



The Reverend Emily Williams Guffey
Sermon: August 22, 2021
Worship in the Park – Belle Isle

Readings: Joshua 24:1-2a,14-18, Ephesians 6:10-20
Psalm 34:15-22
Gospel: John 6:56-69

My knee was really hurting me last month.

And I've had issues with my knees before, so I didn't want to take any chances, and I went right to the physical therapist...anticipating that the physical therapist would give me a bunch of exercises to strengthen my knee so that it would not get injured in a really bad way.

Come to find out physical therapists (and you may know this if you are a physical therapist or you know one) don't just look at the thing that we told them to look at.

I came in with a knee problem, thinking that I was going to get exercises to strengthen my knee so it would not get hurt!

And the physical therapist told me, "*Your back and your hips...you need to stretch those out. That will help your knee.*"

That's not the solution I was looking for! My knee hurts! It needs to be stronger. Strengthen my knee.

And the response was, "*Stretch out your back and your hips.*"
So over the weeks I did...and my knee is feeling much better.

But I was remembering that experience when encountering these readings, especially our epistle which it is all about strength.

And that physical therapists taught me, in their cunning ways, that strength is found where we least expect it.

Strength is found in places and situations when we're not actually looking for it. And strength is found...by stretching and resting and making space.

It made me think that strength is not the avoidance or absence of injury. To be strong is not to be impermeable to injury or pain.

But strength is making space to move amid and among the pain and injuries and the challenges and the hurts that do arise. Because they do arise.

To be strong...is to move among them.
To be strong is to have space within ourselves...to move.

I was listening to a conversation between Krista Tippett and Sharon Salzberg who is a Buddhist teacher (Lucinda's nodding, because Lucinda reminded me to listen to these conversations.) Sharon Salzberg is one of the leaders and founders of Insight Meditation.

And Sharon Salzberg was describing (of course, this is a characteristically Buddhist perspective) that pain is a part of our life. It is not worth our time and our energy and effort to avoid pain...but rather find ways to move and dwell within it.

And further she gave word to visiting forces — to pain, injury, anger, fear — being among those forces that visit our lives. They take place in our lives. No one of us is impermeable to anger, fear, pain. They happen.

We can choose how to greet such forces when they show up.
We can choose to make space within ourselves to move about.

She even says, when anger or fear or pain comes knocking at the door, we can choose to invite them in for dinner.

We don't need to be afraid of fear, anger, pain showing up in our lives.

But we can *choose* to move among them and let them go on and move right out of the door.

Though sometimes, especially in recent times, fear and pain our incessant visitors. It's like they are always over, and they have quite out-stayed their welcome.

And at the same time, we can still choose.
It is *our* house. We are at home within ourselves.

Fear is not our house. It's not their house. They are only visiting.
We can *choose* to remember that we are in the house.
It's our house.
And we must make space for us to dwell.

To be strong is to make that choice.

Our ancestors time and time and time and time again have had the decision before them:
Whether to let fear and anger and pain dominate and take over their space and their lives...or...to remember that *God* goes before them in *everything*.

And to remember that it is not only our house but *God's* house.
And to choose God.

As for me and my house, *we* will *choose* the Lord...which means that we do not choose to let anger and pain and fear rule.

They may visit. And they do. And sometimes they visit really frequently.
But we can choose time and time and time again, as our ancestors have, the Lord.

And that decision...is one of strength.

To be strong in the Lord is not to be above pain or anger or fear. They happen. They happen to all of us.

To be strong in the Lord is to *choose* the Lord in the *midst* of those forces.

And in that we have life.

In that we have healing...

To heal and to return and to return and to return again.

For it is by *his* wounds that we are healed, and it is in *him* that we are strong.

AMEN