

God's Grace is Sufficient

2 Corinthians 12: 7-10; Mark 6:1-13 July 4, 2021

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Grace and Peace to you, from our triune God,
who is the source of all life, source of all love, source of all hope. Amen

When Jesus came to Nazareth - *his* hometown –

The stories of healing surely MUST have spread through the community before he got there.

On the sabbath he began teaching in the local synagogue.

At first, the people who listened to him were ASTOUNDED by what they heard...

But then... A voice among them asks this snarky question:

"Isn't this the carpenter, the son of Mary - and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And aren't his sisters here among us?"

It was spat out – like an accusation!

Not a prideful welcome to hometown hero.

PAUSE

Barbara Brown Taylor notes that, in Jesus' day, the only reason to identify someone by his mother -- is to point out that no one knows for sure who his father is. The accusation was intended to humiliate him into silence.¹

The people took offense – Who did he think he was??

Certainly not a learned rabbi who would be teaching and preaching – at least not to THEM.

Their assumptions about Jesus became the obstacle that prevented them from receiving what he had to offer. Jesus was amazed at their unbelief...

He ran into such a wall of distrust and anger, that it incapacitated him.

Or *rather*, it incapacitated THEM... the disbelievers - who took offense at him.

¹ In her sermon, "Sapping God's Strength" by Barbara Brown Taylor

Theologian Debie Thomas observes that in this text...

“the people's small-mindedness, their lack of trust...

is not just a mere technicality; it has real consequences.

It constrains Jesus, blocks the healing work he longs to do for the people he loves.

Have you ever thought about that before?

Do we know that our own unbelief – our own lack of faith has real world consequences? Can you perceive it ?

Something precious is lost when we refuse to participate with the Spirit of God in transforming lives...in transforming the world.

When we fail to recognize the power of love, the power of forgiveness...

When we close our minds to the needs of others...

When we steel ourselves, or harden our hearts to whatever God puts in front of us to see...

We miss the very presence of God in our midst.²

What looks like a rare FAILURE for Jesus' ministry,
is not the end of the story.

From his hometown, Jesus moves on to other villages and continues to teach.

And then he sends out his 12 disciples – to carry his message,
to heal the sick, and to cast out demons.

He instructs them not to take extra baggage...

to carry nothing that will become an obstacle for them or for others.

Jesus has tasted rejection from his own neighborhood,
and he warns the disciples that they will also.

² “Hometown Prophets” by Debie Thomas, *Journey With Jesus* posted June 27, 2021

The deeds they will do - are not to bring glory to themselves... but to God.

The power they have, comes not by their own merit... it comes from God.
It is through their faith...and in their humble service
that God is able to work miracles through them.
It is in their weakness that God's power is made perfect.

The apostle Paul seemed to understand it,
when he began to hear criticism from other evangelists.
They said he was *impatient, weak, insecure, and tactless*.
He didn't work enough miracles – and he was always in trouble –
always rubbing people the wrong way.

Paul's retort was that he "never asked to be an apostle!"
God had slammed him to the ground one day and told him what to do –
even blinded him so he could not run away. And he suffered plenty.

By his own count, Paul had endured 5 public whippings and 3 beatings with rods.

He had been stoned once, shipwrecked three times,
imprisoned more often than he could remember.

He lived in constant danger – danger from raging rivers and bandits...
danger from his *own* people, as well as his enemies.

He was used to going to bed without food or water
and then lying there awake – because he was worried about his churches.

Paul carried a load of shame because of his weaknesses
he did not try to hide them. He counted them among his other "credentials"
when he defended himself to his critics in the church in Corinth.

The "thorn in his side" is a curious thing... but it makes him "one of us."

Perhaps it was his temper, his lack of social graces –
or his own anxiety and insecurity. Whatever it was, it got in Paul’s way –
so much so – that he begged God to take it away.

The answer Paul received for his prayer was not exactly what he hoped for.

***“My grace is sufficient for you,” God said,
“for my power is made perfect in weakness.”***

Paul may have been angry, frustrated, unkind even, at times, to his critics - but
God knows that being problematic is just part of being human.

PAUSE

Our entire world has been turned upside down in these past 16 months.

This 4th of July – feels a little bit like the beginning of a new year.

LAST year at this time, we were just beginning to realize the impact of Covid 19
on the world – with no end in sight.

Most of us still enraged – and somewhat bewildered - as we saw the inhumanity
of George Floyd’s murder and the impact on our community and on the world.

Every one of us had days – maybe even weeks and months –
when we were exhausted, depressed, sad, angry, insecure, tactless.

Many of us have had some sort of “shipwreck” during this time...

Still, none of that disqualified us from serving God.

The fact that the church survives -- with people like us in charge—
is the surest proof in the world that Christ is alive ...

living IN us... working THROUGH us...walking along side of us
or nudging us off our couches...

How else could we have endured, either as individuals or as a community?

God’s grace, God’s power becomes more evident -

when we acknowledge our failures, our poor judgment, our character defects...

So, what can it mean? “God’s grace is sufficient for you”

To have been given the grace of God – God’s free gift to you
 Is to receive the unconditional love and the unbounded forgiveness of a
 God who knows us better than we know ourselves...
 How can that NOT be “sufficient” for us?

Paul’s weakness or “failure” was not the end of *his* story –
 Failure was not the end of the story for *Jesus*...
 And our own failures, will not be the end of our stories.

Despite our fear, our grief, our exhaustion,
 our clumsy prayers, our resistance to change...
 Even in the face of our inadequacy... our missed deadlines...
 our awkward silences... our reluctance to engage with people unlike us...

Still, we are God’s beloved people ...
 Called and sent out – in spite of all the clunky baggage we insist on carrying...
 Called and sent to reach out... to bring healing and hope to a hurting world...
 God commands us – even gives us the authority, and the courage –
 to gather ALL people into community...
 to love – even and especially - the least loveable...
 to forgive the unforgiveable,
 to feed those who are starving – for food, for jobs, for affordable housing,
 for medicine... for recognition that ALL people are God’s beloved ...

God gives us power that enables *each of us*, like Paul,
to follow through...and to recognize – that yes – God is now,
and ALWAYS has been present in the work we are called to do.

Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us, has always been and will always be – for you.

For me. For us. For all.

God's grace is what we need, in order to live.

God's grace is not merely sufficient.

God's grace is all we have to offer

God's grace is all we have

It's all we need.

Amen