

NEW BEGINNINGS LUTHERAN CHURCH

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost – July 7th, 2024 (11:11 am)

MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT FOR YOU

Psalm 123
Ezekiel 2:1–5
2 Corinthians 12:1–10
Mark 6:1–13

The Ministers of Christ Are Sent with His Authority to Forgive Sins and Give Life

The prophet Ezekiel was raised up by the Spirit of the Lord and sent to speak an unpopular Word to the rebellious house of Israel. As a prophet, he was not to speak his own word, but to preach the Law and the Gospel: “Thus says the Lord God,” whether the people “hear or refuse to hear” (Ezek. 2:4–5). So, too, in the footsteps of the prophets before Him, the Lord Jesus “went about among the villages teaching” (Mark 6:6). In His hometown, as elsewhere, “many who heard him were astonished,” marveling at His wisdom and at the “mighty works done by his hands,” and yet “they took offense at him” (Mark 6:2–3). The offense culminates in His cross, which is, ironically, the heart and center of His “authority over the unclean spirits” (Mark 6:7). It is by that authority of His cross that those He sends preach repentance, “cast out many demons” and heal the sick (Mark 6:12–13). Thus, the apostle Paul boasts in the cross of Christ and in his own weaknesses, knowing that God’s grace is sufficient and that the power of Christ “is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:8–9).

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Amen. (Psalm 19:14)

My Grace is sufficient for you. These few words mean a lot. And we need to understand better what this means.

By the way, today’s texts confront us with a context of a complicated and rebellious world against the Word of God. In the Psalm, we see people being ridiculed for hoping and believing in God. God called Ezekiel to announce the good news in a rebellious and anti-God environment. And in the gospel, Jesus himself was rejected among his neighbors in Nazareth and encouraged his disciples to continue sharing the gospel even amid an ostentatious environment.

The apostle Paul has the characteristic of being quite scholarly in his letters. Theological depth. Spiritual wisdom. Faithful ministry. His theological depth and action among the Gentiles lead us to more profound thoughts about God, his action, and our lives related to God and our neighbours. This is the case with this answer from God to Paul: **“My grace is sufficient for you.”**

This relationship of suffering, deliverance from evil, God’s Grace, our rebellious world against the things of God, politics, the relationship of good and evil in the world bring us many questions that obscure the understanding of this profound phrase: **“My grace is sufficient for you.”**

How can the apostle Paul, a follower and faithful preacher of the Word of the Lord, not be freed from his sufferings? Oh, dear! What kind of a righteous God is this?!? Where is the Grace of God in that?!?! The light of the human vision is an injustice. From a human perspective, the apostle Paul, because of his sanctified life, deserved this relief. But from the divine point, no.

Unfortunately, we live in a society that encourages a “survivor” attitude. It’s all about winning, succeeding, eliminating the competition and looking out for number one. We teach and model personal self-sufficiency. Those who are weak don’t have a chance.

The Apostle Paul saw it differently. For him, weakness was a sign of strength. Paul had a thorn in his side. We don’t know what it was. It could have been bad eyesight, malaria or arthritis. Paul, however, accepted his limitation and was grateful for it. **“I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”**

Power in weakness? You’ve got to be kidding. No one wants to be the weakest link. We would rather be the winner. But this is precisely the paradox of the Christian faith. When we give of ourselves and lift others up, we are lifted. When we experience sorrow and suffering, we experience joy. When we are last, we are first.

Paul states that he had a “thorn in the flesh” to keep him humble. He had an abundance of revelations, which acted as a reminder to keep him from being too elated. We have a natural tendency to think of thorns in the flesh as punishment. Paul, on the other hand, sees them as a way of keeping us in check.

BUT WHERE IS GOD’S GRACE IN ALL THIS?

One time there was a man in the choir who couldn’t sing. The other choir members often complained to the choir director that he sang off-key and made it difficult for them to stay on track. Several of them put pressure on the choir director to do something. The choir director went to the pastor and told him that the man was creating a problem in the choir. He felt the pastor should go to him and suggest that he might want to be an usher or do something different in the church’s life¹.

The pastor went to the man’s home for a visit. He tactfully told the man that perhaps he might be better off not singing in the choir. **“But, I like to sing in the choir,”** the man said. **“It gives me great joy and a sense of participation.”** **“But you sing off-key, and it affects the quality of the choir,”** the pastor said. The man then replied to the pastor. **“You know, you are not the world’s greatest preacher, but I listen to you every Sunday. And because**

¹ [Keith Wagner](#) comments.

you are my pastor, I support you and listen even though there are few times that I get anything good from your sermons.” The pastor thanked the man for the visit and said, ***“I guess we’re lucky to have people like you who want to sing in the choir.”*** The pastor then left and went home.

WHERE IS GOD’S GRACE IN ALL THIS?

Paul may have been using a literary device so as not to claim special privilege for himself. This ***“certain man,”*** this ***“person in Christ,”*** could boast of his special spiritual gifts and knowledge, but apostle Paul said he would not boast. God had given him a thorn in the flesh—an angel and messenger of Satan—which would torment him and make him suffer. Paul said he would boast of his sufferings only and not glory in his spiritual gifts. Paul confessed that God had given him the gift of this thorn of suffering to keep him humble and to remind him of the common humanity he shared with all other people. We are like Saint Paul, and he is like us, sharing weakness, imperfection, sinfulness. Like St. Paul, we believe in Jesus Christ. God said to Paul, and God speaks to us, ***“My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.”*** As we are weak, God is strong.

We must confess that this does not make a lot of sense to us. We admire the strong, the talented, the wealthy, the successful. We want to be on the winning team.

It was no different in ancient Corinth. They liked winners too. They respected honor, money, credentials, success. They would have wanted to hear what this ***“certain man”*** saw and heard fourteen years before. We would like to hear about Paradise from someone who has been there. The Corinthians appreciated signs and wonders, and so do we. Those ancient people had a more challenging time believing in a God who became a man, who suffered and was crucified and died. It did not make much sense to them that becoming a Christian meant following this man who told his disciples that they should take up a cross and join him in pain and sorrow.

And if the greatest of the apostles could not get God to take away his thorn in the flesh, then who are we to promise believers that they will find earthly blessing. Followers of Jesus Christ are promised God’s presence with them but also persecution and rejection. But Paul says he is thankful even for the thorn because it is only in weakness that Christ is glorified. There is power in weakness because it is only through suffering that God’s Grace is made clear.

SO, WHAT IS GOD’S GRACE?

Think of a prize, a trophy. But you didn’t do anything to win. It’s the trophy for the laziest and useless! Then there’s a knock on your door, you open it, and they say: here’s your trophy.

If you want it, just take it, and you'll live forever. If you take the trophy, you received it for free (Grace), and you didn't win anything for your merit. If you reject the trophy and slam the door in the guy's face, you go on with human life but lose out the heaven – the eternal trophy conquered by Jesus on the cross. Exactly why salvation does not come by good works!!! It isn't easy to draw a moral line. Just believe, the rule is clear and simple. Still, God gave us the Ten Commandments, which are very clear and straightforward moral laws that teach how Christians should behave. Not as a condition of salvation but as a protection for yourself against evil, which wants to take your faith away. And, therefore, it ends up being a protection to your neighbor as well. That's the Grace of God!

NOW, ABOUT THE HUMAN VISION OF PAUL'S WORTHINESS FOR HIS HOLY LIFE AND GOD NOT HAVING ANSWERED HIS REQUEST FOR RELIEF: a virtuous life or something that allows you to pursue a life of holiness is a natural result of faith in Christ, not the other way around. You don't seek to be holy to please God and get a place in eternal life. But you do good after you have received this free faith as a gift – by Grace. Being good to your neighbour is a natural response to the love that God has given you through faith. That's the Grace of God!

SPECIAL GRACE FROM GOD

It is God's undeserved favor, which emanates from Jesus' sacrifice on the cross of Calvary. Through it, God saves and justifies the sinner, making him a child of God (*John 1:12; Ephesians 2:8,9*). Grace, when absorbed, also causes us to die and be resurrected with the Redeemer (*Romans 6:3-5*), and then we come to life.

Thus, freed from the bondage of sin, by the special Grace bestowed by God, we will no longer have the power of sin upon us; that is, sin will not dominate us (*Romans 6:14*). This grace “has made us pleasing to himself (God) in the Beloved (Jesus)” (*Ephesians 1:6*).

That is, we are not pleasing to God by our merits, but by the Grace of Jesus, our Beloved Savior. For this reason, there are no different degrees of God's love for men.

The Lord loves us equally, deeply and extraordinarily, for Christ's sake. The weakest of the disciples is as pleasing to God as the most spiritual. Grace is no respecter of persons (*Acts 10:34*).

What is grace? He chooses us. He finds us. He saves us. He rescues us. It's all his doing. Then by his initiative. We let him work in us. We submit to his will. And he gets all the glory. We have simply done our duty as his servants.

God's grace motivates us. Encourages us. Gives us hope. As well as meaning and peace. God's grace is enough. It's more than enough. It is sufficient.

God bless us to continue living in this Grace! In Jesus' name! Amen.