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Alexandria, VA 22310
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2 Samuel 5:1–5, 9–10
Mark 6: 1–13
2 Corinthians 12: 2–10

BORN JULY 10, 1509

Next Friday, July 10, back in 1509, an infant was born. His father would urge him to become part of a profession where he would make more money than a minister. He would carry the same respect of the day; but for his studies and his labor, he would be rewarded richly. His father wanted him to be a lawyer. His mother would pass away only a few years after his birth. He was the second born in a family of three boys. Actually, there had been five births, but only three had survived.

Later his father would remarry. And he would bring to that family two half-sisters for this young boy to learn and to love. Early in his life when he was only fourteen, he was shipped off to college. He was sent to study Latin and by the time he was nineteen, he had not only finished his pre-college studies, but he held a degree in philosophy and theology. His father was still living at the time, and now the father exerted his considerable will over his son's life. He insisted that he pursue the study of law at the University of Orleans.

After only a year of so in law school, this fine young man took up the study of Greek as well. Then his father grew ill, and so the son quit school. That's right. One so famous to us was also a college drop-out. But after his father dies a few months later, when he was only 22, he returned to university. And at that time within the year, his life was radically changed. He had been studying Greek as well as Latin, and he was subdued by God—in his words, “subdued and brought to the point where his mind was of a teachable frame.” By his own admission, his mind and his opinions had become more hardened in spiritual matters that one might have expected of one so young.

Maybe that's one reason that we have such high regard for youth. Their minds are still malleable. They are still taking in truth. They have not been hardened to the point that they cannot learn. At 22, this overwhelming sense of God's presence caused him to devote himself and his considerable intellect to the matters of faith and theology. He found a home among intellectuals—humanists is what they were called in that day, intellectuals who were challenging some of the church's superstitions and abuses, the excesses that came with being an institution. A monopoly, if you will, on faith.

This man was among those who called into question how the church was being a church. He loved to refer often to this passage in Corinthians. He referred to it several times in his formidable work, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

We do well today to remember his simple sentence: “God subdued my heart and made it teachable.” Isn't that what Paul is saying in 2nd Corinthians? Isn't that what Jesus is saying to his disciples as he sends them out? Isn't that what led David to be called a

man with the heart of God early in his life still willing to be guided—not so hardened by life’s circumstances. The longer we live, the more we learn about God’s love, the more important it becomes for us to resist that hardness, that stubbornness. The more important it becomes for us to resist that temptation to being the center of all things good and worthy, the more important it becomes for us to trust the undeserved love of God bestowed upon us.

To trust God at work in our lives beyond our strengths and especially in spite of our weaknesses—if our lives are ever to have meaning, if we are ever to know peace, if we are ever to know purpose—we must stop focusing on ourselves. We must be centers of Christ.

The great theologians, devout souls for centuries, have known that knowledge of self requires knowledge of God. That’s why on this 500th anniversary of Calvin’s birth as we celebrate communion with God, we are also celebrating with that powerful sense of presence that convinces us that in this communion we must also commune with one another. And we can only begin this deeper connection if we are willing to let God tame self within us.

God does have an ultimate purpose for your life. It is not fatalism. It is not predestination. No matter how badly we misunderstand or corrupt God’s purpose, God has a plan to bring us back to Christ.

What would you rather do? Would you rather get on a sailing vessel where the captain has memorized every detail of every chart or would you rather be on a vessel that’s captained by someone who can read the signs of weather and water and who always returns you safely to port?

This isn’t an exhaustive list of truths or of institutes, but here are some tongue-in-cheek, if you will, wisdom sayings—proverbs—from Calvin’s writings:

- There is no worse screen to block out God’s spirit than confidence in our own intellect.
- Is it faith to understand nothing? To submit yourself and your conviction to the church?
- Don’t forget: Satan has miracles, too.

And then I’m not sure if this next one is sarcasm of literal truth:

- Consider whether women are not quite passed sense and reason when they want to rule over men. Which is it? Why would anyone be so foolish or why wouldn’t women want to rule over men seeing how we’ve made a mess of things.
- Man is a capable of understanding the mysteries of God (This next one’s for you, Melvin) as an ass is capable of musical harmony.

My Mom used to say this one in a different way:

- Every one of us from our mother’s womb is a master craftsman of idols.

- God will do whatever God has promised.

I cleaned this one up a little bit: See if you can figure out what I did to it.

- Looseness with words is equal to an upset stomach.
- In order to believe that the universe is made by God, we must be persuaded that God cares for all of His work.
- Build a man a fire and he will be warm for a day; but set him on fire and he will be warm for the rest of his life.

O that we not lose that warmth and passion that allows our minds and our hearts to be docile enough to be teachable still. Let us learn in this sacrum that our only hope is when our lives are centered on Jesus Christ and him risen from the dead, for our lives now and always. Amen.