So we’re driving in the church van this past week to get to Ronceverte, West Virginia on the mission trip and we’re in the section of the trip going through tiny, rural hamlets on wind-ey dangerous roads and the person’s battery cuts out on the GPS we’re using to get there and we have no way of absolutely knowing exactly how to reach our destination. Broberg is a little ticked. So I pull over to ask for the address where we are to try to plug the directions into my cellphone so we can successfully continue our trek. That doesn’t work either; I can’t get cellphone service, which tells you how rural this place really is. And I’m walking out of the store where I asked directions and there is a giant church sign, right in front of the church van, at the Mt. Olivet Freewill Baptist and Holiness Church and it says: “My grace is sufficient for thee.” By the way the pastor listed on the sign, his first name is “Stuart”. Spelled my way, correctly. It was a sign from God!!! Yes, Lord, I want to control everything and know exactly where I am going. But YOUR GRACE is sufficient for me. Your grace, as the scripture from 2 Corinthians 12: 9 states it, says: “My grace is sufficient for thee. For my power is made perfect in weakness.” Not through your perfect plans, Stubie-doo. Through Grace. Through our weakness. And amazingly enough through our collective remembering we all got to Ronceverte, WV just fine. T’is grace has brought you safe thus far and grace will lead you home. It really is about grace, after all...

Everything about today’s world is about ANTI-grace. It is the opposite of the grace sent into the world through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Even longtime and strong Christians can get sucked into ANTI-grace. Its easy to become critical and stand in the Commons Area every Sunday and criticize everything that everyone else is doing. You’re exercising your personal power as the world does, negatively. You seek to elevate your own standing by bringing others down. ANTI-grace. Christians love to gossip and tell terrible things about others. I possess a piece of juicy information which may or may not be true which you do not possess and therefore I am better than you are and certainly a lot better than the person about which I am to gossip. ANTI-grace. The best way to shut gossip down is to say, as I like to say, “O, I don’t believe that. Who told you that?” (Gag, choke, wheeze). We’re all pretty good about building our little power kingdoms and trying to get our own way. It is so interesting to me that often when someone has been very active in a particular area of the church and then they don’t get their own way about something, how they react in anger and sometimes even choose to leave the church. Well, we certainly figured out why you did everything you did in the church…and it wasn’t for the Lord, was it? It wasn’t about grace. It was Anti-Grace. Our sick and sinful world where everything is about the exercise of power and our own “self-actualization” is bleeding into the life of the church also. I had a belly-full of Washington, DC when I served a church there. It was all about the exercise of self-will and power and there was no grace to it whatsoever. Frankly, I found the most refreshing comment in this recent debate to be the woman candidate for President who dared to intone, “We haven’t tried crystals and bee honey yet.” Boy, the pundits had a field day on that one. All this ANTI-grace who-ha that is politics and obviously is not working to bind the country together, all this self-serving, self-centered, self aggrandizement that is destroying the nation, maybe we should try something else? For me, to be clear, it’s not crystals and bee honey. But what about GRACE? What would happen if some candidate were savaged by an opponent in a debate and their response was: “I know you’re going through a tough time in your personal life right now, and what you said is very mean and hurtful, but I forgive you and would like to be your friend.” Maybe we need more bee honey and less...well you can complete the thought...

When I was leaving that church in the DC area I had to have my picture taken by a famous photographer so that I could “hang” in the Westminster Room where the Session met. It wasn’t the first time I would
hang in the Westminster Room. So I make my appointment and drive over to Langley and to a very prestigious four story townhouse where I am greeted at the door by an exquisitely beautiful and curvaceous receptionist asking if I wanted bottled or lively water. It came time for my appointment and I was escorted up the staircase and on the first landing I passed a large portrait of Willard Marriot, he of Marriot hotels fame. On the second landing, feeling smaller and less significant with every step, I passed a large portrait of Sandra Day O’Connor, retired Associate Justice of the Supreme Court. And on the last landing I passed the large and official portrait of Prince Charles, heir to the English throne. And then there was Stubie-doo. By this time I felt I was about in third grade waiting for my school picture. So Mr. Bermingham, the very English photographer, sort of looked over his subject and I’m very sure was most unimpressed. So I put my blue pulpit robe on, and he positioned me in various poses, but wasn’t getting what he wanted, so he started to shout out, “I want heroic, I want valiant, I want regal!!” “Give me heroic, heroic, heroic!” So for the life of me what I give him is a pose like George Reeves as superman, fists clenched and arms akimbo on my hips and I jut my jaw forward in my best imitation of Winston Churchill! You want heroic, you got it! And that picture, as ridiculous as it was, is the one that really should have hung in the Westminster Room. A parody of all that is Washington, DC. But the one that did hang there, as I look at it closely, I think the expression on my face says, “I hate this and this isn’t what my ministry has been about at all!”

If we are fairly clear on what ANTI-grace is then what is GRACE? Our scripture begins by noting “we are justified by faith” (Romans 5: 1) This is a very humble concept. We are saved and justified, not by what we do, but by what Christ has done for us. It isn’t about all the good stuff we try to do, our sad efforts at being successful in life, trying to prove ourselves worthy of being saved. Nope. While we were yet helpless, while we were yet sinners, long before we ever knew or practiced grace,” Christ died for the ungodly”. (v. 6) Its not your planning and the GPS that’s going to get you to Ronceverte, WV, its my GRACE that will lead you there. We are justified by faith; what Jesus has done for us, we believe He has done for us, and so what He has done for us, gone to the cross and justified us, is true and real. Its all about GRACE. And if that isn’t enough then the Apostle illustrates this by noting that we can “rejoice in our sufferings”, because we know that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, (O give me character, not gotcha moments in debates!) and character produces hope, and hope does not ever disappoint us. Its not about being heroic and valiant and regal and winning and getting the most power over others. It begins with suffering and it ends with hope. And our justification leads to an access to the grace in which we stand. Through what Christ has done for us, we have access to this grace in which we stand (v. 2) and our strength comes, not by trying to lord it over other people and getting our own way, not the way the world operates, but our strength comes from Jesus, as a gift, as GRACE. Because God’s love has been poured into our heart through the Holy Spirit. HIS GRACE is indeed SUFFICIENT. For HIS GRACE is perfected, not in our strength, but in our weakness.

So who would like to take a stand for GRACE today? Who would like to say the way the world is operating isn’t working and will never work? Who would like to be an instrument of God’s Grace on the face of this earth? Who wants to stand in the grace we have received from the ultimate act of weakness, Jesus’ Cross, that has been transformed into the ultimate act of saving power, through God’s LOVE and God’s GRACE? Who wants to overcome this world through the Love of Jesus? Who wants to live a different way? Who wants to say NO to politics as usual? Who wants to believe that the only hope we have is the grace that entered the world 2,000 years ago at Calvary through Jesus, and has entered and re-entered our heart today? STAND in the grace we have received. Make our STAND for Jesus TODAY. In the end, it really is about GRACE. Amen and Amen.

By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, Pennsylvania

IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!