

## Becoming a Better Grace and the Weakness that God Can Use.

### 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Today, I want to talk about becoming a better Grace and the weakness that God can use. As we move into the future that God has for us and wants for us, this is a good topic to ponder. It's a good topic every church should ponder.

James Baldwin, the brilliant black writer who confronted our nation with its racism said:

Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.

Or, as Mr. Rogers put it:

If you can mention it, you can manage it.

### I

We've been talking together all summer about our church, its strengths, its passions, its core values, and more. With a little humility and courage we can talk about our weaknesses too. I'll begin the discussion today, and we will find another time to talk together about it. Until we do, here's a good question to frame our pondering: "What weaknesses of Grace do I want to help with?"

Some of our weaknesses are shared with other churches because we're all human here. These are the things we do that trip us up and get in the way of our key mission: the increase in the love of God and neighbor.

A spiritual writer from another time talked of our "besetting sins". These are the ones that hang around. Novelist Reynolds Price called them "our loyal flaws."

I saw a cartoon of a couple going into a church to visit. The sign out front said, "Welcome to The Church with Issues." *All God's churches got issues!* Some are the same as other churches, some are peculiar to its own life together. In the Old Testament God called us his "peculiar treasure". Both words are right. We are peculiar *and* treasured. I have been a pastor of 6 churches over 47 years. All churches have issues, including the pastor!

Most every church stumbles with Pride: "we alone", we say. Most all need classes in conflict management. Some want to be like other churches and demean their own. That's called Envy. All churches get discouraged with its failures and struggles. Some worry about their size. We need Jesus' words: "Fear not little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Give you!

I think I told you about a beloved member of Crescent Hill Baptist Church in Louisville. His name was John. He was developmentally disabled and was a fixture around the place. One Monday on visitation night, the members went

throughout the neighborhood inviting people to the church. John knocked on a door. When the man came to the door, John invited him to his church. The man rather belligerently said: "I'm not going to church. They're all filled with hypocrites!" John said, "There's always room for more!"

## II

Now to the question, "What is the kind of weakness that God can use?" Any weakness acknowledged and offered to God can be used by God. The ones we hide or deny are pretty hard for God to use.

We can befriend our weakness rather than cursing it. When we befriend our weakness, we acknowledge it, we accept it, we take responsibility for it. If necessary, we get help for it. We say to God, "This is who I am, warts and all, here's my weakness, please use it for your kingdom's sake."

William Sloane Coffin was one of the most eloquent persons I've ever known. Later in his life he suffered a stroke. He never stopped speaking. I heard him speak after his stroke. He began "You'll have to pardon my speech It's a little difficult to understand after my stroke. It's like what the woman said about the music of Wagner: 'It's better than it sounds!'"

## III

Paul had some disabling, humiliating weakness, what he called his “thorn in the flesh.” Who knows what it was. The guesses of what it was could fill a medical textbook. It made him a laughing stock to his opponents: They said, “God can’t use him! If God has blessed him, no thanks!”

Paul said it was given to him as a check on his pride. In our text says he prayed three times to be healed or delivered of this thorn. It was probably more than 300 times! But God did not heal or deliver him. Instead, God gave him something else. God said to Paul:

My grace is sufficient for you. For my strength is made perfect in weakness.

When we cannot be healed, delivered, fixed, God sends us the sufficient grace:

When through fiery trials

Thy pathway shall lie

My Grace all-sufficient

Shall be thy supply.

It is easy to believe that God can use our strengths. Can you believe God can use our weakness too? What are our weaknesses at Grace? God can use them. We may fret about our size, for example. But God uses small churches to do things large church cannot.

Gordon Crosby, founder of Church of the Savior said that every church pastor search committee should ask the prospective minister: “Are you weak enough to be our pastor?” Did he mean, Are you weak enough to know your need of God?

God may be saying to us: Are you weak enough to be my church?