

“Never good enough”  
Westminster Presbyterian Church  
October 11, 2020

*Philippians 4:4-7 and 2 Corinthians 12:9-10*

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*You can't have your cake and eat it too.* I've heard this depressing proverb throughout my life, and I'm just going to say it: it makes no sense. What's the point of having cake if you're not going to eat it? If I have cake, I am eating that cake. If I don't have cake, it's going to require a pretty strong imagination to eat it. How are these contradictions? (One of you is like: *Wow, he's pretty passionate about cake...*)

Apparently, this proverb appears in nearly 50 cultures. Some of the variations are equally baffling. The Norwegians say, “You can't both get in a bag and in a sack.” Why would I want to get in either? What cultural phenomenon possibly led to the rise of people debating whether they wanted to be in a bag or a sack?

More helpfully, the Russians say, “You can't sit on two chairs.” In German, it's “You can't dance at two weddings.” Or as the French say, “You can't want the butter and the money used to buy the butter.” The idea is that life is full of incompatible things; you have to choose. You can't have it both ways. You can't eat your cake and keep it too.

I still think it's a stupid proverb—especially when we are told by our culture every day that we should want it all. You should work and volunteer really hard, putting in 60+ hours a week, rising in your career and community service, but also take care of yourself, relax, exercise, cook nutritious meals, hang out with friends, focus on your family, enjoy sunsets, and get eight hours of sleep a night.

If Facebook is to be believed, all our friends are succeeding amazingly—their children and grandchildren are smiling, their jobs are rising, their retirements are booming, and their vacations are glorious. Meanwhile, we can't even manage some days to take a shower.

Life is complicated. We're not just being asked to juggle two things; we're being asked to juggle 20. And so it's not surprising that a lot of us feel like we're dropping a few. It's like we're never enough. Frighteningly, even many of our children feel this way—a pressure to be good at school and sports and the arts, and be pretty, and fit in and also be unique, and oh yeah, try to survive remote learning and prejudice and addiction and violence. A lot of times, it feels like, no matter how hard we try, we're letting someone down. Take your pick: not a good enough parent or grandparent, not a good enough spouse or friend, not good enough at your job or at life, not a good enough citizen or—oh yeah—Christian. We echo Bilbo Baggins, in *Lord of the Rings*, when he says, “I feel thin, sort of stretched, like butter scraped over too much bread.”

Our culture's answer is to say, “You've got this. You can do anything you put your mind to. Just try harder. Believe in yourself. You are enough.”

It sounds nice... if only it were true.

What I'm about to say won't sell any T-shirts or timeshares, but here it is: You are not enough, and you never will be. You don't got this. You can't do everything just by trying harder. (*Wow, this guy's a jerk. Why do we even come here? Jerk face!*)

I know. At first, that statement may wound you in the same way it wounds me. But isn't it fundamentally true? We are finite beings. We have limits. There are only so many hours in a day. Everything is a choice. If I choose to be over here, I can't be over there. If I choose to help this person, well, I'm choosing not to help that person. Even more fundamentally, I am a broken person. Beautiful, yes; loved, yes. But broken... imperfect, sinful. And that brokenness, it shows up in my relationships, my job, my discipleship. I get impatient, angry, selfish. I stop listening, interrupt, walk away. Or, as we discussed last week, we prioritize the wrong things.

Isn't there relief in accepting that we don't have to be perfect? Yeah, I'm falling apart, and so is everyone else. We don't have to pretend anymore. We don't have to keep pushing, trying to keep it together. Yeah, life is hard right now, and we could really use some help.

I'm not saying that we should abandon ambition or working hard or trying to improve ourselves. I'm asking, What peace might we find when we accept that we have limits?

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," writes the Apostle Paul, not to depress us, but to say: hey, we're all in the same boat (Rom. 3:23).

Of course, that would be depressing if that's where the gospel ended. So, yeah, if we are measured—as the world tells us—by what we accomplish, by what we do, then it'll never be enough. The gospel asks: What if there are other standards?

In 2 Timothy, the author who calls himself Paul writes, "Join with me in... relying on the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to God's own purpose and grace" (1:8-9). Paul is suggesting that, if God is Love, as 1 John states, then God sees us, judges us, not through the lens of our successes and failures, but through the lens of God's own divine love. It's no different for human parents and their children. Heck, if a man can keep human body parts in his basement, and his mama still loves him, you better believe that God can still love us, no matter what we've done. (Though, I do hope that none of you are in the practice of collecting human body parts. If you are, I'd like to amend my earlier statement to say that you are perfect just the way you are, you are definitely enough, um, please don't kill me.)

When you look in that mirror, you see yourself, you see the person who's not quite enough. But what if that's not what God sees? What if God sees Christ standing there with you, his arms wrapped around you, his strength, his love pouring over you? What if God sees the wondrous child God always knew you to be, the wondrous child you always were—you just maybe didn't know it, because you thought you stood there alone?

Christ has carried you more times than you know. God says to Paul in our Scripture reading today, “My grace is enough for you. My power is made perfect in weakness.” It’s those moments when we’re on our knees, and we don’t know how we’re going to make it another day, that God raises us taller than we’ve ever been before. Paul says, “When I am weak, God is strong. And therefore, because God is in me, and upon me, and in love with me, when I am weak, then I am strong.” Our weakness creates room for God’s Spirit to dwell in us, to work through us. Or as John the Baptist once said, “I must decrease, so that he can increase.”

I felt this on Wednesday. I had had two really good days of putting God first, just like we talked about last Sunday. But I woke tired. I felt no will to meet the day and its demands. As I drove to church, and thought about this passage from 2 Corinthians, I began to repeat, “When I am weak, you are strong. When I am weak, you are strong.” And you know what? I had an amazing day. God brought to me a mother of five children, who was a domestic violence victim. I sat and talked about life and God with a member of this church. I cared for a person who was grieving. I began to write this sermon. And yeah, I still struggled. But it was precisely when I felt that I had nothing left to give that God took over; God filled the space I left.

Covered by Christ, we become enough. Together, we become enough. In God’s love and grace, we become enough. Because it’s not what you do; it’s who loves you that counts.

Martin Luther says that instead of asking ourselves, “What have I done? Where have I sinned? What have I deserved?” we should ask, “What has Christ done? What has He deserved?”

Yours is to do what good, what love, you can, with what time and limits you have, knowing they will be imperfect, and that’s OK, because you are not alone.

Before you woke up this morning, before you did anything, you were enough. And at the end of this day, in all that you have done or left undone, all that you have said or left unsaid, all your achievements and all your mistakes, even if you did nothing at all, or just was a total mess, or screwed up real bad, you will be enough. Because God loves you. Because God is with you. Because the One who is enough—Christ Jesus—covers you. **Amen.**