

Grace Sufficient
Psalm 48:1-3, 9-14 and Mark 6:1-13
4 July 2021

Ann and I spent a few days last week in Georgia, visiting one of our sons, his wife and their two frisky girls. And I think we'd agree that one of our **greatest joys** as parents has been seeing how **good** a father our son has become. Actually, **both** of our sons are remarkable dads. They're **engaged** parents. They're patient and compassionate and clearly present to their children. They consistently provide them a foundation of love. And they have **taught** their children about the love **God** has for them, too... the **unconditional** love God has revealed in Jesus Christ... a love they will never **lack**... love they can never **outrun**...love they can always count upon. *You can live from that love*, I'm sure they've told their children. *You can live from that gift of grace. It will be sufficient for you, no matter what comes.* (It is grace sufficient for us **all**.)

Jesus, **our** elder brother, **clearly** lived **from** God's steadfast love. The gospels **spread** that before us like fireworks in the sky! And **as** he lived **from** God's gracious love, he was amazingly free to live **for** God – to love God – and all of God's other earthly children – purely, passionately, courageously, selflessly – with no need for **anything** beyond what God's **love** supplied him in abundance.

Unlike so many celebrities and politicians, **Jesus** had no need for groupies or sycophants to stroke his ego. God's grace was fully sufficient for him. So, when he was rejected or insulted, it was **not a disaster**. God's grace was sufficient. And there he stood. Jesus **seems** to have taken **care** to stay **grounded** in that grace. He spent a lot of time in prayer, in conversation with the Holy One – partly, I believe, so he could keep a proper perspective on himself and on what he was going through... to reinforce his willingness and capacity to live **from** God's **love**. It seems to have been a daily, ongoing endeavor. And because he **did** so well and **truly** live from God's grace, this world is a different place. He certainly made an impact! And **some** people... even some of us... have been drawn into **believing** that we and others **also** can live from God's grace... that we're **all** called to live from God's gracious love... to live **from** God and **for** God... and to **witness** to the **sufficiency** of God's gracious, unconditional love.

Now, for just a little while I want to focus your **attention** of the passage from **Mark** – on the **interaction** between Jesus and the folks in his **hometown**. When Jesus finally got back to his hometown after **beginning** his ministry, he had

already **taught** great crowds of people; he'd **stilled** winds and waves on a stormy sea; he'd **healed** scads of sick persons and **freed** many who'd been captive to unclean spirits. And when Jesus started teaching on the sabbath in the synagogue in Nazareth, Mark tells us that **many** who heard him were **astounded**. Were they astounded by **what** he was teaching... or **that** he was teaching? Mark doesn't say. What Jesus's **townspeople** said was, *Where did **this** man get all of this? What **is** this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by **his** hands? Is not **this** the **carpenter**, the son of **Mary** and brother of James and Joses, of Judas and Simon; and are not his sisters here with us?* It **seems** they somehow felt **diminished** by Jesus... like, if **his** stock was **up**, theirs was down. So, they tried to put **him** down – the **carpenter**, the son of **Mary**... a nobody?! That might have stung him.

But Jesus did **not take** their **insults** badly... their effort to **diminish** him. He did not take it to heart. **His** heart, **you** understand... his sense of self and sense of worth... was grounded deeply in God's **grace**. And God's **grace** was **sufficient**. It was all that he needed. *Prophets*, he observed, **perhaps** with a smile, *are not without honor... **except** in their **hometown!***

Now remember that **among** those Christ was **teaching** that day were his **disciples**. And at **that** point he was **teaching** his **disciples** by **example**... **showing** them what a person who lives **from** God's gracious love is **like**... what he or she can depend on... and how free it makes him or her. It was quite an example... quite a lesson for his followers... one that was followed soon afterwards by "a quiz".

After leaving Nazareth with the twelve, Jesus decided that it was time for **them** to **try** out living from God's grace themselves. *God's grace **is** sufficient for you, too*, they'd heard him say. *It's all that you or anyone needs. So, **now** you're going to have an opportunity to **experience** that... to test it out.* Jesus sent **out** the disciples... sent them with authority... to teach people and to cast out demons, just as he'd been doing. He sent them **out** two by two – to keep one another accountable, perhaps. And, to **help** them discover how **entirely** sufficient God's grace was for them, Jesus **told** his disciples to travel **light**.

Jill Duffield, former editor of the Presbyterian Outlook, interpreted Christ's instruction like this: Jesus told his disciples to "*Take only a staff*" – no bread, no bag, no money. *Wear sandals, and only one tunic. Go in pairs.* Notice, she said – these few items and instructions allowed for **mobility** and **flexibility**. The disciples wouldn't be taking **time** every morning to repack the donkey. They wouldn't be dragging roller bag and stopping every few feet to rebalance things and to adjust

the straps. *Expect to be **on the move**. Never get too comfortable in one place. Don't be on the lookout for the **niciest** homes to stay in. Be **content** with the accommodations you're offered.*

The lightness of **load** that Jesus proscribed extended to **metaphorical** baggage, too. *Shake off the **dust**. Keep moving... mentally and spiritually. Don't obsess over those who won't hear you, who dismiss you or ridicule you. It happened to Jesus. Don't imagine it won't happen to you. Let it go. Keep moving. Keep sharing the gospel. Keep teaching, healing, confronting evil. **Don't** worry about **outcomes**. **Don't** carry **grudges**. Don't give into anger, fear, disillusionment. It won't be easy to **rely** on grace. **That's** why you'll need to be praying **constantly**. But, believe me, Jesus says – God's grace is sufficient for you. So, keep at it!*

Duffield also shared a tweet that Civil Rights leader John Lewis sent out on day during a particularly bad week in America: *Don't get lost in a sea of despair. Be hopeful, be optimistic. Our struggle is not the struggle of a day, a week, a month or a year. It's the struggle of a lifetime. Never be **afraid** to make some **noise** and to get in good trouble... **necessary** trouble.* So said John Lewis!

Well, in **light** of their Teacher's example and direction, the disciples went off, proclaiming the gospel, urging people to turn to God and to live from God's grace. They went off and demonstrated what can **happen** when people **do** live from a grounding in God's grace. As Mark said, *They cast out many demons and anointed with oil those who were sick, and cured them, just as Jesus was doing.* **That** is something for us to pay attention to... to ponder and take seriously.

So, friends... keep on moving. Keep on proclaiming, praying, healing, anointing and feeding people. Keep **on** casting out unclean spirits, confronting evil, alleviating suffering, speaking good news to the poor, nurturing the beloved community... and **praying**. Keep at it... together! **Go** together. And **rest** in places **with** those who welcome you. **Notice** the **beauty** you encounter and the good **trouble** you get into along the way. Live light, with the kind of love for **others** that Jesus has for you. We all belong to him, forever. Don't **forget** the grace of God that always underpins your life. It **is** sufficient... so **fully** sufficient... that you can let go of **everything** else.

Go – sow the **gospel seed**; let it fall where it will. Let those who hear, hear! And know that though Christ **has** sent you out, the teacher will be right there **with** you, always... with everything you'll ever need. On that, we have his word. Thanks be to God!