

4 Pentecost 2003  
"Sufficient Grace"  
Br. John Ogle, FBC

When Jesus went back to his hometown they didn't have a parade ..there were not large crowds hanging on his every word. In fact, more than a few people were more than a little doubtful.

"Where did this man get all this?" "Is not this the carpenter?"

Jesus is "amazed by their disbelief."

Think about it. We don't have information about the childhood and teenage years of Jesus but he ate and slept ..went to school and synagogue ..worked with his father ..and grew up before the eyes of the townsfolk.

It must have been hard for them to accept that He now knew more than they did about God. A few probably knew He had a following ..(there were, after all, these guys who were with him). But to believe that He was the son of God ..would have been a stretch.

Why should they listen to him? "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house."

In this morning's reading from St. Paul he makes reference to what happened to him. How, on the way to Damascus, he was blinded by the light of Christ ..and changed ..utterly ..from Saul the enthusiastic persecutor of Christians to Paul ..the man of words who preaches the Gospel of Christ and encourages church planting.

Boasting is always distasteful but it's kind of a double edged sword for Paul. He became what he IS as the result of an extraordinary moment. Hearing from God would certainly make one feel important ..would inspire awe and wonder among the people ..but ..in order to fulfill God's purpose ..the event must be put in it's place.

It is the visions and revelations that Paul experienced ..in which he was taken up to heaven ..that are important to share ..but Paul needs to establish his credentials ..who is he to say these things?

The other day, Bp. David Jones celebrated the eighth anniversary of his consecration as Bishop ..and he told us about a meeting he had shortly after that at a church. He sat for some hours with the vestry and talked for quite a long time with the Senior Warden over dinner. Leaving town ..after changing to more comfortable clothing (shorts) ..he stopped at a 7-11. The Senior warden was in line in front of him so Bp. Jones struck up a conversation ..the man looked at him

like he was an intruding stranger ..no purple shirt ..no Bishop. Rather than be offended, Bp. Jones reflected that his new ...elevated status in the church ..did not change WHO he is ..only WHAT he is.

Paul also talks about a thorn in his flesh .. “a messenger of Satan to torment me.” God provided a reminder to keep him focused. He doesn't tell us what it is. Scholars suggest he may have had epilepsy or eye trouble or perhaps malarial fever. He does say he tried three times to get rid of it ..but God shut him down “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.” His weakness have kept him from unchristian pride in his visions; they have made him ready to receive the divine grace and power by which he can live and work effectively for Christ.

Paul goes on to talk not about his intellect ..not his standing in the community ..not the way people should treat him. Paul talks about Christ. He tells us he is content with “weaknesses, insults, hardship, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.”

In my own life, there are a few accomplishments that I look back on with pride. There are also a few memories that I try not to dwell on ..but God has helped me to review those memories ..to seek forgiveness where possible. My thorn, I guess, is my memory. Memories of the sinful life that I led for so many years ..and the people I hurt.

Whenever I get too full of myself I find that thorn pricking my mind. I often see in vivid recollection a person or a time or a moment when I did what I knew was wrong to get what I wanted. Some of it is pretty painful ..heck ..some of it was illegal.

I'm still not very good with insults ..I try to avoid hardship ..no one has persecuted me and I haven't been swept up in any calamities ..but I am the king of weakness. Like you ..I still sin ..but His Grace is always with me and that's enough.

Like Paul the weaker we are ..the more we need Him. The more we need Him ..the more He gives us. I'm even learning to understand when the answer to my prayer is NO ..when what is placed before me as a “salvation necessity” is something I don't want to do. Some days it's not easy but things that are worthwhile seldom are.

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. His Grace is sufficient for me. In the end, we will not be judged by man ..we will be judged by God.

How about you? Have you given it up to God? Have you experienced enough to know that no matter how hard you try ..how clever you are ..how important you

become in the eyes of man ..you still find yourself in a place where your hard work, clever mind, and status aren't enough?

Your spouse has a wayward eye? Your kid is huffing glue? Your promotion depends on you dissing someone else? Your business is the victim of changing trend. You'll never sell that house if they find out about the leak? You're in trouble and the answers and the solutions are not coming?

When bad things happen to good people ..it is NOT the work of God. It is the work of sin and evil in the world. It is, however, GOD's GRACE that will get us through these things ..to show us how they can be used for the kingdom.

We have to take the first step. For a moment ..let's consider not our goodness ..but our weakness. Let's not be too pleased with ourselves that we're here in church. Let's feel the thorn and remember the answer. Let's let our need become part of our abundance in Christ ..so that our Joy ..and His ..may be complete.

AMEN