



DAILY FAITH PRACTICES

Sunday, July 3-July 9 (B) – 2 Corinthians 12:2-10

Focus: *Sufficient Grace*

word of life

“My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Corinthians 12:9 NRSV)

Read 2 Corinthians 12:2-10.

This section of 2 Corinthians (chapters 10-13) is thought to be a part of a later correspondence Paul wrote when his relationship with the church in Corinth was at its lowest point. Rival “apostles” in Corinth had undermined Paul, challenged his teachings, dismissed his preaching, and boasted of their spirituality and ecstatic experiences as being far superior to Paul’s.

1. *How can spirituality and spiritual gifts and experiences cause division?*
2. *How can such divisions be avoided or mended?*

Paul writes his defense – even though he doesn’t think anything will be gained by getting into a boasting contest (vs. 1) – by telling of “a friend” who had a visionary experience. Unlike Paul’s opponents, who boasted of their ecstatic experiences and made them a mark of superiority, the “friend’s” vision was so profound that Paul ironically indicates that things were heard that could not be spoken by mortals (vs. 4). So Paul will not tell anything more about his “friend’s” revelation, even though if he did, it would validate Paul’s spirituality and show the exceptional character of the revelations he has experienced. (It appears that the “friend” is Paul himself.)

Paul then stakes his authenticity not on heightened spiritual experiences or on boasting, but instead on weakness. He reveals to the church in Corinth in a very personal way about the “thorn in the flesh” (vs. 7) that Paul has to bear. There has been much speculation of what this difficulty might have been – sexual temptation, a physical malady, or a mental illness (such as depression). Three times, Paul asked the Lord to take the thorn away; but the answer from God was always the same and is the hallmark of Paul’s message: “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.” (vs. 9)

The nature of the “thorn” is not the point; rather, the thorn leads Paul to a vulnerable humility and a trust in the Lord. Rather than relying on his own strength or on his résumé – rather than compiling a list of spiritual experiences about which he can boast – Paul is forced to rely on God’s grace. The grace of Christ is more powerful than the difficulties that come from life’s challenges. In God’s hands, weakness brings strength, death brings life, and humility brings assurance.

3. *What are some “thorns” that people have to live with?*
4. *How does living with a “thorn” shape a person’s life and faith?*
5. *Is God’s answer to Paul comforting, troubling, or both? Explain.*

Paul concludes this very personal portion of his letter by pointing once again to the challenges and calamities he has endured as an apostle. He does more than endure suffering for the sake of Christ; he embraces it. “Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.” (vs. 10) The word translated “content” is even stronger; it could be translated “to delight in.” To delight in weaknesses and suffering for the sake of Christ bears witness to a grace that is sufficient indeed!

6. *How do you find contentment and delight in the midst of suffering?*

word among us

“Chin up!” “Big boys don’t cry.” “Don’t ever let them see you sweat.” “Don’t ever show your weakness.”

We are taught from an early age be strong, to display our assets and hide our liabilities. We value the biggest, best, and brightest. We strive to always show our best side; we emulate the perfectly-sculpted physiques and are uncomfortable with those who are handicapped with special needs.

1. *When you grew up, how important was it to be strong?*
2. *Give examples of how our society places high value on the biggest, best, and brightest.*

“My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Corinthians 12:9 NRSV)
God seems to have a way of transforming weakness into strength. A symbol of suffering and agony becomes a beacon of hope. A cruel death becomes a gift of life and salvation. The lowly are lifted up. And our uncertainties and vulnerabilities become vessels for a confident faith.

3. *Describe someone you know whose life reflects the phrase, “power is made perfect in weakness.”*
4. *In what ways is God’s grace sufficient for them? For you?*

In the wonderful book, *The Wounded Healer*, Henri Nouwen reflects on the strength that comes through weakness and wounds. Our “thorns” reveal our shared vulnerabilities and remind us of our reliance on God. It is not a God that is removed from the suffering of the world; rather, it is a God with nail-pierced hands and feet and a spear-pierced side. We are embraced by this God in our suffering. Our wounds reflect our common need for God and for one another. They remind us of our reliance upon grace – grace that is sufficient for our every need.

5. *How do our wounds open us to God?*
6. *What give you strength in difficulties?*
7. *How does it feel to know God’s grace is sufficient for us?*

faith practice in daily life

Proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed

In baptism, a lit candle is presented to the newly baptized (or to the parents or sponsors) along with the calling to let the love of Christ shine through us. It is a challenging call. Too often, we feel like we have to have just the right words or the right set of skills in place before we can let our lights shine.

The message in today’s reading suggests otherwise. God’s love can be seen and heard through us, even if we don’t have everything properly in place. In fact, the good news of Christ is sometimes more clearly heard and seen through our very weaknesses and challenges we face. As we place our lives in God’s grace, God gives us the strength to live out our calling to proclaim the good news.

8. *How has God used your weaknesses to proclaim the good news of God in Christ?*

Prayer

Gracious God, grant us your all-sufficient grace, that we may know your strength in our times of weakness and challenge. Amen

last word

Watch for examples of power being made perfect in weakness.

Daily Faith Practices

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