

Sermon for: Trinity Lutheran Church, Manilla, IA; Zion Lutheran, Denison
Second Week of Easter—April 13-14, 2024

Sermon Text: Acts 3:11-21 (First Lesson)

Sermon Title/Theme: “Easter People: EMPOWERED!”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Who would be on your list of powerful people? The list would vary greatly depending on your interests. There are the politically powerful in various state, national, or international roles.

There are the financially powerful (the list of the world’s wealthiest persons just came out again—Warren Buffet is just number 6). There are the Hollywood “a-listings” or the top grossing or media friendly entertainers—Taylor Swift? The world (and we) are intrigued by power. There’s the athletically powerful either in physical strength, agility, or personality (Caitlyn Clark?)

In the eyes of the world the Christian church is not perceived as powerful or having powerful people. However as we continue to observe the early church through the book of Acts, we learn of the power of the message of Jesus’ resurrection in individual lives and in the church. Jesus’ resurrection continues to empower the church today.

Part I. Peter, the powerful Easter Person

Peter had once perceived himself to be powerful. “I can walk on water.” “I will go anywhere for you Lord.” “Others may deny you, but I never will.” “Lord, I’ll draw my sword and fight for you.” The power that Peter perceived was the kind of power that we often look for. It is the power of the personality. It’s the power of hanging around the right group of people at school or at work. It’s the power that comes with money or with our accomplishments.

But then it all had crumbled in for Peter. Peter tried to walk on water and found himself quickly sinking; his dreams of earthly power were literally drowning. The power of the sword was diminished when Jesus asked Peter to put his sword away in the Garden of Gethsemane confrontation. Peter's lack of power to fight temptation was evident when he couldn't stand up to the questions of a slave girl in Caiaphas' courtyard: "Weren't you also with him? Peter weakly responds, "I don't know the man." Peter's perception of power hit bottom when his Master died on a cross on a Friday afternoon. There was now no personal privilege or power in following Jesus. There was no hope of following His coat tails in an overthrow of the Roman government to gain political power for the people of Israel. When Jesus died, the disciples had huddled in fear in an upper room in Jerusalem. They were frightened for their own lives. They were powerless.

Can you identify with that powerless feeling? It's the feeling we have when we've said the wrong thing again and offended our spouse, our children, or fellow employees or neighbors. It's the feeling we have when we (or a loved one) get the cancer or other diagnosis and we feel helpless. It the reality of being alone and powerless at the death of a loved one. It's the inability to hold our marriage or our business together by ourselves. It's all those times when we don't have the resources we need or the fortitude to go forward.

The first lessons of the Easter season share the dynamics of the early church. In Acts, chapter 2, the Spirit descends on the Jerusalem gathering on Pentecost Day. Filled with the Spirit, Peter and John begin witnessing in Jerusalem. The two disciples are given the miraculous power to heal a crippled man: "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk"—and he does.

When Peter and John are hailed as powerful miracle workers, Peter is quick to explain the real power at work in and through them. Peter explains, "Why do you stare at us as if by our own

POWER or godliness we made this man walk?” Peter explains that the miracle was not a result of his personal power. Peter preaches a greater miracle: “The God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus . . . God raised him to life. We are witnesses of this. By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus’ name and the faith that comes through Him that has given this complete healing to him.”

Peter emphasizes that the power is not the power of Peter. Jesus is the powerful One. On Easter Sunday, we as the people of God were privileged to see again a divine power display. We were told that there had been a powerful earthquake that moved the stone to the tomb and made Roman soldiers fall to the ground. The power of God who would bring Jesus to life again had been on display. There is no earthly power that can overcome death. We heard the good news of the angel. “He is risen!” By the power of God the One who was dead was alive. Jesus Christ the resurrected One descends to hell to forever crush the head of Satan. Nothing can keep us in the grave and out of heaven. “All hail the power of Jesus’ name.”

The power of Jesus’ resurrection continues to be evident in the people of the early church. Saul who once had a powerful position in the Jewish council is rendered blind and powerless on the way to Damascus to persecute Christians. Reflecting on his journey, Paul realizes all of his physical and other weaknesses and then rejoices that “the power of Christ may rest upon me,” (2 Cor. 12:9). Peter, John, Paul, and the other Apostles had seen the resurrected Jesus and the reality of the resurrection and the power of the resurrection. They were willing to give their lives for that message.

Part II. More “Power To You”

People want earthly power. They also want spiritual power. It is not accidental that a once popular Sunday morning television program was called “Hour of Power”. One of the best

selling religious books of all time is Norman Vincent Peale's "Power of Positive Thinking." In times of weakness or failure it is not unusual for individuals to seek out a church again that will offer some immediate power over problems. A powerful church is not a church that has a pastor with a powerful personality or the power impressive numbers or media coverage. The early church was small in numbers and influence, but it was powerful because it knew the power of Jesus' resurrection.

The power of Jesus is ours. That power begins with repentance. Peter preaches to the gathering: "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ." We can only be powerful in Christ as we admit our own sinfulness, our own weaknesses, and our complete powerlessness. The lyrics of a contemporary Christian song state, "When I am weak; then I am strong." We hang our head and weep with Peter in confession. We journey to the cross to see a Savior sacrificing Himself for us so that we might have forgiveness of sins.

During His earthly ministry a crippled man was brought to Jesus and lowered through the roof to meet the Miracle Worker. Before Jesus granted physical healing, He announced to the paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven," (Luke 5:20). The greater miracle that Jesus came to bring to the man was forgiveness. Through His death and resurrection that miracle has come to us.

The unique power that Jesus has given to His church is the power to forgive sins. It is only through the sacrifice of Jesus and His resurrection that there is forgiveness of sins, and we get that assurance through His Word and Sacraments each week.

Having witnessed the resurrected Lord, the disciples were blessed on Pentecost Sunday (Acts 2) with the power of the Holy Spirit. It is the same Spirit who has come to us in the in the means of grace.

Christian author, Lloyd Ogilvie, tells of having lunch with an old friend. They had a pleasant time together but nothing profound or earth shattering was said at the lunch table. Just as Ogilvie was about to get into his car, he said rather casually to his friend "Power to you." Suddenly his lunch partner stopped and said, "That's just what I need, because power is the one thing that I especially lack in my life." He went on to say that he had lost much of the sense of joy and peace that had once been part of his Christian life. "Something was missing—God's power seemed so far away. The words 'Power to you!' felt like a powerful lightning bolt had struck."

Power to you! I cannot promise the power that will heal your limbs like the crippled man in Acts, chapter 3. I cannot promise you the power that will heal all your hurts or relationships. I can promise .to you the power of the resurrected Jesus. The power that says: "Your sins are forgiven." "I am with you always." "I have given you eternal life."

Sometimes the Christian church is perceived by the world to be weak and irrelevant. It is suggested that we are out of date and out of step. It is suggested (and sometimes perceived) that we aren't making a difference in the world or in individual lives.

The miracle and message of Acts 3 and the many incidents that follow in the early church give a completely different message. We are the church of the resurrected Lord. We are Easter people. In Christ, we are an empowered people.

Christ's power to YOU! In Jesus' name. Amen. Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.