



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. AMEN!

This week as I was studying for this sermon, I found myself thinking that I had to pick between the two Gospel stories in our text: The rejection of Jesus at Nazareth or the Mission of the Twelve. What a decision that was. Guess I am doing neither this morning, but at the same time both. I will start by putting more emphasis on the reading from Ezekiel. So here goes!

Everyone likes a winner. Our culture, our society, and our country are caught up with the idea of winning. Winning, succeeding, getting ahead, overcoming great obstacles are the ideals. These are the goals that society emphasizes. And it sure seems that most people fall into that expectation.

We see this as evidence by our preoccupation with sports. And I am guilty; I sure have enjoyed the Brewers so far this season. With all the young players they are 17 games over 500 as I write this message. Just awesome!!! How many of you have had a renewed interest in College Basketball, because of the emphasis on Caitlyn Clark. Even the WNBA is growing, and people are on board watching to see who wins if Caitlyn is on the team. Look how many bets are made on the sweet 16 teams during March. Who if anyone can pick the right teams and have a winning bracket? And who will win and walk away with the trophy? And need we talk about our own Green Bay Packers? Will they have a winning season now that Jordan Love is a more seasoned quarterback? Will they be able to win the Super Bowl this season? And I will not talk about our election in November, but somehow, we will have a winner.

Not only in sports, but also throughout all of life, we like to see and know about people who have succeeded. We like to read or watch stories on TV about people who have overcome great mental or physical obstacles. Special Olympics has grown in the past decade. Everyone needs a chance to win at something. We lift up people who start from little and become great. We like to see the underdog get ahead and become a winner.

Television news is good at reporting how people come back from disasters. But did you ever wonder why those that do not make it back from calamities, the non-winners are not given the same TV coverage. Or how about people who struggle with the life? For there are many people who live quietly with brokenness

and frustration, who sense the strong cultural feelings that others are the winners, not them. They have tried and yet cannot get ahead, knowing that they were not successful in breaking out of their individual struggles, they remain in the midst of their brokenness. And here we have it, drum roll please, a paradox. How can these, non-winners, who are weak in the eyes of our society be strong in the eyes of God?

Our readings this morning speak of the idea of a paradox in Christian living, a paradox of values and a paradox of expectations. Do you know what a paradox is? NO! It is not two physicians. According to the dictionary, a paradox is a statement that seems to contradict itself but expresses an element of truth.

A statement in our lesson from 2 Corinthians is a paradox. It says, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." How can a person have power when he or she is weak? According to our human standards, this is quite a paradoxical statement.

Ezekiel lived a paradox. He was called by God to be a prophet to the nation of Israel, to a people who God said had rebelled against him, who would probably not even listen to this new prophet. Our text says when God called Ezekiel to stand before God, the spirit of God entered him and set him on his feet. Ezekiel in his human weakness was given power by God to be a prophet to the rebellious nation of Israel. Ezekiel was given power in his human weakness to speak the word of God to a stubborn people, a sinning people, a people who had turned away from God.

God's power was made perfect in Ezekiel's weakness, and it is made perfect in ours too! Out of the weakness of this human being, comes strength to speak to a nation came. Ezekiel spoke about the love of God for his chosen people. Ezekiel was not always going to be successful, and God told him that the people may even refuse to listen to him. However, Ezekiel should know that God would be with him even at this time. Ezekiel was weak but God's presence made him strong.

Jesus himself was a paradox to the people of his time. His birth, his life and his death were a paradoxical statement of how God's power would be manifested on this earth. Jesus himself appeared weak to many of his contemporaries. They were expecting a kind of Superman. They anticipated spectacular signs and unmistakable evidence of his divinity. They saw only a carpenter's son, the local boy, a prophet without honor. Yet, God proved mightier than the greatest strength of men. And this happened right in his hometown, we are told. Jesus was not accepted as the Messiah, the one God sent to save them from their enemies.

Jesus did not fit the image people had of the Messiah. They expected a mighty king after the fashion of king David. A man who would lead a mighty army, a man who would make this small nation of Israel strong and powerful. A leader who would defeat Rome.

And all Jesus had was a band of 12 men who were uneducated fisherman, or tax collectors, or religious radicals. He did not intend to fight Rome or anyone else other than the devil. Rather he chose to heal people, forgive their sins, and one day would go to the cross and be resurrected so that the promise of eternal life would be fulfilled. And if that was not enough, he made water turn to wine and he calmed the sea, a sea that he could walk on.

Jesus talked about the love that His Father had for his children. He said He was the Son of God. Jesus died because he did not fit the expectation and did not have the value system the people of Israel expected. Jesus came as a servant to men. He came to show that God did not want men of superhuman ability, but he wanted men who would believe in God's power for their life. He showed that God wanted people who would live in this paradox. He showed that even if you are weak and believe in God and not self, then you are really strong. Jesus lived and taught the ultimate paradox.

Once again, our reading from Paul tells us that Jesus said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

There truly is a paradox between the demands of our world, and the demands of our God. Our world calls us to be strong, to succeed, to be upward mobile, to always win, but God calls us to surrender, to be dependent on him, to worry about our neighbor, to treat others with kindness, humility, and honesty. Yes, it is a paradox that has been around for over two centuries.

Jesus lived the ultimate paradox for us. And this folks, is our truth. Our paradox to live by. God's power is enough. God's grace is enough, period! In all our weakness, God's grace is sufficient for us. Not wealth, not fame, not fortune, but God's undeserved grace. Grace from the paradox of the cross is more than sufficient.

Being a grandmother, I find joy in sharing this story with you as I have with my son and son in law. It is a story about a little boy making pancakes and boy oh boy would Emmett be exactly in the middle of this parable.

Six-year-old Brandon decided one Saturday morning to fix his parents pancakes. He found a big bowl and spoon, pulled a chair to the counter, opened the cupboard, and pulled out the heavy flour canister, spilling it on the floor.

He scooped some of the flour into the bowl with his hands, mixed in most of a cup of milk and added some sugar, leaving a floury trail on the floor, which by now had a few tracks in it left by his new kitten.

Brandon was covered with flour and getting frustrated. He wanted this to be something very good for Mom and Dad, but it was getting very bad. He did not know what to do next, whether to put it all into the oven or on the stove. But he realized he did not know how the stove worked!

Suddenly, he saw the kitten licking from the bowl of mix and so he reached to push her away, knocking the egg carton to the floor. Frantically, he tried to clean up this monumental mess, but slipped on the eggs, getting his pajamas white and sticky.

And just then he saw his Dad standing at the door. Big crocodile tears welled up in Brandon's eyes. All he wanted to do was something good, but he'd made a terrible mess. He was sure a scolding was coming, maybe even a spanking. But his father just watched him.

Then, he walked through the mess. He picked up his crying son, hugged him, and loved him, getting his own pajamas white and sticky in the process!

That is how God deals with us. We try to do something good in life, we try to win, but it turns in to a mess. Our marriage gets all sticky, or we insult a friend, or we cannot stand our job, or our health goes south. Sometimes we just stand there in tears because we cannot think of anything else to do. That is when God picks us up and love us and forgives us, even though our mess gets all over Him.

But just because we mess up, we cannot stop trying to "make pancakes" for God and for others. Sooner or later, we will get it right and then we will be glad we tried.

Just as the disciples were sent out two by two with "authority over the unclean spirits", we too should go out and tell the story of God's love for us and how He will have the final word.

Those 12 men, only stayed at homes where their message was welcomed, where they were accepted. If not welcomed, they moved on. We are not told how well it went or what percentage of homes welcomed them as the Bible is not big on that sort of statistics. Later on, in this chapter, verse 30, we are told that they returned to tell Jesus what they had done! My guess is that they told Jesus everything that they had done and taught as well as the disappointments over those who would not listen to the truth. This happens just prior to feeding the 5000. Their message of the love, grace, peace, and hope that comes from Jesus was incredible.

Yet I am sure that some people would not listen to such a paradox. Two disciples telling them this good news of Jesus was still unbelievable to some. How could a man born of a human woman, be God? How could this son of a carpenter offer such a gift of love to all people? It is simple, through God's grace. "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

And so right up to this very day, the paradox continues. How can the weak be strong? How can they also be winners? Folks, we are all winners in the eyes of God, if we just believe and then repent. For as the song we will sing in a few minutes says, "God shed his grace on thee". We are all commissioned to go out and share the love of God with others. So even if you feel paradoxical in your call, know that God's strength goes with you during your times of weakness. Start now! Don't wait! Go, make pancakes.

AMEN