

"Not Fair"

Text: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Grace and peace be yours from God our Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

One of the earliest and most difficult lessons human beings must learn to accept is that life isn't always fair. No doubt you adults heard that early and often as children, and have been working tirelessly to pass that information along to your own children. I remember hearing it from my own parents, and I'm sure my own children remember hearing it from me.

Bottom line is that there are many things in life that just aren't fair in our eyes, and it will ever be so. There will always be bad people who are rich and good people who are poor. There will always be beautiful young men and women who are wildly popular despite the fact that they are completely devoid of character, honor, manners and integrity. Superb talent of every imaginable sort will forever be meted out to those who lack any sense of morality or responsibility. Each of you, I am sure, could almost certainly come up with a thousand other examples of "not fair."

So as parents we struggle to teach our children to *be* fair, on the one hand, but to learn also to accept the fact that many things in life just aren't fair.

It is frustrating sometimes, isn't it? Should it be? Only if we imagine that our God lacks the ability to control the events of this world. In fact "not fair" is not always all bad. This is one of the lessons of our text for this morning, found in Paul's Second Letter to the Church at Corinth, the Eighth Chapter:

ESV 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. ⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. ⁹ But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

These are the words of God. Trusting that these are indeed the very words of our Holy God, and therefore true and right in all that they teach, so we pray, "**Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth!**" Amen.

Have you ever noticed how quick we are to recognize and point out all the ways in which we feel we have been cheated, wronged, or shorted, and yet how slow we are to acknowledge an inequity that happens to be in our favor? You lose your wallet or purse and you find yourself muttering about the sneak who probably found it and helped himself to anything of value. But if you happen to be the one who *finds* a wallet or purse, your mind races through the possibilities of just how you might justify *keeping* what you have found – "finders keepers" and all that. And maybe the person who lost it really doesn't care that he or she lost it... Sure.

Although we complain about it bitterly and often, this morning we are going to speak up in defense of "not fair." The fact is we owe our eternal lives to such inequity. In fact each morning we ought to wake with a song of thanksgiving in our hearts that our God has *not* treated us fairly; that is, he has not treated us as we *deserved* to be treated. We need to acknowledge, from the very start, that our great, eternal inheritance is ours solely on the basis of grace – God's *undeserved* love. In this, our God has been really, really *unfair*.

How many times would you guess you have heard the expression, "**We are saved by grace!**" Next question: *How many of those times did you stop to think just how unfair that really is?* Again, if the injustice or inequity happens to be in our favor, we have this natural inclination to imagine it is somehow earned or deserved. Think of it this way: the bank sends you your end-of-the-month statement and they say you have \$100 less in your account than you think you do. Our reaction? "*They are so wrong and I'm going to get this straightened out but quick!*" Next month the bank sends your statement and they say you have \$500 more in your account than you thought you had. Our reaction? "*Well they keep pretty close tabs on this sort of thing, so I'll just assume that they got it right and I made a mistake somewhere.*" Human judgment is almost always clouded by whether the error is to our advantage or disadvantage.

The point here is that if everything in life were fair, we would all be damned eternally. Our salvation is, from first to last, *undeserved*. God's Word is very clear on this point, first as to what would be fair for each

one of us. The Bible teaches us that **"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"** (Romans 3:23). The *fair* thing was therefore outlined in Ezekiel 18:20a: **"The soul who sins shall die."** Death in hell for every sinner would have been fair – a just punishment for the thoughts, words, and actions we chose, we committed, in rebellion against our Holy God.

This is the place where every single one of us needs to stand this day and every day. Until we get to this place, this realization of just what "fair" would have been as far as God was concerned, we will never learn to rightly understand or truly appreciate anything else about the Christian faith. Hell was fair, yet in its place we have been given heaven – all without having personally earned the payment for even one of our sins.

Once we come to understand what would have been fair, it becomes immediately apparent how unfairly our God has treated us. God the Father in his infinite love and mercy chose to carry out the greatest inequity, the greatest injustice, the greatest unfairness the world will ever know – *in our favor!* God chose to take his own dear Son and sacrifice him to pay for the sins of the world. More to the point, he chose to sacrifice his Son for *my* sins. Paul explained this unfairness in this same Second Letter to the Church in Corinth when he wrote: **"For our sake he (God the Father) made him (Jesus) to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."** (2 Corinthians 5:21) Could you imagine anything less fair, less equitable, less reasonable or just? God the Father chose the suffering and death of the *only sinless man in the history of the world*, rather than the suffering and death of sinful, rebellious, undesirable mankind. Clearly the ultimate in "not fair."

Next time we are tempted to complain that life is not fair, we would do well to remind ourselves how fortunate we are that it is not.

This brings us finally to our text for this morning and what might, to the untrained eye, look very much like a perfect example of *not fair*. The Apostle Paul was obviously one of the strongest Christians in the history of the Church. He was the Great Missionary. Through his efforts the Holy Spirit brought countless souls to saving faith. Through this man some of the best New Testament Scriptures were recorded. By human reckoning, if any human being deserved to be blessed with health, wealth and prosperity, it was Paul.

Yet what do we find? Paul suffered in ways you and I can hardly comprehend. Not only was he stoned, whipped, beaten with rods, and imprisoned, he often had to do without adequate food, shelter, and clothing. On top of all that, he also carried in his heart and mind the

welfare of every Christian congregation. When they suffered, he suffered. Given all of this – together with the fact that he absolutely dedicated his life to the spreading of the gospel – wouldn't you think that it would at least be reasonable for God to bless Paul with perfect health and vitality so that he could carry out God work unimpeded and unhindered?

Yet what we learn from our text is that Paul was given a physical impediment of some sort – a **"thorn in the flesh"** as he called it – which God not only allowed into his life but steadfastly refused to remove. It just somehow does not seem fair. Why should a guy like Paul suffer so when he was serving his Lord so well?

This is in fact our first object lesson concerning what we just learned about "not fair." This is also a perfect example of how or why we need to personally apply what the Bible teaches us or we will miss out on the invaluable real-life benefits with which our God longs to bless us. The gospel itself teaches us that God's inequities always work to our favor. Hear that again and let it sink in: *God's inequities – that it, all of the examples in our lives where God seems to be responsible for allowing something bad into our lives – every one of those "not fairs" in some way works to our eternal benefit.*

So how did Paul's **"thorn in the flesh"** work to his benefit? Paul was a sinful human being. As such he was in danger of every sin that plagues other human beings. In this case he seems to have fallen victim to the world's ideas of how things get done on this earth. Paul no doubt believed that the gospel message he preached to the world would have a much greater impact and enjoy much greater success if only God would remove from his life the **"thorn in the flesh"** that was impeding and tormenting him. His logic might make sense to us, but not to God. It seems logical to us that great things are accomplished by great people. Strong people. Powerful people. Weakness of any kind is an impediment, a hindrance.

What exactly was this **"thorn in the flesh"**? We aren't told – which in fact teaches us that it really didn't matter what it was. Paul came to recognize it as the measure employed by God not only to keep him humble but to teach him, moment by moment, the supremely valuable lesson that human strength is an illusion. Man has no strength and power of his own. He has only the illusion of strength when God works through him, when God's power grants success to impotent human efforts.

Paul needed such a reminder not only because of the great things that had been shown *to* him, but also because of the great things accomplished *through* him. When Paul in our text refers to **"the surpassing greatness of the revelations"** he is most likely referring to the special visions of heaven that had been given to him, as well as the direct revelation he received from Jesus himself after his conversion. These visions obviously set him apart as something special. God the Holy Spirit also used the preaching of Paul to convert thousands. For all of this Paul recognized the need for something from the Lord's hand to humble him. Whatever it was, Paul came to refer to his special humbler as his **"thorn in the flesh."**

Note the measure of Paul. He did not ask for the thorn to be removed so that he would not have to suffer from it any longer. He asked so that his proclamation of the gospel might be delivered with more strength and power. Again, God's message to Paul was clear – *"Your strength does not accomplish my will. I accomplish my will through you."* To make that point clear to all in Paul's day, Paul's thorn was left to humble him, and to remind him of the words of his God: **"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."**

Do not pass these words over lightly, for they are precious jewels from our God. Study them and meditate on them until you understand them. When God says, **"My grace is sufficient for you,"** he is here telling Paul (and each one of us) that we do not need and therefore should not expect anything from our God beyond his grace, his undeserved love. This is not because God is stingy with his gifts; it is because there is no greater, longer lasting, more valuable gift to be given. Physical strength will fail. God's grace will not. The most stubborn determination will come to an end. God's grace will not. Even the most unrelenting stamina will finally play out. God's grace will not. Even more than that, all of those physical abilities tend to hide or mask the truth that 100% of our strength and ability comes from God. And it's not just that he is the one who gave us our physical gifts; it is his ongoing blessing *alone* that determines success or failure. In other words, he didn't just give us the tools and tell us to go; he accomplishes all that is good moment by moment and day after day – whether we are weak or strong. ***It is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*** (Phil. 2:13 ESV)

Finally then take another look at the hard things in your life and learn the lesson of Paul. What we would normally regard as examples of *not fair* are *always* examples of the wisdom and grace of God. The challenge for you and me is to humbly, patiently learn to appreciate the examples of our

Father's love that the world will forever see as examples of punishment or misfortune, and to thank him for each of them.

God grant that the great inequity of our salvation – the Innocent paying for the guilty – might work powerfully in our hearts, so that the new man might daily come to dominance in our hearts and lives. Let God alone thus be glorified and sinners drawn to their Savior God in all that we say and do. Along the way life will not seem fair. God help us to recognize and appreciate that simple truth as a demonstration of his love. Amen.

Scripture Readings

ESV **Ezekiel 2:1-5** And he said to me, "Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak with you." ² And as he spoke to me, the Spirit entered into me and set me on my feet, and I heard him speaking to me. ³ And he said to me, "Son of man, I send you to the people of Israel, to nations of rebels, who have rebelled against me. They and their fathers have transgressed against me to this very day. ⁴ The descendants also are impudent and stubborn: I send you to them, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD.' ⁵ And whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house) they will know that a prophet has been among them.

ESV **Mark 6:1-13** He went away from there and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. ² And on the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astonished, saying, "Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands? ³ Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. ⁴ And Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household." ⁵ And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. ⁶ ¶ And he marveled because of their unbelief. And he went about among the villages teaching. ⁷ ¶ And he called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. ⁸ He charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff--no bread, no bag, no money in their belts-- ⁹ but to wear sandals and not put on two tunics. ¹⁰ And he said to them, "Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you depart from there. ¹¹ And if any place will not receive you and they will not listen to you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." ¹² So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent. ¹³ And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them.

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The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost – July 8, 2018

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 424 *(Red Hymnal)*
"My God My Father Make Me Strong"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. *(Brown Hymnal)*

The Scripture Lessons: *(Printed on the back page of this bulletin)*

The Old Testament Lesson: (Ezekiel 2:1-5) We read these words this morning noting especially the stubborn rejection that God's prophets have routinely faced when bringing the Word of God to sinners. We witness the same rejection in our decadent society today. Yet we also recognize that there is but one source of power that can break through the barrier of unbelief – God's Word – and that God continued to send his prophets, as he sends also us today. Though man may continue to reject the Word, we cannot fail to bring that Word into their lives.

Psalm 91 (Supplement page 33) *(Brown Hymnal)* *(Read Responsively)*

The Gospel Lesson: (Mark 6:1-13) The stubbornness of unbelief is demonstrated nowhere more clearly than when the Jews rejected both the words and the miracles of the Son of God himself. Jesus was known to them from childhood on, and they used that familiarity to justify their unbelief. Surely this will rise up to condemn them on the last day. Yet again we note that Jesus continued to teach, despite the opposition and rejection that he encountered. Jesus, again, is our perfect example.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – page 5. *(Brown Hymnal)*

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 778 *(Brown Hymnal)*
"Grace Has a Thrilling Sound"

The Sermon – Text: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 *(Printed on the back page of this bulletin)*
"Not Fair"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn -306 *(Verses 1 & 4)* *(Red Hymnal)*
"Lord Jesus Christ, Thou Hast Prepared"

The Preparation for Holy Communion *(Brown Hymnal page 17)*

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving *(Brown Hymnal page 20)*

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn -651 *(Red Hymnal)*
"Be Still My Soul"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here! **To our Visitors seeking an altar at which to commune** – Since we desire to follow the words of our Savior, we practice "Close Communion" – a practice that is not new to confessional Lutherans. This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting them to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please first meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word.

Attendance - Sunday (46) Average (43)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/ Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship and Coffee Hour
Mon-Fri	- 6:30 p.m.	– VBS Sessions
Next Sunday	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service
	-11:30 a.m.	– Annual Church Picnic at Hillside Park

CLC News – Pastor Rob Sauers is considering the call to Luther Memorial of Fond du Lac, WI. July 15 is the deadline to nominate a candidate to fill the upcoming vacancy at ILC. See Pastor Roehl if you need more information.

VBS – Our Summer Vacation Bible School begins tomorrow at 6:30 pm. If you haven't already done so, please let Angela Meyer know how many will be attending from your family (children and friends).

Church Picnic – Our Annual Church Picnic is scheduled for next Sunday, following the Sunday service. Please list yourself on the signup sheets on the mailbox table if you plan to attend. Smoked ribs will be provided, and each family is asked to bring a dish to pass. See Sandy Roehl if you have questions.