

July 4, 2021  
"Grace Is Sufficient"  
Pastor Norman Fowler

Well, today is the day we celebrate our independence from a colonial power. We think back to that time when our nation was still being ruled from afar, and we had a struggle over who was going to be in power. Was it going to be England? Or was it going to be local? In the end, we were able to get that independence. It is, as I think about that event, how we have used that event to be a thing we celebrate, and not only that particular event, but all of our achievements ever since. And, how we appreciate those achievements we've been able to have as we have lived through these two hundred-some years.

But there is something that seems like a contrast as I try to read what Paul has to say, and I think about that power struggle that happened so long ago. How does what Paul says, that phrase "Power is made perfect in weakness", work out? What is he inviting us to look at a little differently? Well, we can think about it by beginning to define the terms he uses, what exactly he is talking about. How is power perfected or completed in weakness? What's interesting, is that the Greek word for power generally means, the need to get something done. And that weakness means the opposite, the inability to get something done. So we begin to think about powers' ability to get something done.

I often think of power as not only the ability to get something done, but the ability to get something done in the face of opposition, or in the face of resistance. It almost seems like there is a sense of conflict built into the concept of power, and maybe it's because of the age we live in. The sociologist, Hartmut Rosa suggests, our stance toward the world today as people, is one in which we will expect we will need to be aggressive to accomplish anything. In fact, he says, "anything that appears to us must be known, mastered, conquered, or made useful." Is this aggressive stance what Paul is talking about? Is this the power of Christ? Is the power of Christ aggressive or coercive? And how can that kind of power be made perfect in weakness? So I have to begin to think, what was Christ's main power? How did he use what we might call power?

What seemed central to his ability to get something done was that he had the ability to do God's will. He didn't come and decide to bring an army with him, to throw the evil empire out, or to overcome the pompous, authoritarian, religious elites. His power came in a different way, it came through invitation, through teaching, and encouraging, a healing, a giving of grace. He brought an invitation to a new way of living, a new way of living out God's will. Jesus' power seems different.

We look at Paul and we still see a desire for a power that changes the world, or at least the thorn he had to deal with. He wanted it made better, he wanted God to use a power that changed the way things were, perhaps to heal him, perhaps to take out opposition. But he suggests, that instead of that difficulty being taken away from him, that thorn being removed, he learns instead God's grace is sufficient for him. I don't know about you, but I still struggle, I still want a power that changes the world, I want God to overcome our fighting and bring peace. I want God to use His power to heal, to

heal those who are in pain or those who are sick. I kind of have a personal stake in that this year, having walked through the pain of sciatica. There is a wondering, God why can't you just take this away? And so as I hear Paul remind me, remind us, that God's grace is sufficient.

I have to take a step back and think about that, that God's grace, that surprising gift of forgiving love, is sufficient in the midst of all of life. Sufficient for us to live our lives in the lord. Paul is suggesting, the very struggle we experience, our inability to solve the world, our lives, our pain, our uncertainties, is an avenue to recognizing that God's grace is sufficient. Finding God's grace in the midst of our struggles, our frustrations, dashed expectations, our experiences of pain reminds me of where life starts, and around which life revolves. It is that being known, and loved with that forgiving love, that grace of God that gives perspective. We get so caught up in the world, I know that my pain this year focused me, in a new way, in a different way and it reminds me that God's grace is sufficient. I could do all I would normal have done, but I could be in relationship to God and God's grace.

In fact, if we think we must know, master, conquer, and/or make God useful, we are like the crowd around Jesus unable to hear and respond to his wisdom because of their own need to be better than him, or to put him in his place. After all he grew up with us; he can't be as good as he sounds. Paul instead invites us instead to see our own limitations our weaknesses, our inability to accomplish all that we want to, think we can, or the expectations of what we think we can accomplish. Especially when it comes to the will of God, we need help; help to love, help to care for others, help to see beyond our own needs, desires, and limited perspective. We need help with the ability to do God's will. We need the power of Christ to live in us, the very ability to do God's will that comes through our experience in Christ, the relationship we have. It is not our own will power, our own strength, our own status, or anything else. But it does come through our relationship we have with Jesus Christ. Through the way we are given the love and grace of God in him that begins to show us the way, because we begin to hear his teaching, accepting his grace, and receiving the Holy Spirit working in us and among us.

Power is made perfect in weakness. Jesus transforms the way we look at power, and invites us to find the ability to do God's Will is completed not in our own ability, to know, master, conquer, or make useful, but in opening ourselves to the grace of God through Jesus Christ. To finding that God's grace is sufficient, it is the ground on which we stand, and it is when we have to let go of the way we think we control the world, that we begin to know the power of Christ dwelling in us. The ability to do God's will can come alive and grow in us. We are invited to see our limitations because that invites us to know we need God's grace. We are invited to recognize we can't do it all on our own because then we have to reach out for the grace of God in Christ. We are invited to recognize our own vulnerabilities so that we can open ourselves to the work of the Spirit that might lead us through.

We are not a people who are self-contained and able to do all that there is, we need to take in sustenance, like being at the table we are reminded that we require sustenance – The sustenance of food – the sustenance of Grace. And so, we come to the table to be reminded of that need for sustenance, the sustenance that God gives us of food and grace, and if we recognize our need, we can open and hear the invitation. Then, if we can allow ourselves to accept that invitation, we are opening ourselves to

the very power of Christ working in us, that ability to do the will of God that comes through our relationship with Christ, through the Grace of God. And who knows, maybe we even become purveyors of grace ourselves. Amen.