

**Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> July 2018**

**6<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Trinity, St Andrew's, Cobham**

**Ezekiel 2.1-5; 2 Corinthians 12.2-10, Mark 6.1-13**

**'God's Sufficient Grace'**

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***'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.'*** This is a familiar verse for many of us, perhaps one which we use regularly as a motivation prayer, or one which we have used when we were going through a particularly difficult time or shared with others in time of need.

The first time that this verse had real meaning for me was almost 14 years ago, when my husband died rather suddenly whilst out in London. In the blink of an eye, my life changed as I found myself widowed and the sole parent of two young children. I was heartbroken, helpless and *felt truly* alone as I asked God why He had allowed this tragedy to happen to me. We'd had plans, Ade wanted to retire early so we could spend more time together as the kids grow older, but God clearly had other plans for us all.

So, I turned to God in prayer and to my Bible. That was when I came across those words - 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness'. It opened up my eyes to a new concept about God – **my God** was telling me that He knows I am down but that He was with me. That in my weakness, His **grace** was upholding me and that from that weakness, His love and purpose for me will shine through. I felt comforted, and in the midst of my despair, I realised that I didn't have

to pretend to be strong, for God was there with his arms around me, sustaining and supporting me and I was not alone

In my grief, I was assured of His steadfast love – for me and for my children.

Although my heart was broken, I did not break, rather I felt strengthened in my faith, and as I came to understand the extent of God's love for us my transformation began, and my feelings of sorrow gradually became feelings of blessings. I watched my children grow and thrive, although life as we knew it had changed, where there was grace and faith, there was hope.

God's grace was sufficient for me and His power and strength were made perfect in and through my weakness, my sadness and my brokenness. In our second reading today, Paul was in the same state of submission and admitting the sufficiency of God's grace.

In this letter, Paul confronts the issue of false prophets who are undermining the spiritual growth of the Church in Corinth - he calls them 'deceitful workers disguising themselves as apostles of Christ'. Paul's authority as an apostle is under attack as is the truth of the gospel he proclaims. He complains about the 'thorn' causing pain in his flesh.

No-one is entirely sure what the 'thorn' is; perhaps a physical ailment or a personal enemy is responsible for this metaphorical pain on his flesh. Regardless, it is there, and Paul begs God **three times** to take away the thorn and pain but God's reply to

him is the message before us today. God said, '*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.*'

Grace is described as the free and unmerited favour and kindness of God. There are certainly many examples of God's grace to individuals in the Bible. God's grace gave Joseph strength to persevere through difficult circumstances and guided him to a position as saviour of his people. God graciously guided Moses, who doubted God at almost every turn, as he led the Israelites through the wilderness. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ was part of God's gracious plan to redeem us. There is no human effort involved in obtaining God's grace – it is *gratis*, a *free gift* from God, it says in Ephesians (2.8), 'it is by grace that [we] have been saved, through faith – and this not from ourselves, it is a gift of God – *not by work.*'

So, for God's grace to be sufficient, means that Paul has been given God's blessing in abundance, certainly enough to meet all his needs – physical as well as spiritual. Paul's illustration is not to show that he is a 'super apostle' better than the deceitful workers turning his new converts away from the Gospel of Christ. I am quite sure that God can heal Paul and deliver him from that constant pain dogging him; a dramatic healing that Paul can then boast about to his opponents in Corinth. A big sign of God's power that will show the greatness of God! Now that would be a spectacular and wondrous boast to his adversaries!

No, Paul is not trying to revel in his own importance, but he is trying to show the importance of Christ *in* Him, so that the new Christians in Corinth can submit fully to Christ. His pain from the thorn in his flesh shows his humanity and weakness – does

that remind us of someone? Jesus perhaps? God's reply to Paul's prayer is that His blessing is enough to get him through the pain he is experiencing and not just the physical pain but also to fulfil his primary mission of proclaiming Christ to the gentiles.

*God said, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.'*

God's grace is the foundation upon which the gospel message is built.

### **What does this mean to us?**

We live in a society/culture where weakness is considered a massive fault; a person is considered to be a failure if he or she shows weakness. We find it hard to admit to ourselves, much less to others when we are struggling with a burden that weighs heavily on our hearts. Be it an issue at work, a diagnosis of an illness, a family issue; we often think that we can handle it alone. Personally, I know there are times when I find it difficult to ask others for help. Many of us delight in showing the world how strong we are – even when in reality our burden is unbearable.

But we do not need to suffer or carry that burden on our own or in silence. Like Paul, God wants us to hand them over to Him and by His grace, He will see us through our heartache and trials.

We can turn to Him and we can trust in Him. God's grace is not just reserved for individuals either. As a church family, we have numerous examples of God's grace to us. We are blessed with many people who have enhanced the ministry here at St

Andrew's, legacies received just in time to pay for major projects, such as the much-needed renovations in Church Gate House or the new lighting in the church. More recently, God's grace has guided to us, a new Shepherd to lead our church after a prolonged and perhaps unexpected vacancy period. During those 16 months of vacancy, the church continued to thrive, this is God's grace in action in our Church. God's grace is evident in the provision of individuals with many talents who have flourished and enabled spiritual growth in the Church.

As Christians (God's children), we are tasked to build-up the kingdom of God and our mission statement at St Andrew's reads 'to know, glorify and make Christ known'. The advent of our new-priest-in charge, Mike symbolises a new season in the life of this church, this parish. We can now boldly approach the future knowing that God's grace, his unmerited favour and forgiving love to us is enough to empower us in fulfilling our vision.

Let us spend a quiet moment to pray for ourselves for the presence of God's grace in our lives and the lives our families. Let us also ask for God's grace in our country, particular in the negotiations with our European neighbours. Let us also pray for Mike and his family as they prepare for their move to Cobham. We pray that they and the church will be filled with the abounding grace of God.

Amen