

9.20.2026 Trinity 16 (Ephesians 3:13-21; Luke 7:11-17)

According to biblical sources and scholars, St. Paul spent approximately six years in prison during his ministry. Most scholars believe that at the time of his first two-year Roman imprisonment, Paul was inspired to write four books of the Bible that are commonly called the prison epistles: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. In these epistles, St. Paul often encouraged Christians to be content everywhere and in all things. For example, in his letter to the Philippians, it was from prison that Paul reminded us that to have Christ is to have everything, and he assured us that in Christ, with Christ, and through Christ who strengthens me, we can do all things, we can press on in every circumstance (Philippians 4:4-13).

The Epistle we read from this morning is among the letters that St. Paul wrote from prison, and in his inspired words once again we find the Apostle encouraging Christians not to be discouraged by trials or tribulations. Paul writes, *“I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory. For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...”* (Ephesians 3:13-14). Paul is certainly one of the greatest examples of a saint who was not knocked to his knees by God, but who instead willingly lowered his knee to God, who humbly and faithfully knelt before the Almighty as he endured grief, pain, and sorrow. St. Paul tells the Ephesians *faint not at my tribulations*, or, don’t let my trials discourage you, because these crosses I bear are simply opportunities to serve God, to know Him and make Him known, and to witness the good and the glorious things that He will bring about through these difficulties.

One of the greatest difficulties St. Paul endured, he described as a *“thorn in the flesh... the messenger of Satan”* come to torment him, and Scripture tells us that he fervently prayed three times for this thorn to be taken from him. However, instead of answering his prayer by removing the thorn, God comforted and assured Paul with these words, *“My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness.”* God heard Paul’s faithful prayer, but instead of removing this painful cross, He provided His amazing grace and His perfect strength to bear it, and this definitive answer to his repeated prayer caused St. Paul to conclude and declare: *“Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may*

rest upon me” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

During his ministry, Paul endured shipwrecks, beatings, imprisonments, this thorn in the flesh, and in the midst of these things he tells us that he was glad, that he gloried in it all, because these trials were opportunities for the power of Christ to “*rest upon*” him. As I researched this passage of Scripture, I learned that the greek word translated into English in this verse as rest is a compound form of the simple greek word *skenoo*, which means, to pitch a tent. A familiar verse in which the word *skenoo* is used is John 1:14, in which St. John, writing about the mystery of the Incarnation, declares, the Word was made flesh and dwelt, or pitched His tent, among us (John 1:14).

St. John uses this word to draw a parallel between the way Almighty God dwelt among the Israelites in a tent as they journeyed through the wilderness, and the way God, in the Person of Jesus Christ, pitched His tent by taking on human flesh and dwelling among us, and St. Paul began with the same simple word, but used it in a compound form, to paint a beautiful picture, not of God pitching His tent in the center of our camp to the end that He might dwell among us in this wilderness, but rather, the image presented by St. Paul in this letter is one of the power and presence of God pitched as a tent spread over him, a tent spread over us as we endure the trials and sorrows of this earthly life.

There is great comfort found in the knowledge that God is with us always, but a greater and even more comfortable truth is realized in the blessed assurance that God is not only with us, but that particularly in our affliction and suffering and weakness, His power is like a tent spread over us, a tent in which God dwells, not among us, but in us. This is the reason St. Paul can so boldly declare, “*Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong*” (2 Corinthians 12:9-10). The world, and especially our culture, views such things as infirmity, reproach, need, persecution, and distress as weakness and loss, but the Christian, like St. Paul, never loses a thing in suffering and affliction. Instead, we gain the power of God like a tent spread over us, and in this tent, as we’re drawn into even deeper intimacy with our Lord, we are reminded that Jesus understands

and speaks to our suffering in a way that no one else, and no other god can.

In the final stanza of a poem titled *Jesus of the Scars*, Edward Shillito expressed that truth by contrasting the gods of other religions with the God of Christianity. He wrote:

The other gods were strong; but Thou was weak;
They rode, but Thou didst stumble to a throne;
But to our wounds only God's wounds can speak,
And not a god has wounds, but Thou alone.

Only a wounded God can speak to wounded people, and no other god has wounds, but Jesus. Our Savior Christ understands human suffering completely, and His intimate understanding of our wounds comes not only from His own human, mental and physical suffering, as Isaiah foretold, saying, “... *many were appalled at Him. His appearance was disfigured beyond that of any man, and His form was marred beyond human likeness*” (Isaiah 52:14). Not only does Jesus' understanding of our wounds come from His own sorrowful suffering, it also stems from the fact that even now He is with us in every moment of our suffering.

Jesus promised, “*I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee*” (Hebrews 13:5), “*I am with you always, even unto the end of the world*” (Matthew 28:20). At the Last Supper, He assured His disciples, “*If anyone loves me he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we shall come to him and make our home with him*” (John 14:23). Our bodies are, as St. Paul declared, “*the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have received from God*” (1 Corinthians 6:19). Our selves, our souls and bodies are a temple in which God dwells, *always, even unto the end of the world*, and in times of trial and sorrow and weakness, the power of God is a tent spread over us, in which God dwells not just among us, but in us, and in this tent, with scars in His own hands, feet, and side, Jesus speaks words of comfort and peace that only a wounded God can, and no other god has wounds, but Christ alone.

St. Paul gloried in his infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses. He took pleasure in his wounds and in weakness because God's strength is made perfect in weakness.. By the grace of God, may we follow

Paul's example, an example not of squaring our shoulders and standing on our own two feet, but of falling to our knees. In trials and sorrows and affliction, may we fight the good fight of faith on our knees that the power of Christ may rest upon us.