

Sermon Proper 15 Year C

[RCL] Jeremiah 1:4-10; Psalm 71:1-6; Hebrews 12:18-29; Luke 13:10-17

The Power of the Spirit

Today's readings and Collect can be seen as a unit teaching us about God's power and how it works in us. The opening Collect (prayer) in the Episcopal Church says: "Grant, O merciful God, that your Church, being gathered together in unity by your Holy Spirit, may show forth your power among all peoples..."

This power is based on the unity of the gathered, not a majority of the divided. It is a power that expresses itself in service, mercy, healing, reconciliation, and includes all of us.

Jeremiah learns about this power when he is called to be a prophet. He protests that he doesn't know how to speak well, and is merely a boy, but God tells him he is chosen for a life filled with the Spirit. He is to go and proclaim the truth everywhere, and is assured God will put the right words into his mouth. So, in the tradition of the great Biblical prophets Jeremiah goes to "destroy and overthrow; to build and to plant."

Jeremiah teaches us that God's power is not always found in those who are mighty, wealthy or politically adroit. Like David against Goliath, God can use even a boy, and one not gifted with glibness to do God's work.

God's power sustains us. This is a teaching from the appointed Psalm 71, verse 6: "I have been sustained by you ever since I was born; from my mother's womb you have been my strength; my praise shall be always of you." And so, Jeremiah, throughout his prophetic witness is upheld, as is Jesus while he fasts in the wilderness, and Paul as he is shipwrecked and later imprisoned.

The passage from Hebrews develops this theme of God's power in an eloquent set of verses that illustrate our relationship with the old covenant now supplanted by the New Covenant based on the "sprinkling of blood," and then ends with the assurance that "since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be

shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe; for indeed our God is a consuming fire.”

The Gospel Lesson focuses on the healing of a woman on the Sabbath. Jesus’s rebuttal to the leader of the synagogue is practical: “Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water?” But behind his action and the exposure of hypocrisy is the destruction of an old sacrificial system that operated the other six days of the week. Jesus heals her and asks for nothing except to praise God, which the woman freely does.

It is no longer necessary to obey all of the strict purity code, to make the necessary sacrifices. Now one simply puts one’s trust in God and the power is unleashed, sometimes dramatically, sometimes quietly, but always as needed.

As the national political campaign cranks up and we are bombarded with political ads and slogans that weary us all, it helps to remember that God’s power does not require gigantic sums of money, the latest and fastest technology, or the “packaging” of candidates for office.

Instead, as believers we have access to the power of the Spirit to fill our hearts and minds with God’s love and promise. As the world careens along with chaos and disorder unending, God offers us the power God gave to Jeremiah, the promise to have the right words and actions given to us to do the work of an evangelist.

In our communities, among the people we see every day, are those who thirst for something other than cynicism and despair, but may not know it is there for the asking. A few weeks ago we were reminded to “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.” Those who do so know they can walk through times of difficulty without being overcome.

Here are some pointers to help us remember how and why we are empowered:

(Note: you may wish to elaborate on two or three of these or select one especially appropriate to the context).

1. We received power in our Baptism through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. One of the Baptismal prayers asks that we might receive inquiring and discerning hearts, courage to will and persevere and the gift of joy and wonder (Book of Common Prayer, p. 308).
2. We were sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ's own forever.
3. We do not do service as a solo act. We are supported by a community of fellowship, love, and prayer, and the power vested in that community is nothing less than the risen body of Christ.
4. We are given the power of the Holy Spirit for one reason; we are empowered for God's service and promised that power will sustain us all the days of our life.
5. The weekly coming together of the faithful is for renewal and strength to be servants in the world and to each other.
6. Even though we may from time to time fall away from our relationship with God, God never abandons us. When we return to God in penitence we are restored and strengthened again.

So, we are called to show forth God's power to all peoples. Churches are places from which God's power and compassion emanate to a hurting and chaotic world, badly in need of God's mercy and love. We are the people called to that service. *Amen.*

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