunchtime. You are invited to begin a period not just here but for these next six weeks to dry close to God, to seek God with heart and soul and mind, to find what it is that God would have you do with your life.

The disciples in those early days weren't sure what all was going on in their life. Their relationship with Jesus was up and down. And they loved this high moment, but Jesus had to let them know as much as they wanted to see this Prophet Elijah and Moses and all those good memories that they had known about all their life, you can't just stick in the past. You have to live in the day. This time for us, this time of Lent, is a time to rediscover who Jesus is for you and for me. It is a chance for us...throughout history, Lent was a time when...we Protestants don't do this so well where we pray more. We study more. We have a time of sacrifice. And I'm not talking just giving up a little candy here or giving up our sugar. But it was a time when folks really realized that they had a God who had given them so much, it was a time to do some sacrificial part of their life that would show God that they were humbling themselves before Almighty God. They would come near to God because the scriptures remind us when we come near to God God will come near to us. We need to be able to come.

James said it so well: Come near to God and He will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinner, and purify your hearts you devil minded.

Coming near to God does a lot of things but one of the greatest things that can happen to us in this season is that we find God's Spirit again,. We find new power and we experience the presence of God, perhaps like we have never experienced it before.

Sometimes the events in our lives draw us close and that's a good thing. Way back in 1995 I was pleased to go for my first and only trip at this point, to the Holy Land. This was actually a study tour, it wasn't just a tour, we met with both Muslims and Jews and Christians. We met in radical groups and conservative groups of all, trying to understand how we can learn to live in peace. For the months prior I remembered an old song: I Walk Today Where Jesus Walked. And I could only imagine, and I took it with me, that I could sing it even to myself, to imagine being in places where Jesus walked. To go to the Sea of Galilee, and I might not have known the exact place, but I knew he was in Galilee and I knew he fed thousands of people with a little boy's fish and loaves. To remember what it was like when he went to the Garden of Gethsemane and he prayed. And I had all these desires: the desire in the past was burning with me to be there.

And I think, why can't we have this desire all the time? Do you have a desire for God the way you have a desire and a burning passion for other things in your life? If not, why? I know why it drizzles out for me sometimes. I don't stay focused. We look to the future a lot and the older I get I look forward to like: am I going to have my health? What will my life look like? Will I have enough money? And I focus on things that aren't godly and aren't holy, but if I look through that lens and I say: God, in this period of my life, what it is that you will have of me? Not worrying about me, but asking God: Lord, you've cared for me all the days of my life. I hope you can say "Amen" to that. What is it that you would have at this significant time of my life? And God will say: if you come near to me, if you will come and see, I will make a way because I am calling you.

And God is always asking me and I suspect asking you: Do you really desire God? You see, in our culture it is so easy to desire the homes, the comforts, the pleasures, the holidays of life. And God says: Do you desire me? Do you desire a new life not just today, but every day? I'm sure by now many of you have been to the butterfly places all over the country including the one at Hershey and you have seen the chrysalides change into the butterfly. We sing that song here in the church. We've released butterflies at celebrations. Are you ready to release your life into the hands of God and saying: All that I have and all that I am, I am yours?

We need to do that and that's what the season of Lent does. It's a refocusing, it's a regathering of who we are as a servant of Almighty God, as a sinner being redeemed by God, saying: Lord, recreate something new in me. Let me be yours today. And in our busy society there is only one way that is going to happen and that's if we take time to stop and look and listen a bit.

When I mentioned earlier about the celebrations, when I look at folks at graduations, you remember that joy? Oh, no more papers! Not more tests! No more quizzes! No more bills. At least like that. You know what it is like when you see folks that are in love and the excitement of them uniting their lives together in those holy promises? You know what it's like to encounter God? Do you remember the first time God was real to you? Oh my gosh, I could have walked on water myself.

And there have been a lot of those encounters with God in my life and I think: God, it just doesn't get any better than being with you. If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation. Everything old has passed away. See, everything has become new.

People that morning with Jesus thought they were going to stay on that cloud forever and Jesus said: No, you need to get back down in that valley because you need to take the love, you need to take the promises of the Word, you need to take my vision of peace for the world to others. But we don't do that very often because we're too busy. We are speeding all the time. When I grew up, I grew up near two different sets of railroad tracks. One had the crossing arm and the other had none. And so when we either walk or we would ride our

bikes or sometimes when my parents were with us we were in the vehicle, you always saw this sign that said: Stop, Look and Listen. If you don't, there is going to be trouble, right?

When we take time to Stop, Look and Listen life changes. There are so many times in our relationships with our parents, with our children, with our friends and our coworkers, we are so busy we miss the very life and fun until they are gone...until they are gone.

And God is telling us we need to slow down. If we want to grow in our relationship with God, we have to slow down. We have to take time for God. It can't be this hour Sunday. It needs to be a commitment day after day. We need to be present with God like we are present with others. Do you know what it is like when you meet someone and you are all excited to meet them? I have been so blessed and you have been so blessed. You are sitting in a doctor's office and you meet someone beside you. You never knew them before and now you found out something in common...a school teacher they had or someone where they grew up or some hobby or some interest. When we take time for people and get to know people, we brighten up our lives and when we take time to know God, to pray and to study and to come close to God, we grow in life. It gives us joy.

Says: I give people my joy and my full attention. How do we do that? Well, there are some things I learned when I was a little child that I don't always do. People still do it with business agreements. You don't see people just making agreements and walking or looking the other way. They look strongly. They take a firm handshake. They look in the eyes and say: thank you.

I remember in elementary school we would hold each other's hands and they would make us look at the little boy or girl in front that you are holding because if you are holding their hand you can't be doing other things, keeping busy, and if you are looking at someone you have to address them. This is what is going to happen if we address God. We will take time to listen. And I'm just saying to God: I'm going to pour out my heart to you, which is a good thing. God says: once in a while would you listen to me too? Right? It's a two way thing, for as we do that we will deepen our knowledge and our love of God.

We build relationship with anyone when we take time to hear their stories. I used to read the old Blondie cartoons and Dagwood would always be reading his newspaper in the morning, never paying attention to his spouse. That's not a good way to get to learn someone. Both of us, all of us, anytime we are with someone else, you have a wonderful story to share and guess what? They others do too.

Everybody has a story and if we want to get to know our Lord, we can't fake it. We need to spend time with God. We offer and say we have good communication but when was the last time you really talked to God and listened to God and spent time and moments and maybe even hours thinking about it.

I believe there is a lot of fantasy relationships in the world today. People really think they really know somebody and they really don't. People think they have a close relationship with God. Then trials come and they really don't because they've not taken time to build that relationship.

If we want a great relationship we need to be in contact with God daily, all throughout our lives, actually. This season of Lent is that time. It is that waking up time for us to come to God to say: God, I intend to spend my time through this season to draw near to you so that I can find out what is my purpose in life? It is not your job. That is not our sole purpose in life, making money and making a way for our family. That is a blessing for sure. But God has a purpose, a calling for you. When He said: this is my beloved son it was an eye-opener to all those disciples and to all of us. This is my son...what are you going to do with him? What will he have in your life? We need to listen and we need to make a listening space.

So many people say: well, Pastor Jeff, I don't have time. You don't understand. I've got my children to run places, I've got all these activities. And I'm saying we need to stop the chatter. All of us have limited amounts of time...all of us. And yet my guess is when we say we have no time and someone calls today and says: I have tickets to... Oh, man! We change our calendar. We always have time for what's important...always. So what is our excuse? What will it be to help us rearrange our lives that we can do the right thing? Sometimes that happens in tragedy because we've not done it before. Wouldn't it be great to rearrange our lives every day that we have time for God and that we are not running?

Pastor Bob I worked for used to tell me when I would get running too frantically, he said: Jeff, there are a lot of good things you can do, but you can't do all the things that need done. Right? You have more to do in your life than you can do. You have to prioritize. You have to think: what is the best? You have to reflect on what will really make the most impact with my time and my talents, my gifts, my resources. What will be the best use of my time?

I heard someone tell the story once that their child came up to them and said: Daddy, I really have something exciting to tell you and I'll tell it to you real fast. And the father said it was at that time when I recalled her saying: I'll tell it to you real fast, that I have been too busy to listen to my child for some time. And the father said: Honey, you don't have to tell it to me real fast. You can tell it to me real slow. And the daughter said to him: then how about listening real slow.

When we are too busy for those around us, they will notice. Priority. Prioritizing what is important to us will change all the world. And when I think of the cross, this helps me prioritize. When you of what someone has given their life for you and not just the sad part of that, but given us after the resurrection. Think of the good. He says: I've given my life that you can have that resurrected life too, not just when you die, but every day you can find resurrection, you can find new life, you can find new hope, new purpose, new meaning in life. From wherever you have been there is a reason for your existence if we keep our eyes on Jesus

Christ and we need to do that.

There are a lot of things in this world that will take our sights off of Jesus, but we can't allow that. You and I are the only ones that can stay there in the dwelling place of God. I don't know where it is and what it is that helps you do that, but this season of Lent is here to draw us near. Sometimes when I have been out in the rain I wasn't prepared and sometimes I've gone out in the rain just to let it wash me like a baptism, washed clean. Sins washed as white as snow, saying: Jeff, today is a new day. I'm forgiving your past. I'm making a way for you to have a future that you might praise me, that you might lift your life before me as a gift and you might offer it fully unto me.

God's inviting all of us to do that that we might stop and that we might look and we might listen because in the end God is saying to everyone around us: coming soon is a new me. Every day? Every day is a new me if I give myself to Jesus because this journey of Lent is one that will bring us to God, give us peace for our souls, cleanse us from all unrighteousness and say: today is a new day. Thanks be to God for the privilege of being born anew every single day. Amen.