

Sunday, July 5, 2009
God's Grace Is Sufficient

Ordinary Time (Proper 9)

Scriptures: *II Samuel 5:1–5, 9–10; Psalm 48; II Corinthians 12:2–10;*
Mark 6:1–13/6:1–14 IV; Moroni 10:29; Doctrine and Covenants 163:10a–b

We Come into Your Presence, Lord

Prelude Anna
Welcome and Sharing Carole
Gathering for Worship Hymn: "O Lord, Grace Our Communion" *HS 1* Congregation
We Give You Praise, Lord

Call to Worship Carole

Leader: God loves you with an everlasting love.

People: Praise God, that we are drawn close to have our wounds healed, our emptiness filled, and hopes strengthened.

Leader: Do not turn away in pride, fear, or guilt from God's everlasting love. Let yourself be drawn close.

People: Let us open our minds and hearts and discover anew the blessings of the gospel.

Leader: Be vulnerable to God's grace.—*Doctrine and Covenants 163:10a–b*
adapted

*Hymn of Praise: "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing" *HS 31* Congregation

*Invocation Carole

*Response Anna

A Time of Confession and Pardon Nancy

We come to the table of bread and wine with deep, hurting hungers from the emptiness of our worship of false idols: Our way of life, our nation, our fears, our politics, our unforgiveness, our ambitions, our faithlessness, our greed, our status, our doctrines. And here at the table of love, we find healing.

—Adapted from *Worship Resources for the Sacraments*,
Judy Judd, ed. (Herald Publishing House, 1968), 79.

Silent Moment of Reflection and Prayer

Scripture Reading: *II Corinthians 12:2–10* Nancy

We Share with Generous Hearts

Disciples' Generous Response

Statement Denise

"Grant us, Lord, the grace of giving with a spirit large and free,
that ourselves and all our living we may offer unto thee."—*HS 413*

Blessing and Receiving of Oblation and Mission Tithes Denise

Communion Message Based on II Corinthians 12:2–10

Anna

Sacrament of the Lord's Supper

Preparation of Emblems Hymn: "Let Us Break Bread Together" *HS* 342

Congregation

Invitation to the Lord's Table

Come, let us kneel side by side and share together this holy meal. The Lord is present and seeks to fill our hungry souls. Let us break bread together on our knees.

Blessing of the Bread and Wine

Denise

Serving of the Bread and Wine

Denise and Carole

Hymn after Communion: "Jesus, Remember Me" *sing twice NS* 26

Congregation

Silent Meditation

God's Grace Is Sufficient

Sending Forth

Nancy

Lord, by your grace we came, and by your grace we depart. You have met us again here, and for this we thank you. We thank you for the unmerited love we enjoy. Help us accept your call and your commission and become more involved in ministering to the needs of the world about us. Send us forth refreshed and renewed to be about your business and to acknowledge your blessings day by day. Amen.

—*Worship Resources, Beginning Advent 2005 up to Advent 2006, Year B*
(Herald Publishing House, 2005), 146.

*Sending Forth Hymn: "Sent Forth by God's Blessing" *HS* 493

Congregation

*Response

*Postlude

Sermon Helps

Scriptures: *II Samuel* 5:1–5, 9–10; *Psalms* 48; *II Corinthians* 12:2–10; *Mark* 6:1–13/6:1–14 *IV*

Exploring the Scriptures

Paul's second letter to the saints in Corinth is personal and passionate, revealing much about both leadership of congregations in conflict and discipleship in times of personal struggle. To understand why Paul writes strangely in 12:2–10, it is necessary to understand the conflict that is occurring between Paul and the congregation. Frank Matera summarizes it as follows:

The father and founder of the Corinthian community, Paul, finds himself alienated from his "children," who, abetted by intruding apostles, have called into question his integrity. To resolve this conflict, Paul must engage in an extended defense of

his ministry in order to show the Corinthians that they, and those who have intruded upon his missionary field, have misunderstood the essential nature of apostolic ministry and, therefore, of the gospel.... At stake in this conflict are nothing less than the nature of ministry and the shape of the gospel that will be preached at Corinth.

Paul does not want to boast about himself, but the “intruding apostles” are apparently boasting about themselves, and the congregation seems to have asked Paul to submit matching credentials. When he does so in verses 2–4, he is plainly describing his own experience, because he is the only one who could be aware of this person’s experiences. He has chosen not to tell the Corinthians about the experience earlier, both because he believed it would be self-promoting (v. 6) while not helping them (v. 1) and because the things he heard in the experience were “unutterable utterances”—an oxymoron, but one that we understand (v. 4).

While Paul affirms the truth and “the exceptional character of the revelations,” his main purpose is to set up the larger revelation of the power that comes in weakness. At just the moment he is experiencing the elation of the divine encounter, he is given a thorn in his flesh—some kind of personal suffering that will be with him from then on. Not understanding why he is being made to suffer, he prays that the pain would leave him. (As we all do, Paul wants to specify what the answer to his prayer should be.) Instead, the Lord makes clear that the suffering is as much a gift as the ecstatic experience: “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.”

Paul is therefore happy to boast about his many weaknesses. He has come to the radical understanding that the power of Christ dwells in his weaknesses: “Whenever I am weak, then I am strong.” He has come to be vulnerable to divine grace. You might say that while God’s grace is sufficient, our weakness is necessary.

Countless hours have been spent trying to guess what Paul’s thorn was. It is possible that the Corinthians knew (see 10:10), and Paul therefore does not need to say. In any case, it is good for us that he does not say, because we are free to count our own weakness as equal to his, and God’s grace as sufficient for us, too.

In the Communion experience, we have the opportunity to confess our weaknesses and cast our burdens on the Lord. By receiving the bread and wine, symbols of Christ’s body and blood, we accept the sufficiency of God’s grace.

Central Ideas

1. In order to receive God’s grace it is necessary to recognize and admit our weaknesses and personal pain.
2. In receiving the gift of our weaknesses, the power of Christ is also received.
3. Christ provides strength in times of weakness.

Questions for the Speaker

1. How have you been able to recognize your weaknesses as ways that the power of Christ might work?
2. How does this passage help you deal with the question of why there is suffering?
3. Can you name instances of Christ's power working through your weakness?