

OUR REDEEMER LUTHERAN CHURCH      Iowa City, Iowa  
7<sup>th</sup> S. after Pentecost                      July 5, 2015  
2 Corinthians 12:7      “Roses DO Have Thorns!”

JJ

The title of our sermon today is stating the obvious. We all know the contrast evident in the rose. While we have seen the beauty of a rose garden, we may also have grabbed a stem at the wrong spot and been poked by a thorn.

We could spend our message today talking about the beauty of the rose and comparing it with the beautiful life of the Christian. That would be a worthwhile experience. We would not be phony in doing so, but genuinely able to share the joy, the peace, the comfort, the forgiveness, the love—all beautiful realities of the Christian life.

But we wouldn't be sharing the whole truth. “I beg your pardon. I never promised you a rose garden” said the lyrics to a popular song several years ago—“along with the sunshine there's got to be a little rain sometime.” (Lynn Anderson)

What is your expectation of the Christian life? Is it of a special brand of thornless rose—a care-free, worry-free, pain-free existence. Or maybe you realize that there will be thorns, but you still find it hard to accept and live with.

Our lessons today bring us into contact with some experts on thorns, namely Paul and Jesus. The Apostle Paul talks about one particular thorn in our text—may have been a vision problem or some other pain in his flesh that was never removed. In addition, he experienced insults, hardships, persecutions, difficulties, any of which could be considered thorns.

Jesus knew about thorns, too. He faced rejection by the religious leaders, people from his home town, even rejection by members of His own family. Like Paul, he experienced the thorn of insults and persecution. And, of course, Jesus also became acquainted with some real thorns that were placed on His head. It was a sign of mockery. All leading up to the rejection of the cross—put to death by men, even forsaken by the Heavenly Father. Buried.

And why did Jesus go through all this, suffering unimaginable pain? Because we are a pain because of our sin. It wasn't just the people of Jesus' day that caused Him pain. Our sin made His death necessary so that we might receive forgiveness.

I am not sure if it is an accurate summary or not, but it strikes me that you could divide the thorns experienced by both Paul and Jesus into two varieties or categories: People Pain and Physical Pain. Truly there is pain that comes from other people and pain that comes from some physical ailment. Think about that as you consider if you have any thorns in your life. It might best be asked, “Which ones do you have THIS week?” And in all honesty, we should ask, “How have I been a pain to others?”

No matter what their cause or source, thorns all have one thing in common. They are all painful!

People pains:

- Children: Maybe your thorn is a playmate that stops talking to you and joins with a group of kids in a clique, leaving you out.
- Parents & Children: You are thorns for each other once in a while as you struggle to understand each other, as you struggle through growing pains, stages in life, not only children, but adults as well.
- Family quarrels: A most difficult thorn to deal with is when family members don't speak to each other, as they put the worst construction on anything that is said and done, and the warfare seems to be never-ending, with immediate family, extended family.
- Person you work with may be your thorn in life. You just can't seem to get along. You've tried to be nice but now you are being falsely accused of something by this person.
- A neighbor who complains about the most insignificant things.
- Physical pain: arthritis, bursitis, back pain, migranes, poor vision, poor hearing.
- Maybe most troublesome and perplexing: spiritual doubt, religious questions that become thorns for you.

Something else that all of these thorns have in common: They tend to isolate us, make us feel alone with our hurt and pain. And cause us to ask "WHY?"

We all hear the "Why?" question often. "Why is this happening to me?"

You hear many human explanations: fate, odds were against me, bad luck, punishment for something I have done wrong.

Scripture is NOT silent on this subject! Thorns serve a purpose in God's plan in our lives: Strengthens faith, keeps us close to God, keeps us from being overly proud (text!), helps us develop patience, helps us to be sensitive to the hurts and pains of others—comforting rather than critical; matures us, builds endurance, character, hope.

Paul gave an answer to "Why?" in our text: the Lord's strength could work through his weakness. "My power is made perfect in weakness." This is God's message to Paul and to you and me. Pain makes us more dependent on God, instead of relying on ourselves.

Yes, roses DO have thorns and the Christian life does have painful thorns as well. However, they can serve a good purpose for us if we allow God to teach us through them, if we wait for the Lord to train us and not give up on Him, to lean on His strength.

Let's deal directly with this question: HOW DO YOU HANDLE THORNS? Let's learn from others:

- Learn from David's patience and trust: Psalm 27:1,5,13-14 "THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION—WHOM SHALL I FEAR? THE LORD IS THE STRONGHOLD OF MY LIFE—OF WHOM SHALL I BE AFRAID?...FOR IN THE DAY OF TROUBLE HE WILL KEEP ME SAFE IN HIS DWELLING; HE WILL HIDE ME IN THE SHELTER OF HIS TABERNACLE AND SET ME HIGH UPON A ROCK...I AM STILL CONFIDENT OF THIS: I WILL SEE THE GOODNESS OF THE LORD IN THE LAND OF THE LIVING. WAIT FOR THE LORD; BE STRONG AND TAKE HEART AND WAIT FOR THE LORD."

- Learn that you have an understanding Companion—One who has walked the thorny path of life in order to help you along the way of life and even unto eternal life.

Heb. 4:14-16 “THEREFORE, SINCE WE HAVE A GREAT HIGH PRIEST WHO HAS GONE THROUGH THE HEAVENS, JESUS THE SON OF GOD, LET US HOLD FIRMLY TO THE FAITH WE PROFESS. FOR WE DO NOT HAVE A HIGH PRIEST WHO IS UNABLE TO SYMPATHIZE WITH OUR WEAKNESSES, BUT WE HAVE ONE WHO HAS BEEN TEMPTED IN EVERY WAY, JUST AS WE ARE—YET WAS WITHOUT SIN. LET US THEN APPROACH THE THRONE OF GRACE WITH CONFIDENCE, SO THAT WE MAY RECEIVE MERCY AND FIND GRACE TO HELP US IN OUR TIME OF NEED.”

We have a companion—What a Friend we have in Jesus!

In addition, God says we are the Body of Christ. Therefore, we need to be understanding companions for one another as we journey through life together and face the thorns that come our way. “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” Gal. 6:2

Instead of being a pain to others, with the Lord’s help we can be burden-bearers for each other.

Yes, Roses DO have thorns—and so does the Christian life! “BUT THANKS BE TO GOD WHO GIVES US THE VICTORY THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.”

(Victory over thorns; victory over death!)

And who in all things MAKES US MORE THAN CONQUERORS THROUGH HIM WHO LOVED US.” (Rom. 8:37)

May He who has all power, even to remove thorns, if that is His will, may He give us the power to overcome and conquer those thorns not removed. To Him be all glory.

AMEN.