

Relying On the Power of God (I Samuel 17:32-49; II Timothy 1:1-8; Mark 4:35-41)

It is reported that most men today feel pretty powerless. Changes in society have made it such that men never know if they should open a door for a woman or not. Men's wives often bring home a bigger portion of the family income than they do. And what helplessness many men feel when facing the current economy! Many men have been powerless to keep their old jobs and have had to find new, lower paying jobs. No wonder most men today feel pretty powerless.

But listen to these words from Emma Bombeck: "If I had to tell someone's son what a father really does that is important, it would be that he shows up for the job in good times and bad times. He's a man who is constantly being observed by his children. They learn from him how to handle adversity, anger, disappointment, and success. He won't laugh at their dreams no matter how impossible they might seem. He will dig out at 1 a.m. when one of his children runs out of gas. He will make unpopular decisions and stand by them. When he is wrong and makes a mistake, he will admit it. He sets the tone for how family members treat one another, members of the opposite sex, and people who are different than they are. By example, he can instill a desire to give something back to the community when its needs are greater than theirs. But mostly, a good father involves himself in his kids' lives....A father has the potential to be a powerful force in the life of a child."

Studies bear this out. According to an article in Time Magazine, "Studies of young criminals have found that more than 70% of all juveniles in state reform institutions come from fatherless homes. Children from broken families are nearly twice as likely as those in two-parent families to drop out of high school."¹ It has also been reported that children are more likely to stop coming to church if the father doesn't attend than they are if the mother doesn't attend. According to Dr. T. Berry Brazelton, a father's involvement with a child increases the child's IQ, the child's motivation to learn, and the child's self-confidence. In addition, children with involved dads are more likely to develop a sense of humor as well as an "inner excitement."²

¹ White, Harold L., Fatherhood

² Parachin, Victor, "The Fine Art of Good Fathering," Herald of Holiness, February 1995, pp. 32-

And just think of the four-year-old coming home one Sunday after hearing that God is our Heavenly Father. The only father he knows is the one who lives with him and says, "Pass the potatoes, please;" so he asks..."Is God like Daddy?"

Yes, you men may at times feel powerless, but nonetheless, you actually have a lot of power, in the influence you have on your children, grandchildren, as well as the children and grandchildren of others who are watching you. And you have even more power here than previous generations of men, for fathers today have a more active role in doing housework and taking care of the children than men traditionally have had.

All of us, men and women, need to reclaim the biblical understanding of power. We've been too conditioned by the world and how the world says we get power. The world tells us that power comes when one political party gets the most votes....when one government can force other governments to comply...when one person "holds all the cards"...when one person has a lot of social prestige or fame or money. Or, the world tells us that power comes from coal, electricity, water, wind, atomic energy--to give us air-conditioning, heat, indoor plumbing, running water, automobiles. Ah, and the world combines both of its interpretations of power, to the point that the world says if you really want to be powerful, you'll base your power on the power sources you control.

But according to the Bible, real power is not found in such strong lording it over the weak. Nor is real power found in natural resources. Real power is only found in God. Our lessons this morning couldn't shout this truth louder.

In the Older Testament story, we're presented with the world's perfect example of a powerful man. Goliath of Gath was a giant among men. He was unusually tall and strong. When he appeared on the battlefield, all the other men trembled. The king of Israel couldn't get any of his soldiers to face Goliath one-on-one. But then a mere boy named David went to the king and said, "Let no one's heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine." When the king pointed out that David didn't have enough personal power to do battle with Goliath, David said "The Lord, who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine." In other words, David said that he wasn't worried about how much physical strength he personally had, since he wasn't going to trust in his own

power anyhow--he was going to trust in God's power. So King Saul said to David, "Go, and may the Lord be with you!" And to make sure we don't miss the point, the writer of the story put in that little aside about David not even being big and strong enough to wear armor or carry a sword. So David wasn't able to wear any material protection, and all he could carry in the way of material weapons was stones.

When the mighty Goliath saw the weakling David, he laughed. But David, who knew that he had the invisible power of God with him, answered the Philistine, "You come to me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts...the battle is the Lord's..." This said, David slung a stone and struck the giant on his forehead, causing him to fall face down on the ground.

And if this old story leaves us with any doubt about the fact that true power comes from God, all we have to do is look at our Gospel story for today. Jesus and the disciples were all in a boat when a ferocious windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was being swamped. Jesus, though, wasn't a bit worried, cause, like David, he knew that true power wasn't in the wind or water but in God. The disciples, however, didn't understand this. So they woke Jesus up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" And so Jesus said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the disciples said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

God is the source of true power, a power that can calm any storm that hits us, a power that can give us strength to face and defeat all the giants that come across our path. And, wonder of wonders, God does not want to keep his amazing power all to himself. He wants to share it with us. Thus right before Jesus ascended into heaven, he told his disciples, "you will receive power--when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1).

Indeed, since the outpouring of God's Holy Spirit on that Pentecost described in the Acts of the Apostles, God's power, real power, is available to each one of us. But God's power isn't to be used to rule nations--nor to lord it over anyone. Instead, it's to be used to help us stand up to the evil in our own lives. It's to be used to help us change our lives for the better. It's to be used to help us forgive someone who has hurt us terribly. It's to be used to help us survive the disappointments and sorrows of life. It's to be used to heal those who are

broken and relationships that are broken. It's to be used to bring good news to the poor and to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind. It's to be used to let the oppressed go free. It's to be used to proclaim the favor and love of the Lord (Luke 4). It's to be used to make a difference in the lives of those around us. It's to be used to make a difference in the world. It's to be used to bring God's kingdom of peace and love to earth.

A boy was constantly told by his father that he would be somebody of importance when he grew up. In childhood, however, the boy felt weak and "less than" the other kids. But his father kept telling him over and over that he would be somebody. Despite his poor report cards and his numerous failings as a child, his father kept confidence in him until the young man finally believed what his father told him. "You will be somebody one day! You will make a positive contribution to your community," his father had constantly, consistently told him. So the young man finally claimed this promise of his father and later went on to become a great neurosurgeon. His father had told him he would be somebody, but it wasn't until he believed it and "received it" that it happened. So too our heavenly Father has faith in us--and has thus entrusted to us his power to change lives and the world for the better.

Oscar Cervantes is an example. As child, Oscar began to get into trouble. As he got older, he was jailed 17 times for brutal crimes. Prison psychiatrists said he was beyond help. But--they didn't know about the power of God! During a brief time of freedom, Oscar happened to meet an elderly man who told him about Jesus and his forgiveness and love. Oscar believed and placed his trust in the Lord and was thus changed into a kind, caring, responsible man. And himself now possessing the power of God, Oscar started a prison ministry, using the power of God at his disposal to change the lives of others, as his life had been changed. Chaplain H.C. Warwick described Oscar's ministry this way: "The third Saturday night of each month is 'Oscar Night' at Soledad. Inmates come to hear Oscar, and they sing gospel songs with fervor. They sit intently for over two hours. They come freely to the chapel altar....What professionals had failed to for Oscar in years of counseling, Christ's (God's) Spirit did in a moment...."

A preacher named Bret Blair told the story "of a native from a remote mountain village who had the opportunity to visit a large modern city for the first time. He could not bring much home with him, and he had little money. But he was amazed at the electric lights which he saw everywhere. So he bought a sack full of electric lights bulbs and sockets with switches so he could turn them off and on. Arriving home he hung the light bulbs in front of his home and on his and his

neighbor's trees. Everyone watched him with curiosity and asked him what he was doing, but he just smiled and said, 'Just wait until dark; you'll see.' When night came he turned on the switches, but nothing happened. No one had told him about electricity! He did not know the light bulbs were useless unless connected to the source of their power.

Jesus said, 'Apart from me you can do nothing.' There are many people who do not know that the way they are living their lives is useless. They got the education; they got the job; they made the family; and bought the home, but when the sunset and night comes and they reach for the switch, nothing happens. They do not know that there is a source, which makes all these things light up!"³

Friends, how blessed we are that we know the source of real power. How blessed we are that we have the words of the Apostle Paul in II Timothy, always reminding us "to rekindle the gift of God that is within you" and that "God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power"--reminding us to live our lives "relying on the power of God...." Amen.

-- Terry Chamberlain Diehl; Hickman Mills Community Christian Church; June 21, 2009

³ *Christian Globe Illustrations*, Brett Blair, from Donald Deffner, Christian Globe Networks, Inc.