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Psalm 138; Mark 3:20-35  
"Summer Strength"

I own an amazing book called *The Westminster Collection of Christian Meditations – Over 500 Meditations Classic and Contemporary*, which is a veritable Who's Who of Christians across the centuries: Thomas Aquinas, Augustine of Hippo, John Calvin, John of the Cross, Meister Eckhart, St. Francis of Assisi, Ignatius Loyola, Julian of Norwich, Madeleine L'Engle, C. S. Lewis, Henri Nouwen, Archbishop Oscar Romero, Mother Teresa, Paul Tillich, Desmond Tutu, and many others.

In such hallowed ground, you can imagine my surprise when I read a meditation on surfing by William McNamara, author of *the Human Adventure: The Art of Contemplative Living*. Somehow, I cannot see John Calvin and John of the Cross on a surfboard. Mother Teresa: Let's go surfing! Why not, especially in McNamara's way of telling it?

He writes, "The surfer is my favorite example of the disciplined wild man, the man who has a perfectly balanced ascetical-mystical life. Check out his style.

"He gets up early in the morning. That's a tough ascetical act of self-denial. Then he attends carefully and reverently to his board, polishing and waxing it with love. Next, he puts the board, this burden of love, this sacred tool, on his head and walks silently and solitary to the sea.

"There he faces a lonely and forbidding beach hardly perceptible in the fog. He then plunges into cold water, works his way out into the deeps against the waves, and now comes the keenest ascetical act of all: he waits; no impulsive action, no rush, no rash moves. He looks, listens, sees the distant waters, watching intently, contemplatively for the right wave, letting all the others go by.

"Finally, he sees the big wave coming. Deftly and adroitly he moves into position – timing is so important – not to master the wave, but to meet it and become one. They meet. He is caught up in the magnificent, mounting momentum of that majestic wave; his muscles relax, his spirits soar, he lets himself go, surrenders himself to the mighty swelling and roaring onslaught of that wave; and he rides and rides and rides in utter delight and sheer ecstasy.

"That is the mystical goal of a surfer's asceticism. Such exquisite, abandoned delight in God's cascading glory, flowing through the parched human soul made

ready for the pinnacle of all human achievements, spiritual matrimony with God, is the mystical goal of all human asceticism.”

I can relate to that. For me, it is “summer strength” and goes to the heart of my sermon today.

The biblical texts read by Bonnie are from the lectionary and when I read the complicated Markan text, I ignored the parts where Jesus states logically that anyone who persists in claiming that his healing ministry is satanic, saying that he has an unclean spirit, those blaspheming against the Holy Spirit, commit an unforgivable sin – so long as they do so.

I shall not focus on Jesus extending his family. I too can say that Suellen, Anna and David are my family but then so are you my sisters and brothers in Christ.

I went to the beginning of the text where Jesus is frantically healing many that came to him. Earlier in the chapter, he is crushed by crowds and cures those with diseases and “unclean spirits.” The needs were as great then as they are today.

The text reads, “...the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. When Jesus’ family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, ‘He has gone out of his mind.’ And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, ‘He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.’ And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, ‘How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. But no one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered.’”

My focus is the final sentence, “...no one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered.”

What in life ties me or you down right now or what has the potential to tie me or you down? Jesus affirms our strength and especially our strength in him. He wants us to be strong to withstand the wiles of evil. That’s “summer strength” and I call it that because this is the beginning of summer and the scriptures today encourage us to be strong this summer – and throughout the year.

The Psalm lesson today is fantastic in this sense. It even has the word strength in it. In verse three, the psalmist addresses God, “On the day I called, you answered me, you increased my strength of soul” which reminds me that strength for Jesus and the Psalmist is strength of soul or spirit which is the

greatest strength of all. You can kill the body but you cannot kill the soul, Jesus says in Matthew 10.28. A strong spirit strengthens and heals body and mind and fosters a healthy emotional state of being.

The entire Psalm 138 is strengthening. I enjoyed it so much that I gave it a modern feel by simply reading a verse in the New Revised Standard Version and putting it into my own words. I've included it as an insert and thought we can appreciate its strength by reading it together responsively. I'll wait for you to locate the text. In your response of verse three, please strike the word "in."

<sup>1</sup>I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart; before the gods, I sing your praise;

**Passing all earthly gods, I approach God with thanksgiving and praise.**

<sup>2</sup>I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness; for you have exalted your name and your word above everything.

**My prayers during Sunday worship are wonderful. I continue to give thanks to God and bask in God's steady love and faithfulness. God's word and name are above all.**

<sup>3</sup>On the day I called, you answered me, you increased my strength of soul.

**I prayed and you heard me and strengthened ~~in~~ my entire being.**

<sup>4</sup>All the kings of the earth shall praise you, O LORD, for they have heard the words of your mouth.

**I trust that Presidents and Prime Ministers are listening to your words and praising you, O God.**

<sup>5</sup>They shall sing of the ways of the LORD, for great is the glory of the LORD.

**I trust that they joyfully enact policies that affirm God's will and give God the glory.**

<sup>6</sup>For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly; but the haughty he perceives from far away.

**Our high God reaches out to the poor and humble and keeps distance from those who think that they are better than others.**

<sup>7</sup>Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve me against the wrath of my enemies; you stretch out your hand, and your right hand delivers me.

**God is with me and saves me in troubled times and keeps me safe when those against me are angry with me for no good reason**

<sup>8</sup>The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands.

**As I continue in faithfulness, God's purpose and love will be with me forever.**

Doesn't that feel good just as the surfing meditation felt good? That's "summer strength."

What I'd like each of you with computers at home to do this summer is go to our website, [redwoodspress.org](http://redwoodspress.org), and click onto the spirituality icon and read and

practice the prayers and meditations listed there. Those who do not have a computer call me anytime and I will ensure that Mari sends you a copy of anything you want in the site.

The introduction in the site states, "The gifts of spiritual growth or enlarging devotional experience liberate the full potentialities of life, increase joy, peace, power and love. The returns are greater than our involvement in other activities. Our fragmentation can be expanded to wholeness and our immediacies to eternity. "Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut." (Revelation 3:8). There's a wealth of spiritually strengthening practices in the link.

Remember also, that like McNamara, we pray and mediate with any experience: surfing, hiking, biking, walking, movie-going, reading, swimming, etc. See God in the redwoods. Hear God rustling through the trees. Experience God in our gardens. Feel God in the sun – and don't forget the sunscreen! Amen.