**With Authority Comes Power**

**Text: Mark 1:29-39**

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Jesus is a very busy man in the opening chapters of Mark’s gospel. In the first chapter alone he travels south to Judea to be baptized by John, goes into the wilderness for a 40 day retreat, returns home to Nazareth and starts preaching, goes on a recruiting trip around the Sea of Galilee and calls his disciples, travels to Capernaum and commences his healing ministry, and then he launches a preaching tour throughout Galilee, teaching and healing and casting out demons! It’s no wonder that in verse 35 he takes a break; he takes time to be alone in prayer.

Serving God’s Kingdom is hard work! It requires energy and strength; it requires *power*.

Last week we saw Jesus speaking and acting with authority. And we said that with authority comes power. And we’re not just talking about Jesus here. *We* have been given authority by God. We have been given the authority to speak and act in Jesus name, and the *power* to speak and act in Jesus’ name. The *Church* has been given the authority and power to speak and act in Jesus’ name.

But let’s be clear: it’s not our power, it’s the power of the Christ flowing through us. We are – each of us – a conduit for Christ’s power. Each of us individually and all of us collectively as the Church: we are a conduit for Christ’s power. And we have to *claim* this authority and power to act in Jesus’s name.

We can’t just give lip service to it. We have to claim it, we have to recognize it deep within us, and we have to use it. And I’m going to tell some stories a bit later to illustrate the point.

But first we have to consider what we mean by power. The Greek word that Mark uses for power is *dunamis.* It means force, power, mighty work or deed of power. Some would go a bit further and talk about *dunamis* as a deed of *great* power. *Dunamis* can also mean ability. So, *dunamis* means force, power, mighty work, deed of power, or ability. Many English Bibles translate *dunamis* as miracle. That’s because often when Mark and the other gospels uses *dunamis* to speak of a deed of power, it’s in the context of Jesus healing a sick person or casting out a demon; in other words, it’s in the context of what some of us would call a miracle. But to restrict *dumamis* to what you or I might call a miracle is misleading. Miracle implies an act so extraordinary that it’s of a different order of magnitude, a higher order of magnitude, than the kinds of actions in which we might be engaged. We think of a miracle as something that’s supernatural; something that defies the laws of nature. Jesus performed miracles, the scriptures seem to say, while we who are Jesus’ followers can do nothing more than simple, ordinary acts.

Well, I’m here to tell you: it ain’t necessarily so! When Mark talks about *dunamis* – when Mark talks about power – he’s talking about the strength to engage in a whole *range* of actions: from casting out demons to offering a cup of water. It’s not a different order of magnitude, but different points along the same continuum. And where you are on that continuum – how you are called to use the *dunamis* of Christ – the power of Christ pulsating through you – depends on the gifts that God has given you. In other words, we’re *all* miracle workers, according to the particular gifts that God has given to each of us. To offer a cup of water to thirsty person, to offer hospitality to a stranger, to tell someone about the good news of God’s love: these are all deeds of power. It seems almost humorous that as soon as Jesus heals Simon’s mother-in-law, she pops out of bed and offers food to her guests. But that merely underscores the point that the power of Christ is the strength to do a wide variety of things: including healing the sick, including offering food to strangers; as we are now doing every Saturday morning. And to do all of this in Jesus’ name: that’s claiming the authority and the power that God has given to the Church!

So the kind of power that we’re talking about is Christ’s power, flowing through us; the power and the ability to do great things for the sake of God’s Kingdom.

There’s nothing wrong with such power. There’s nothing wrong with *claiming* such power. This is important because so often we think of power as something that’s tainted, something that we shouldn’t strive for. That’s because we often equate power with *selfish* power. And it’s no wonder that we do so, because that’s the way that power is often used: to gain something for one’s self; to manipulate others into serving one’s own purposes. And because power is so often used in that way, we tend to think of power and love as polar opposites, as if there’s power on the one hand and God’s gentle and loving will on the other.

So listen to this: there’s the power to do as one chooses, and there’s the authority to do with *great* power when *God* chooses *for* us. We work with the latter when we act according to what God has called us to do; what God has given us the authority to do. When conventional power is used, we’re tempted to take advantage of our power over others and manipulate them in ways that will benefit us. When we act with God’s authority and tap into Christ’s power, we put the interests of the Kingdom above all other interests, including our own, and we are gentle with others, even at great cost to ourselves.

Consider what’s happening right now in Washington. I have no doubt that the vast majority of people who run for the Senate or the House of Representatives do so out of a desire to do something good for the nation and the world. This is true of both Democrats and Republicans. Those who are people of faith understand themselves to be seeking political power in order to serve as conduits for God’s power. So far so good. But once they get elected, the seductive qualities of human power tend to get the better of them. They shift from seeking power for the sake of God or for the sake of the good to seeking power for their *own* good. And this is true not just of politicians but of *anyone* who gets a fair bit of power in their hands. It’s human nature. It’s part of our sinful nature.

In order to resist this temptation, and reclaim the authority that taps into Christ’s power, we need prayer. We need the power of prayer to stay focused; we need prayer to stay focused on God’s will and God’s Kingdom. Jesus got up early in the morning to go off by himself and pray; and so should we. If not early in the morning, then sometime during the day anyway. We all need to do this, and those of you who have a gift for prayer – those of you who *enjoy* being in prayer – might want to think about forming a group that gets together each week to pray: for all those on our prayer list, and for God’s world, and for this congregation as we move into our Telling Our Story/Future Glory process. If we’re going to claim the authority that God has given us, if we’re going to tap into the power of the Christ pulsating through us, if we are going to accomplish great things to God’s glory, we need to be in prayer.

Now, let me tell you some stories:

Clare was one of the saints of Northeast United Church. She had two teenagers at home, a good job, a full life; and a lump in her breast. A biopsy was scheduled, and if the mass was cancerous – and the surgeon thought it probably was – he would immediately do a mastectomy. Clare checked into the hospital the night before, with surgery scheduled for the next morning. She was up all night: praying. A woman of deep faith with a strong mystical bent, she spent that whole night in *deep* prayer: asking for courage, asking for strength, asking God to take care of her daughters, asking for healing. About 3 am she felt a warming sensation in her chest. It continued for some time as she continued to pray. By 8 am she was in the operating room and the procedure had begun. When she awoke, the doctor said that he hadn’t found the mass…only a small clump of dead tissue; which he removed. No mastectomy, no sign of cancer, not that day nor any subsequent day. Clare had claimed the authority and the power that God has given to the Church.

But, as we said, God’s mighty power is not only about physical healing. We all know of cases where fervent prayer has *not l*ed to physical healing. But that doesn’t mean that God’s mighty power was not present. My hunch is that in the months after Franklin D. Roosevelt was diagnosed with polio, many people prayed for healing. He was an active Christian – a pillar of his small Episcopal church, like his father before him – throughout his adult life. *Somebody* was praying that he would be healed. But he wasn’t; not physically, anyway. Nevertheless, Christ’s ability to do deeds of great power was flowing through him. Never mind the fact that he became President of the United States. Long before that, he purchased a run-down resort in Georgia, and transformed it into the Warm Springs rehabilitation center. He channeled his pain and empathy into a force for good, helping others to be not polio victims but polio survivors; viewing themselves not as disabled but as *differently*-abled; helping them to use their own God-given abilities to do great things. And never mind the fact that he was rich. If he’d been a man of more modest means, he could’ve gotten together with others, formed a charitable association, gone into fundraising mode, and accomplished the same thing. The healing power of God can be channeled in a multitude of ways. FDR had claimed the authority and the power that God has given to the Church.

And then there’s Rosa Parks. And please don’t think of her as the civil rights icon that she became; think of her as she was in 1955: a hardworking member of her church, just like you all; active in her community, busy at her 9-5 job. She was on her way home from work one day. Riding the bus. And in those days, in Montgomery, Alabama, black folks had to sit in the back of the bus. If you were sitting in the front seat of the black section, and there were no seats in the white section, then you were required by law to give a white passenger your seat. That’s where Rosa Parks was sitting. The white section was full, and the bus driver ordered Mrs. Parks to stand-up and give her seat to a white man. But it had been a long day at work. And she was too tired to get-up. She was arrested, put in hand cuffs, and hauled off to the city jail. But the word went through the black churches that night that Mrs. Parks had been arrested. The community was organized. And by the following Monday, not a single African-American rode the Montgomery city buses. For 13 months the boycott went on. Until the City of Montgomery was handed an order by the U.S. Supreme Court to integrate their buses. This too was a deed of great power. Rosa Parks had claimed the authority and the power that God has given to the Church.

*We* are the Church. We are a people of *tremendous* power. It has been given to us by God. And we have been authorized to use this power by Jesus Christ. It is, indeed, *his* power pulsating through us. We are just the conduits through which Christ’s power continues to do mighty deeds, and God’s Kingdom draws ever closer.

Margaret Mead, said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.”

With authority comes power. It is the power to get things done; things that glorify God and bring God’s Kingdom ever closer. Sometimes they seem like great things, sometimes they seem like very small things. But most things that become great things seem like very small things at the time; like being just too tired to give-up your seat on a bus.

You have been given this power. I have been given this power. The Church has been given this power. And we’ve been given the authority to use it! Amen.