

BEACHBURG PASTORAL CHARGE

Worship Service, August 22nd, 2021

Welcome

Good morning. For you golf fanatics, no this is not Butler cabin but I do secretly wish I had a green jacket. I want to once again welcome you all to the Bunkie for today's service.

Now you may notice this rather large Rosary I have on my chair. No I'm not becoming a practicing Catholic but I was gifted this Rosary from a neighbour up the way. It seems that the cottage they now own had a shine in one room as the previous owners had a nun in the family. So when the new owners fully renovated the cottage this summer they thought that I may be able to find a new home for this piece, so until I do, I'm hoping that it will provide me with some inspiration in putting together my meditation. Strangely enough when they completely gutted their cottage this summer they found three pennies embedded in each room either in the floor or in the wall, I'm assuming in reference to the Holy Trinity. So today as we discuss the "Essence of Power" let us come together to recognize the power of God's love which may at times appear to be hidden but is always there for us if we are just willing to search it out. Let us come together in prayer.

Opening Prayer

Triune God, we offer the prayers of our hearts to you this day. We know that your love for us is never-ending, and that you are with us always. Help us, God, to seek your wisdom that comes as breath, as fire, as inspiration, as calm stillness, as Holy presence.

God, may we come to know that our true greatness is assured when we accept the power of your love given to us through your Holy Spirit. Help us once again, God, to be your faithful people, as we journey through this life. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Song. We open with a song by the group Hillsong entitled "The Power of Your Love". I hope that you enjoy it.

<https://youtu.be/ku3MD00jxl0>

Scripture

Matthew 20:20-28

²⁰ Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons James and John and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him.

²¹ "What is it you want?" Jesus asked.

She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom."

²² "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?"

"We can," they answered.

²³ Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father."

²⁴ When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. ²⁵ Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ²⁶ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— ²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

The Essence of True Power - Matthew 20:20-28]

Let me tell you a ridiculous story, to make an important point.

An MG Midget pulled alongside a Rolls-Royce at a traffic light.

"Do you have a car phone?" its driver asked the guy in the Rolls.

"Of course I do," replied the arrogant deluxe-car driver.

"Well, do you have satellite TV?" asked the Midget driver.

The driver in the Rolls sighed. "I have that too."

"Then do you have a double bed in the back?" the Midget driver wanted to know.

Red-faced, the Rolls driver sped off. That afternoon, he had a double bed installed in his auto.

A week later, the Rolls driver passed the same MG Midget, parked on the side of the road, back windows fogged up and steam pouring out. The driver pulled over, got out of the Rolls and banged on the MG's back window until the driver stuck his head out.

"I want you to know that I had a double bed installed," bragged the Rolls driver.

The MG driver was unimpressed. "You got me out of the shower to tell me that?" he asked.

A ridiculous story to expose a ridiculous motivation: There is a drive within the heart of every one of us, to have the biggest and best, to be number one, to be all powerful.

In this morning's Gospel story, the mother of the disciples, James and John, asks Jesus privately, away from the other disciples: "Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your kingdom."

By contrast, the Gospel writers, Mark (Mark 10:35-37) and Luke (Luke 9:46-48), have James and John themselves make the request. But Matthew apparently did not wish to sully the disciples' reputation by attributing to them such a selfish question. So he represents their mother as being the one

responsible for the power grab.

So, is this what discipleship is all about, a power play in the executive suite?

Is there anyone who can't relate to James and John? The drive to be number one is among the most fundamental of human instincts. The month of July was named after Julius Caesar. Not to be outdone, his successor, the Emperor Augustus, called the following month 'August', after himself. Since August had only thirty days at that time, he took a day from February, and added it to August, thus assuring that his month would not be inferior to Julius Caesar's.

I love the realism of today's Gospel lesson. It reflects back to us our own reality. The request on the disciples' behalf, is rather presumptuous and brazen: But I think we understand it better than we may let on. The human drive for power is a major dynamic in our lives together. Though we often do not recognize the fact, the pursuit of power can easily become a preoccupation, an obsession.

Here is a story about the CEO of a major California bank. He's off the California Coast in his brand new cabin cruiser, when trouble strikes. He immediately radios for help. The Coast Guard responds, requesting his position. Back comes the reply: "I am President of the First National Bank."

Even as the boat is sinking, his position is the first thing on his mind.

The struggle for power is ever present. We hear daily the news of corporate reshufflings, giant mergers, and hostile take-overs. We hear the news daily, of political struggles for leadership (and we are not even going to go near the Trump debacle), of power brokering on boards and committees, and in personal relationships.

I saw a cartoon recently, of a little kid, looking up at his father and asking, "Where are you in the pecking order, Dad?"

This obsession with power is present in all of us, often in subtle ways. Sometimes we abuse power by asking another to cast us in a favourable light. This is what Matthew represents the mother of James and John as doing. It goes on all the time. But the thing is, we all contribute to this. It is a human tendency.

Is there any group or institution we can name, that has not abused its power: the military, the government, schools—public and private, the media, the Church, the legal profession, the medical profession, the family?

Our problem with power arises from a misunderstanding of the nature and source of personal power. Power can be a good and necessary ingredient of true humanity.

Let me list some things that are a part of feeling powerful:

- (1) The wish to be successful and effective.
- (2) The desire to be competent.
- (3) The intention to be cooperative within one's family.
- (4) The ambition to have one's life count for something.
- (5) The objective to live a life of dignity and integrity.

All of these things are important and good, and we need personal power to accomplish them.

But where does that personal power come from?

The lesson contained in today's Gospel story is found in Jesus' response to the request for power:

" You do not know what you ask. ... to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give ..."

Jesus could have made the brothers his chief executive officers. He could have. But he refused to play that game, because it was not the power they needed. You see, Jesus says the only kind of power that is important, comes from within. It is not something that is externally granted. It comes from the inside out.

Oh, but we have a hard time believing that.

Here is the dictionary definition of power, we have bought into: Political, social or financial control or force; legal force or authority; physical force; a source of energy.

Ask the average person the meaning of power, and chances are you'll get a description of force or dominance or intimidation, or at least of political leverage.

Alternatively, I think it may be helpful to describe power in three very different ways, so that we don't always think of power only in terms of its dictionary definition, of force.

Power Over: Intimidation, force, coercion, bullying, and excessive control.

Power Under: Manipulation, deception, underhandedness, and deviousness.

Power With: Cooperation, mutuality, respect, and kindness.

We are all familiar with the beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount.

Blessed are the poor in spirit,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn,
For they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek,
For they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

These words turn power upside down. They are in stark contrast to the power brokers of Jesus' time, and of our own time.

Every society, in every age, has its own way of saying, "Blessed are you." Implied in the full meaning of the word "blessed," (the Greek word μακαριος makarios), is the idea of 'congratulations!' Societies hold up a particular image or group of people in their

midst, and say, "These are the ones who have made it! These are the ones to be congratulated."

For us, television, mass media, the number of likes on Facebook and Instagram are the means we use to say, "blessed are you." These are the ways we publish our slogans indicating who has made it, who counts. We heed these signals constantly. We measure ourselves, judge ourselves, and each other, by them. And they sound something like this:

"Congratulations to you, who display the triple values of achievement, affluence, and appearance. You shall reap the rewards of life.

"Congratulations, you who are thin and beautiful. You have made it.

"Congratulations, you who are young and healthy. You will be loved.

"Congratulations, you who have stock portfolios and drive BMWs."

These values, Jesus turns upside down. True power, authentic power, 'power with', the only personal power worth having, grows from within.

There is an old Zen saying: "[Though one sits] quietly, [and does] nothing, the spring comes and the grass grows all by itself."

Of course, we say the grass has no power. But think again. Why do we call it a blade of grass. We use power machines to cut it,

and often we can't keep up with it. It is organic power. That is authentic power. It grows from the inside out.

Let me suggest three sources of power from within—what Mahatma Gandhi called 'Soul Force', what Jesus called 'the kingdom that is within us', and otherwise thought of as the principle of 'I can'.

One source of personal power is our gifts: our own wisdom, our own light from within, our own unique way of living our lives. All of us are connected to the One Source.

We all have power: the power to choose our own unique way. One's life is ten percent what happens, and ninety percent how one reacts to it. We each have the power [and the responsibility] to choose how we live our lives and how we see things.

The power to choose requires that we tap into the source of the power that comes through us, from an eternal dimension beyond time, what scripture refers to as "the Spirit of truth".

The second source of power is love. Love is a source of personal power, in the best sense of the word. Those who allow themselves to love are able to see far more truth than can the hard-nosed cynics.

The empowerment of love enables us: to think more clearly; to feel more deeply; to speak more truthfully; to serve more creatively; to give more lavishly; to live more fully.

And the third source of power is trust. This doesn't mean believing that things will happen, if only we believe hard enough. And it's not a matter of will power, either. Rather, it has to do with a quiet, receptive heart and mind. It is having faith that a larger process is at work, that we don't have always to be in control, or to manage the outcome of everything.

Trust means that there is more going on than meets the eye. Trust involves making mistakes, and messing up, and still believing that the power Source of all can absorb our failures into a good that lies beyond our comprehension. Trust means believing in the power of recovery, renewal and resurrection.

This kind of talk about the real meaning of power takes on a familiar sound. Much like Jesus who was highly critical of religious elitism, who never held any official position, whose education was informal, whose supporters came from the margins of life, who never did get a good organization going, and who spent his life in a very forlorn little country.

Despite all that, he transformed history, and gave new meaning to the word 'power'.

Jesus revealed through his life, a striking alternative to the power plays, influence games, and struggles for dominance that take up so much of our energy, only to end up making fools of us all.

Power can be poisonous. Power can be cruel. Power can be dangerous. Yet it is also true that authentic power can be healthy. Authentic can be a source of real integrity. It can be the means of attaining spiritual maturity.

Let me close with a story that will help you to remember the relevance of what I have been saying.

It's a story about the power of the sea and the experience of one man who discovered, the hard way, the essence of real power. This particular man had lost his entire fortune in a huge stock market crash. He was so crushed by this loss of power, he decided to get drunk and walk out into the ocean, past the point of no return.

At the edge of the water, he caught sight of something glistening in the sand. He picked it up. It was a shell, a pale, delicate, graceful shell. It was so fragile that the least pressure of his hand would have crushed it. He thought to himself, 'so small and so fragile, and yet here it is undamaged, in perfect condition'. Tons upon tons of water had hurled the shell onto the beach. It should have been smashed, but it wasn't. What had kept the shell intact? He suddenly realized, the shell was free of pride, bitterness, resentment. It had merely been carried, resistless, on the storm, and rode it out, moving with the waves, carried ashore.

For a long time, he sat by the sea, with the breakers pounding in his ears. And then he began to see himself in a new light. He

realized he could accept, without anger or resentment, what life had to offer. He took the shell with him and kept it in a little box, to remind him of his moment of insight.

Only much later did he discover that the shell was called, "Angel's Hair"

God calls all of us to live up to the personal power we already possess. As a child of the Spirit may the authentic power of your true self be revealed in all that you do. Thanks be to God.

Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

Gracious God for your power: to let us never give up praying for justice, or the oppressed in this world will one day ask us 'Why?' We pray especially this week for the people of Afghanistan

Let us never give up praying for fairness, or the hungry and homeless of this world will one day ask us 'Why?' We pray especially today for those killed and displaced by the hurricane in Haiti.

Let us never give up praying for healing, or the sick in this world will one day ask us 'Why?' We pray especially for those who have contacted a new Covid variant and struggle to breath.

Let us never give up praying, for to give up is to deny our faith in a God who hears our prayers.

People of God, as we come to prayer let us remember that we do not have to twist the arm of a reluctant God to seek good things for this world, nor find ways to persuade a distant God to come near and listen to us.

Let us remember that as we pray we kneel alongside Jesus Christ, in the presence of God, with the help of the Spirit.

So let us bring to mind now

those people who are in need of our prayers:

those who are ill, We think today of Brenda and Eleanor

those who are lonely or sad;

those who are despairing or defeated;

those who are hungry or homeless;

those whose relationships are breaking apart;

those who are bullied or abused;

those who cannot find work;

and those who are over-worked.

In silence now, let us make our own specific prayers

for those on our hearts and minds today. (silence)

In the presence of God, alongside Jesus Christ,

with the inner power from the Spirit, may we go into this week

to live out our prayers through our lives, confident in the words that Jesus

taught us to pray: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those

who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us

from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever

and ever. Amen.

Our closing song is simply entitled “Power” and is sung by the group Elevation Worship Please have a safe and happy week. Until we meet again.

<https://youtu.be/QBSDILNS1i0>