

Title: Revival

Text: John 1:10-18

Theme: God's Grace and our Pride

Purpose: Encourage People to be vulnerable.

Intro:

About 10 years ago my sister Ute attended a Bible School in the Southern Part of Germany called Adelshofen for one year. That Bible School is loosely affiliated with the Lutheran Church in Germany and they educate professional deacons and Missionaries. They were founded in the 1960s during a revival movement in some parts of Germany. That was the last big revival in Germany to my knowledge.

Revival in the 60s

I had the chance of visiting my sister for some days and stay at the School for awhile. And it just so happened that the two leading men from that revival (Heinrich Kemner and Otto Riecker) were still alive and they preached in some of the services that I had the chance to attend.

Both of the men were very old in their late 80s and to my surprise I found out that they both were about 60 years old when the revival started . They began to take an active leadership role in that movement when they were retired! Later I read a book of Otto Riecker titled "My life began when I was sixty years old". It was a biography - including much of what happened during that revival - and reading it I realized that truly life began really to take off for him only after he was 60 years old. He was just a regular pastor for a whole life before anything extraordinary happened.

I was very very interested to hear what these men had to say. I attended a service of Heinrich Kemner and it was a service I have never forgotten: During the sermon he shared with us about his struggle with temptations, his weaknesses and his personal problems. That was what I had at least expected from such a holy and famous man. He was very humble and the message was very clear: Only through admitting of our failures (our sins), through the sharing of our weaknesses will the door be open for God to enter in and reveal his power.

That was the secret of the revival!

I found out that they had founded a network of prayer partners all over Germany during that time. In those small groups they were praying about their troubles, their failures to do what God wanted them to do. They were bringing their weaknesses before the Lord.

Weak people in the Word of God

What is required so that the Lord can use us for his purposes? Do we have to be great Holy Men like Paul or Moses? I have made a short survey of those great men of the Bible and would like to read some of their remarks to you:

Paul wrote the following after a long struggle with God about his weaknesses:
(2 Cor 12:9-10) God said to me "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong."

That is a rather curious insight of Paul: "When I am weak then I am strong". But that is exactly what I heard from those old wise men!

Then I found the words of Moses the powerful man of God. He replied in the following to God after God told him to go to Egypt to free the people of Israel from slavery:
(Exodus 3:10) "But Moses said to the Lord, "O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue". Then the Lord said to him, "Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes the mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak. But he said, "O my Lord, please send someone else".

Moses is having big trouble accepting God's call. He knows that he is not a good talker and so he tries to find a way out. Moses was weak. But God promised to help his weakness and ultimately Moses went to Egypt having faith in God's promise.

Both Moses and Paul were not self-confident but rather aware of their shortcomings. But they had one important thing: They trusted God and went ahead despite their weaknesses.

Weakness the prerequisite for experiencing God

Usually we think that we can accomplish something only when we are strong, when we have things under control. In the Kingdom of God it seems just the other way around: When we are weak then we are depending on the Lord and then the Lord has the chance of revealing his power. When we are strong then we often act as if we can be independent and we do not need God.

If we are strong and think we can do it on our own then we often separate ourselves from other and we will not experience fellowship. But if we are weak and share our weaknesses then we can have a strong fellowship. Strong fellowship is often experienced during times of need like wars or catastrophes.

God can only work in the lives of people who are aware of their weakness, their unfitness before the one who is holy and pure. Those who know that they need help will rely on him.

When we are weak then we come to the Lord our God in prayer and seek his face.
When we are weak then we will experience his help.

Weakness necessary for becoming a child of God

Turn to our bulletin for today and have a look at the Gospel Lesson. It says in verse 12 and 13

But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of man, but of God.

How do we become children of God?

It says here not by the blood. Meaning your bloodline or your heritage is not important for becoming a child of God. You do not need to be a direct descendant of Abraham like the Israelites believed. It does not matter if your family is Christian or if you were raised a Christian.

And then it says here: Not by the will of man. One does not become a child of God by our accomplishments through our strong will. Not by our efforts. There is no recipe: Just do this and that and you will be a child of God.

Then how do we become Children of God? By trusting and believing Jesus we are born anew by God. By trusting him for our needs and our desires. Our needs are our weaknesses and through them we can experience God's power and God's salvation. Faith in Christ is trust that Jesus Christ will take care of our needs. It is the trust that we can come to him and he will help us. Faith is not only accepting certain beliefs as true but it is living in fellowship with Jesus.

Pride

What is often hindering God working in our lives is our thinking that we can do it alone. From my experience it seems that God will let us do it alone if we wish to and are proud in thinking that we can. It then often takes running our head against the next wall to come back to our senses and trust him again instead of going on our own.

The Apostle James said in his letter:

God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble (James 4:6)

Another expression of pride is regularly overlooked. People are often trying to keep a certain reputation or set up an image of themselves. They want other people to think about them in a good way. They are proud of the image they have. These images are frequently encountered in churches and I think that concerns us very much.

If we are proud of our self-image then we are not willing to share our weaknesses and so again we are building up a wall against God who wants to help us and against the fellowship in which we can share in our weaknesses. If we are not ready to confess our need for help, our neediness in many ways then God cannot help us either.

If we are proud of our self-image then we are not willing to take the risk of embarrassing ourselves for example by doing things in front of a group of people.

I had a long fight with this fear of embarrassment. I had a big fear of big groups and of having to say something in front of all the people. It took me years to finally come to the

point where I was willing to risk embarrassment before a group of people like I am doing right now. Such a proud ego is a tough thing to handle.

One saying of Otto Riecker (one of the leaders of that revival in Germany) is still very fresh in my mind, especially since my sister repeated it to me again and again (this is German):

Ist der Ruf erst ruiniert, lebt es sich gaenzlich ungeniert.

Translation: If the reputation is gone, then you can live life freely without embarrassment.

Usually shyness stems from the fear of embarrassment through a group of people and I was called a shy person for a long time. But I came to see shyness as a problem of pride. I was holding onto an image (or reputation) that I wanted others to have of me. I think shyness is pride and an unwillingness to let go of the self-image one wants to project.

These fears can seriously chain a person. These chains of pride have to be broken to gain freedom. Where the spirit of the Lord is there is freedom (2 Cor 3:17). Bring these fears to the Lord and he can set you free.

What is much more important than what other people think of you is what God thinks about you. God knows what is in your heart. What do you think God thinks about you?

If you have the fear of embarrassment then think of Jesus. What did he do? He finally got hung on a cross for all to see slowly dying a horrible death. That must have been the most embarrassing thing I can think of. But he did it for a purpose for redemption of us for me and you. He suffered death, suffered humiliation but then God raised him again to new life from death.

Feeling weaknesses sign of the Spirit

It seems to me that being aware of our weakness is a sign of the Holy Spirit in us. The Holy Spirit in us yearns for us leading lives in holiness before the Lord and makes us aware of our sin, our shortcomings before God. You know that you are a child of God by seeing the Spirit work in your life, revealing more and more about some of the more unpleasant sides of yourself.

But we need not stop there. Now we need to take the next step and trust him who has made us after all and go on in trusting him to sanctify and purify our lives.

Conclusion

Let us have another look at a passage from the Bulletin. Look at the Second Reading verse 11:

In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance [The Holy Spirit] having been destined according to the purpose of him [who is God] who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will. so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory.

In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

Do not worry if you feel weak before the Lord and unfit for his purposes. Pray for your needs and then do not forget to thank him when he has answered your prayers.

You need to worry if you do not feel the need for the Lord. Do you think you can handle it on your own?

Did he not say: Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock, and it will be opened unto you? Let us live in the confidence that the Lord is good and strive for his glory.

Amen.

Let us now praise God by singing

Material

A couple of years later Roy Hession who was an active preacher in that revival on the English speaking side of the world came into my hometown and I heard the same message from him. Again the message "Bring your failures before the Lord and let him do do not do it yourself".