

# Sermon

## “Grace Enough”

A Sermon for Cary Presbyterian Church

Sunday, July 4, 2021

6th Sunday After Pentecost

### Prayer For Illumination

**Lord, in a world seemingly dominated by the powerful and impressive — we cannot help but notice how the narrative of our faith runs along another path.**

**Gentleness - instead of harsh insistence**

**Weakness - instead of power**

**Foolishness - in the face of the world’s wisdom**

**Humility - in a sea of self-serving pride.**

**We know the story of your coming to those who should have known you best and being rejected by them because familiarity seems to breed contempt.**

**We wonder at the words of the apostle Paul who openly admits that he is no “super apostle.”**

**Give us ears to hear your peculiar gospel this day. Save us from the folly of adopting the world’s sense of what is good and beautiful and true, and give us faith to receive your Word this day. Amen.**

*Mark 6:1 He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. 2 On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, “Where did this man get all*

*this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! 3 Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him. 4 Then Jesus said to them, “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.” 5 And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. 6 And he was amazed at their unbelief.*

*Then he went about among the villages teaching. 7 He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. 8 He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; 9 but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. 10 He said to them, “Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. 11 If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.” 12 So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. 13 They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.*

- I. Set Context for Reading Passage:**
- A. Paul’s authority under question . . .**
  - B. “super-apostles”**
    - 1. question his credentials because**
      - a. no powerful speaking**
      - b. no miracles**
      - c. no visions**
- . . . if he’d had them he surely would have told about them . . .**
- C. Paul “defends” himself in Chapter 11 by citing his failures and “foolishness” for Christ’s sake.**
    - 1. Humility**
    - 2. Free instead of speaker’s fee**
    - 3. He “failed” to put on airs or to shame them**
    - 4. He surpassed the SAs in imprisonment and floggings, stonings, and beatings, shipwrecks.**

**In short he boasts of his weaknesses . . .**

*2Cor. 12:2 I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows. 3 And I know that such a person—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows— 4 was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat. 5 On behalf of such a one I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses. 6 But if I wish to boast, I will not be a fool, for I will be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think better of me than what is seen in me or heard from me, 7 even considering the exceptional character of the revelations. Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated. 8 Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, 9 but he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.” So, I will boast all*

*the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. 10 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.*

## **II. Chptr 12 Paul continues tongue-in-cheek “boasting”**

- A. Visions (he knows *someone* who had a vision).**
- B. But to protect him from pride . . . thorn in the flesh**
  - 1. Don’t know what it is . . . doesn’t matter**
  - 2. He appeals to God for healing (x3!!)**  
**. . . left in weakness.**
- C. God tells him, “My grace is sufficient, for (my) power is made perfect in weakness.”**
- D. Paul then declares: “So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.”**

## **III. Glad in weakness . . . that Christ may powerfully dwell in me.**

- A. This is a holy mystery. One I do not fully know about.**
- B. I am as eager as anyone to be “successful” at what I do.**
  - 1. Approbation of peers**
  - 2. Example of “effective ministry”**
  - 3. Pastor of a growing and “successful” congregation.**
  - 4. Husband and Father of an outstanding family.**
- C. I think that we are called to be our best . . .**

**So how does that square with being glad in weakness?**

**IV. Hints at an answer:**

**A. In truth my heroes in things of God have been and are all deeply humble people.**

**B. John the baptists in John 3:30**

**“I must decrease and he must increase.”**

**1. glad in weakness that Christ may be powerfully dwelling in me.**

**C. I believe that God will teach us things in our seasons of weakness that cannot be learned in seasons of strength . . . but too many of us are too busy running away from our places of weakness to learn from God what is being offered.**

**D. A quick clarification of what humility is *not***

"You must therefore conceal from the patient the true end of humility. Let him think of it not as self-forgetfulness but as a certain kind of opinion (namely, a low opinion) of his own talents and character. Some talents, I gather he really has. Fix in his mind the idea that humility consists in trying to believe those talents to be less valuable than he believes them to be. No doubt they *are* in fact less valuable than he believes, but that is not the point. The great thing is to make him value an opinion for some quality other than truth, thus introducing an element of dishonesty and make-believe into the heart of what otherwise threatens to become a virtue."

*The Screwtape Letters* - letter 14.

**V. Humility As the Catalyst which Allows Grace to be Fully Effective**

**A. How does Reverence of God get into you?**

“How does reverence before God get into a person?” The elder said: “When a person lives in humility and simplicity, and refuses to judge others - that is how reverence of God gets into them.”

## **B. Humility as an antidote to the dangers of pride...**

From Abba Macarius (the Great) — "When Abba Macarius was returning from the marsh to his cell one day carrying some palm-leaves, he met the devil on the road with a scythe. The devil struck at him as much as he pleased, but in vain, and he said to him, 'What is your power, Marcarius, that makes me so powerless against you? All that you do, I do, too; you fast, and so do I; you keep vigil and I do not sleep at all; in one thing only do you beat me.' Abba Marcarius asked what it was. The devil said, 'Your humility. Because of that I can do nothing against you.'"

### **1. A little translation is needed...we seldom speak of demons and devils meeting us on the road...**

† **In desert literature they are not shy about thinking of their “bad thoughts” as coming from an attack by demons...**

### **2. But this little story nevertheless has a powerful conclusion... Being humble protects us from much that is harmful to us.**

† *Antony said, ‘I saw the devil’s snares set all over the earth, and I groaned and said, “What can pass through them?” I heard a voice saying, “Humility”.*

### **3. No wonder that St. Benedict’s Rule includes Humility as the subject of the largest chapter.**

### **4. Twentieth century writer and guides Thomas Merton:**

*"It is almost impossible to overestimate the value of true humility and its power in the spiritual Life."*

Thomas Merton — New Seeds of Contemplation p.181

**C. Humility allows us to be gentle when others would be hostile . . . because it prevents us from being surprised by the criticism of others.**

**1. The truly humble person is well-aware of their many foibles, faults, and sins.**

**VI. It is a mystery — but God can and does use humility to help us become what we are meant to be...**

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*Deut. 8:11 Take care that you do not forget the LORD your God, by failing to keep his commandments, his ordinances, and his statutes, which I am commanding you today. 12 When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, 13 and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, 14 then do not exalt yourself, forgetting the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, 15 who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, an arid wasteland with poisonous snakes and scorpions. He made water flow for you from flint rock, 16 and fed you in the wilderness with manna that your ancestors did not know, to humble you and to test you, and in the end to do you good. 17 Do not say to yourself, “My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth.” 18 But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, so that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your ancestors, as he is doing today.*

**A. God provides for us *enough* in the deserts of our life “to humble [us] and to test [us], and in the end to do [us] good.”**

**B. Where the apostle Paul, (and I too) seem to get tripped up is that we want *more than enough* when God simply indicates that there is “*Grace sufficient* for our needs.”**

**C. Let us not forget that humility is one of the things Jesus desires to teach us...**

*Matt. 11:28 “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”*

## **VII. Having Grace Sufficient for our Needs means we are enough...**

- A. Rita’s first pilgrimage.**
- B. My pilgrimage to Iona in 2019 . . .**
- C. Trip to Columba’s Bay**

