

Sermon – Mark 6:1-13; 2 Corinthians 12:2-10

David R. Lyle

Grace Lutheran Church

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“Sufficient Grace”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. Anders, our twelve-year old, leaves for his first sleepaway camp later today. I have discovered that, if it's difficult to help your children pack for a trip on which you will be with them, it's even more challenging to pack for a trip without you. You, after all, won't be there to remedy any mistakes or deficiencies along the way. So it is that Anders will arrive at camp with way more than he needs. He has enough clothing in his suitcase for two weeks, not one, never mind the extra shoes, bedding, sports equipment, snacks, money with which to buy more snacks, and on and on. It is also true that I have probably not packed enough; after all, I have no doubt that I've forgotten something. I guess we'll find out what when we pick him up on Friday! As with summer camp, so with life. We encumber ourselves with so much for the journey, only to find we've packed some things we didn't need while forgetting those things we need most.
2. Jesus undercuts this tendency when he sends them out two by two. They don't need to worry about what to pack; they don't even get to bring bags. No extra clothes, no snacks, no money for snacks. What they need will be provided along the way. They go as an extension of Jesus' own ministry, finding that they have authority over demons and disease, casting out the former and curing the latter. Unencumbered not only of material goods but of all else that would hold them back, the disciples discover that all they need is

- Jesus' authority and a travel buddy. Together with one another, two disciples can do great things in Jesus' name.
3. This spartan commissioning is an extension of Jesus' own ministry. In the first part of the reading, in the wake of teachings, healings, exorcisms, and even raising a young girl from death, Jesus comes to his hometown, Nazareth. The people are astounded, but not impressed. Who does he think he is, this carpenter, this son of Mary, they sneer. Jesus seems unfazed, if a bit amazed. Such has it always been for true prophets. He leaves home again, unable to do deeds of power in the face of such unbelief.
 4. While both Jesus and his disciples show up with power, they do so as those who already have true authority – Jesus on his own, and his disciples from him – not as those who need to claim authority. They show up as those who have power they want to use to benefit others, not with power they want to wield over others. They arrive to compel, not to coerce. To be sure, Jesus *will* work grace and love in our lives, even in the face of our opposition. Jesus insists upon being our Lord but will not lord it over us as would earthly tyrants. Jesus shows us that divine power is most perfect in weakness, upon the cross. In service, sacrifice, and death that lead to true life. The power we receive from Christ – power to embark upon his Kingdom's work for the sake of those around us – such power is to be wielded in the same way. We enact Jesus' authority with humility. We trust the power of his authority rather than seeking the trappings of earthly power, which are always traps, anyway.
 5. Which brings us back to packing for the journey. While there are many good sermons to be given about stuff, that's not what Jesus is after here. It's not about our baggage; it's about our baggage. Too often we are carrying around the weight of Christendom instead of the freedom of Christ. We became convinced over the course of 1700 hundred years, give or take, that following Christ meant access to the halls of power, if not a seat on the throne itself.

- Woe to those who would stand in the way. Do we carry this baggage with us? Or will we trust that the gospel of Jesus is sufficient, that weakness is not a weakness, and that God's power is always shown forth as love? In his book, *Losing Our Religion: An Altar Call to Evangelical America*, Russell Moore reminds us that Christians have been given a "mission field" and not an earthly "battlefield." This distinction is not to be lost. After all, one packs a lot differently for a mission than one does for war.
6. As Christians in the United States, we have just celebrated the birth of our nation and the many freedoms that entails for us in this world, and look now to a general election. Long ago, we rid ourselves of the divine right of kings and embraced the idea that while the church should have every right to the public square as do others, the public square does not belong to us. This does not mean the we relativize the gospel as one truth among many – Jesus is the way and the truth and the life, and so shall he ever be. But it does mean that we draw near to others to show and speak that truth with love, for their sake. We shouldn't need commandments in courtrooms or Bibles in public school classrooms. We would do well to think about what a Christian might yearn for from earthly leaders at any level – those who seek power for power's sake, those who lord it over others while seeking to control them, those who see weakness as failing? Or those who use their authority for the sake of others, who want freedom not only for themselves but for all, who are willing to suffer with those who suffer? To be sure, no person or party has a monopoly on getting this right. One guy did that, and his name is Jesus. But that doesn't mean it doesn't matter, or that they're all the same, or that we should stop asking the questions, or that we should stop having high expectations of those with high aspirations.
 7. What we have been given by Jesus is life and freedom and one another, and those are all we need to do the work to which Jesus calls us. Jesus calls us today, once more. We may be rejected. So what? So was Jesus, at times. We

may be ignored or despised. So be it. We don't need to save the world. Jesus already has. We just have to keep showing up. Bryan Stevenson, the justice advocate whose work for those facing the death penalty has been so significant, calls this the "power of proximity." Jesus calls us to show up. Not with power and might, but with one another, for the sake of one another. Drawing close to others that we might better hear their story and know their needs. That we might better love them, that they might see God's love in us, and that together we would more deeply discover the true power of the God who is reconciling all things, all things, through Christ. Along the journey, no doubt we'll discover a few things we're missing. But we will also find that we have all we need: Jesus, whose grace is sufficient for us. This is how we answer the question of who Jesus is, asked by the disciples in the boat and the people in the synagogue. He is the Son of God *and* crucified One, love and power at work in our lives, willing to embrace weakness to show forth the true authority of God, working wholeness and healing for the nations. Amen.

And now may that peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.