

Psalm 19:14 Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.

1 Timothy 1:2 ...Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

“You Have the Power”

Luke 10:1-20

Introduction: Power Mad

We are intoxicated with power. Americans love to say, “We are the most powerful nation on earth” or “Our military is the most powerful the world has ever known.” Regardless of whether those statements are true, we love to think they are.

Our culture loves power too. Flip through the channels. One station is showing the X-men, featuring mutants like Storm who can control the weather or Wolverine who is has animal-like strength and agility plus retractable claws. Another station has professional wrestlers, men and women, who flex their oiled muscles and brag about their brute strength. Even on National Geographic, it seems like only the strong survive: the lion kills the sick gazelle and feasts on its flesh. Nature itself seems to direct us to love power and shun the weak.

We know that God has all the power in the world but what power does he give Christians? That the question I would like to answer today.

Lord of Power

Our Gospel lesson is all about power. Jesus is showing us what he can do. He doesn't refer to himself as a servant in this text. He is acting as Christ the King in these verses. He gives commands and the disciples jump to work but he doesn't send them out unarmed.

Jesus begins by telling the disciples to arm themselves with prayer. They are to pray to the Lord of the Harvest for themselves and their co-

workers throughout the ages. They were praying for us and for all Christians in all times and places.

Once they have been armed with prayer, they are sent out. The disciples don't look very powerful compared to the forces of this world. Jesus recognizes this and lets the disciples know that they are not sent as the world sends its armies. He tells them, "I am sending you out like lambs among wolves."

I doubt the disciples wanted to be sent out like lambs. They would have preferred to be sent out in a powerful way. They would have preferred to be wolves or even wolverines among the lambs but Jesus did not provide them with that kind of physical muscle.

On the other hand, what they lack in physical prowess is made up for in spiritual authority. The disciples can place God's peace on any house they visit. Implicit in this is that they can also deny spiritual peace to the homes that reject them. That is a power beyond bulging muscles or retractable claws. It is the power to orient people toward God or to confirm them in opposition to God.

Dealing with Rejection

When a village or family rejects the disciples, they are commanded to curse those people. This is shocking. Isn't it? They are told to wipe off the dust of their sandals against those people. This is every bit as insulting as giving the finger is today. They are told to curse the people who do not respect them and that God will back up that curse on Judgment Day. It will be more tolerable for the sexual perverts of Sodom and Gomorrah on Judgment Day than it will for people who are cursed by the disciples.

How can we not be shocked Jesus' audacity? Either he is the Judge of the Universe or he is a lunatic but he can't be just a kindly teacher. No

“nice” teacher would dare to command his disciples to curse people who do not receive them. Jesus is showing his power openly in these verses.

Of course, the people who rejected the disciples had an advantage over people today. They could see them performing miracles and healing people with incurable diseases. They could see them casting out demons. The only reason they would reject the disciples is that they loved demons more than they loved the Kingdom of God. Jesus tells the disciples to confirm those who reject the Kingdom in their unbelief.

Return to Sender

When the disciples went out, we didn't hear them saying, “Wow! We get to preach the Kingdom of God! That's Great!” They were probably thinking, “Oh Great. We are lambs and the wolves are going to tear us to pieces.” Then they obeyed orders but I imagine them doing it without a whole lot of excitement.

When they come back, they are excited. They run up to Jesus like a kid who just learned to ride a bike. “Look at me. I did it! I did it all by myself.” What they did was cast out demons. They are thrilled that Jesus has given them this power.

I suspect that some of the power even started going to their heads. So Jesus warns them, “do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” In other words, don't get caught up in a power trip. Just be glad you are saved.

Sent Out with Power

I wish I could say at this point in the sermon that we have been sent with the same power that was given to those 72 disciples. I've made too many hospital calls to think that I have the same power they have. We don't have the power to heal physically in the same way Jesus allowed them to

do. In theory, we have the power to throw out evil spirits but most of us never come face to face with such an obvious manifestation of evil.

But remember what Jesus said, “do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” The most important power is not the physical healing or even a dramatic battle with demons like in the The Exorcist. The most important power is to introduce people to the Kingdom of God. What is the point of healing someone if he goes to hell? What is the point of throwing out a demon if the person winds up spending eternity with demons?

We are given the power to proclaim the gospel to people who have never heard it. We are given the power to give them an infusion of God’s grace by sharing Jesus’ forgiveness with them. They may reject it but that is not our concern. Our concern is to give them the opportunity to hear the word. After that, it is up to the Holy Spirit to create faith in them or for them to reject the faith he creates.

Conclusion

None of us have the power to perform the superhuman feats we see in so many summer movies. We can’t control the weather or fight with animalistic instincts. We may not be powerful in the eyes of the world.

We may be the sheep among the wolves but we are not unarmed sheep. We are sheep with spiritual powers that make the oily muscles of a wrestler look weak. We have the power to open the Kingdom of God and close it. We have the power to open the doors of heaven or pronounce them shut. We have the power to bless and curse and God will back us up on it.

May that peace which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.