

Trinity 23 (2020)

I want to speak to you this morning on the sufficiency of God . . . both in life and in death. A timely subject anytime, but especially in times like these.

But, first, I want to do a quick review of where we have come from.

Since the beginning of the Trinity season back in June, we've been on a journey, a long journey spanning a period of at least 2,500 years.

Following our Old Testament lessons, we have travelled all the way from *the creation the world to getting the children of Israel to the edge of the Promised Land.*

Quite a remarkable journey in 23 weeks, one I hope you have enjoyed.

In our travels through the first five books of the Bible – the Pentateuch – a number of truths about God have come through loud and clear. Three in particular stand out:

The first has to do with **the faithfulness of God**. He keeps His promises.

The promises most clearly in view in the section of the Bible are the ones He made to Abraham.

To the patriarch, He promised a big family and certain bit of territory along the Mediterranean Sea. We have seen both fulfilled, at least in embryonic form.

The second has to do with **the longsuffering of God**. When His people prove obstinate, He does not cast them away and pick another family through which to bring about salvation to the world. He bears with them. At times he punishes them, but does not cast them away.

I think it is safe to say that He has more patience with us human beings than we have with each other!

Is patience a virtue you need to work on in your life. It probably is in my life. Let's see what we can do? Let's go to work on acquiring the God-like virtue of patience.

The third truth has to do with God's use of human beings. It seems that almost everything God does in the world He does through people, people not unlike you and me.

Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Mirum and Aaron are some of the big players in the first five books of the Bible.

Our 23-week journey ends today. Moses has gotten the people to the edge of the Promised Land, but he himself will not be going in with them. That task will fall to yet another person of God's own choosing, Joshua.

With that look back, let's turn now to this morning's focus: **the sufficiency of God in life and in death.**

God's sufficiency has been very much in evidence during the children of Israel's trek from Egypt to the Promised Land. All their needs, both physical and spiritual, have been met.

When they needed deliverance from slavery in Egypt, God heard their cry and sent Moses.

When they lacked food, God provided manna and quail to eat.

When they were without water, God caused water to gush out from a rock.

Nor were their spiritual needs neglected. They were given the Law.

The Law said, "This is how I want my freed-from-slavery people to live over against the nations of the world." Live like this and you will be truly free.

This remains true today.

God's precepts are not little, petty rules dropped down from a celestial demagogue to make men miserable.

No, they represent a way of life which enables God's people -- you and me -- to be truly human and to live life to the full . . . to show the world a better way of doing business.

Of course, the Law was not the final answer to the human sin problem. Jesus was, but the Law was an important stop along the way.

Not only did God give the children of Israel the Law, He also gave them a system of animal sacrifices.

As with the Law, these animal sacrifices were not the final answer to the human problem. But, they too were an important stop along the way. They pointed forward to the Lamb of God who would indeed take away the sin of the world on the cross of Calvary.

God was sufficient in meeting the needs of His people then. He remains sufficient today.

And here is where we come into the picture. So often we feel so insufficient when we hear of a friend's problem. We wish we had something say. We wish there was something we could do with our hands. Often there is not.

In times like this, it is good to remember that we are not sufficient but we know Someone who is. His name is Jesus. He puts a human face on the invisible God. More than that, He has come down to where we are and has become one of us.

Hungry and thirsty. He has been there.

Betrayed by a friend. He has been there.

In pain. He has been there . . . on the cross.

Sorrowful over the loss of loved one, He's been there. Remember at Lazarus's tomb, what did Jesus do? The Bible says, 'Jesus wept'.

Tempted to commit some sin, great or small. Jesus has been there. The writer of Hebrews says:

“For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15).

In short, the God we meet in Jesus Christ is sufficient in every respect. Put Him to the test in your life. Point others to Him.

Sufficient in life, but also sufficient for and in death.

In today's reading, we have the touching story of God – in all probability a manifestation of the pre-incarnate Christ – meeting Moses on Mount Nebo and from that vantage point showing him the land the people would soon be entering.

Moses had disobeyed God at the waters of Meribah and had been barred from entering. But, he had not fallen out of the reach of the love and care of God.

What a comforting thought that should be to each one of us. We may have failed in our storm-tossed life, but God has not left us out there in the storm.

In today's passage we find God exercising love and care to Moses in three ways.

The first, which I have just mentioned, was allowing Moses to see into the Promised Land.

The second was the title given to Moses on this occasion. That title, given by God, was not:

- Prince in Pharaoh's court;
- Shepherd of Midian;
- Miracle worker;
- Lawgiver;
- Sinner at Meribah.

No, it was none of these things. Rather it was 'servant of the Lord'.

And, are not these the same words we long to hear at the end of life's day -- "Well done, thy good and faithful servant"?

The third expression of God's love and care comes once Moses is dead. Today's passage tells us God buried him.

That is the last thing any of us can do for a loved one or friend. I know I find it very meaningful when on occasion I dig a hole in the Memorial Garden in preparation for an interment.

We've all heard the joke about the undertaker being the last one to let you down. Well that is the way I feel when I take on this task of digging a final resting place for a friend.

Well, how much more touching it is for God to take on this job for Moses, a friend he knew face to face.

Our God is the last one to let us down.

I like what old Bishop Candler of the Methodist Church is reported to have said on his deathbed.

Someone asked him, "Bishop, aren't you afraid of crossing the river of death."

"No," came his reply, "what should I be. My Father owns the land on both sides of the river."

Such was the case with Moses. He could say with the future King of Israel, David,"

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me . . ."

God was sufficient in life. He will be in death.

Some of the most miserable people I know are those who spend their lives fretting over the *what ifs of life*.

What if this happens or *what if that happens*? How will I cope?

Well, the God we have met on our journey through the Pentateuch, the God with whom Moses journeyed, is sufficient for all of life's contingencies. ///

And this is the message I wish to leave with you this morning.

Take heart. Carry on. Don't get stuck on the *what ifs* of life. Go with God, the all-sufficient One, for He cares for you and promises to be with you.