

Westminster Sermon – Connections to Power
Scripture Readings – 1 John 5:1-6, John 15:9-17
Sunday, May 5, 2024
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Springfield, Illinois

1 John 5:1-6

⁵ Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ[a] has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child. ² By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. ³ For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome ⁴ for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. ⁵ Who is it who conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

⁶ This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the truth.

John 15:9-17

⁹ As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

¹² "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ I do not call you servants[a] any longer, because the servant[b] does not know what the master is doing, but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. ¹⁷ I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

Sermon: Connections to Power

*Text: "The father will give you whatever you ask in my name."
"For whatever is born of God conquers the world."*

*John 15:16b
1 John 5:4a*

Sometimes we think of POWER in terms of absolute CONTROL, like in a totalitarian regime. Vladimir Putin tries to exert absolute POWER in Russia.

Sometimes it is more devious, like when someone (a child, a spouse, or a co-worker) consistently gets their way by devious manipulations.

What kind of power was Jesus or the author of 1 John advocating?

Peter Marshall, one of our nation's greater preachers and chaplain to our nation's Senate told this story (reflecting his Scottish heritage):

Whenever a little Scottish boy misbehaved, his mother gently admonished him: "God won't like that."

And if he was particularly obstinate, she would ratchet up the warning, “God will be angry...” and usually these admonitions were enough.

One night they were having prunes for dessert, and the little fellow refused to eat the last two. His mother tried coaxing, but to no avail.

Then she tried the first salvo: “ God won’t like this – God doesn’t like for boys to refuse to finish their prunes.”

But he just stared at the prunes.

So, she brought in the big artillery: “God is going to be angry if you don’t eat your prunes – and you will have to go directly to bed!”

When he still refused, she took him up and tucked him in bed.

She was no sooner downstairs than a big thunderstorm struck. The lightening was bold and brilliant, and the thunder shook the whole house. After a few minutes she decided she better look in on him in case her was terrified, being alone.

Quietly she opened his door, expecting him to be whimpering under the covers. Instead, she found him over by the window, face pressed against the glass, muttering:

“Such a fuss over tow ugly prunes!”

There was no doubt in his mind that his mother had a direct connection to God’s Power.

Our scriptural lessons this morning promise more power than tyrants or manipulators can hope to exercise. In our gospel reading Jesus says, “ God will grant whatever you ask... in my name,” and John adds, “Whoever is born of God conquers the world.”

Are these mere platitudes, or is there deeper meaning and real promise here?

The central thrust of Jesus’ teaching and ministry-in action focused on unconditional LOVE.

To appreciate some of the facets of LOVE-POWER let’s look at some of the Apostle Paul’s “FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT” which he commends to Christians un Galatia:

Some of these (with their worldly alternatives) are:

- 1.) Being Joyful: Don’t you agree that a genuinely cheerful and positive person lifts the spirits of almost everyone around them, inspiring hope and our best efforts – bringing our best? But a grumpy complainer who only see the bad and actively seeks the worst in every situation begins to depress every until (if we keep listening to them) we begin to agree: “What’s the use?” “Why even try?” “ Everything is bad and only getting worse!”
- 2.) Again, Paul advocates PEACE as the way the Spirit of God works. Don’t you agree that most good things are conceived, nourished, and thrive when people listen to each other and cooperate? But some people insist on only their way or no way.

(Does this have anything to do with our current crop of elected leaders?)n How much waste and destruction come from those who sow disharmony and dissention... and at its worst violence and war? Paul advocates the spiritual Fruit , PEACE (if we would see the KINGDOM OF GOD.)

- 3.) Being PATIENT and RESTRAINED, rather than being a sign of weakness, requires maturity and inner strength. It is way to be impatient and vent your anger, but these are rarely constructive, and we often regret our words and thoughtless deeds.

- 4.) Being GENEROUS is very close to the heart and meaning of LOVE, and it is the opposite of self-indulgence in the face of the needs of others. When I was growing up, we were near both my father's siblings and my mother's. When we were with my Dad's extended family there was often a scruffy old guy hanging around the fringes of a gathering, his name was Rufus. Finally, I asked my dad, "Who is Rufus, and why is he here? Is he related in some way?" My dad became almost reverential confiding this story: "Your uncle Clarence went out with his wife Kate one night and left their children home alone. There was a fire, and their home was completely destroyed. But the then hobo, Rufus, happened to be passing by, and ran in the burning house and rescued all the children – your cousins.
- 5.) And would you agree our world needs more FORGIVENESS? But we seem so fixated on being vengeful and demanding retaliation.

I had a surprising (at least to me) experience of the POWER of FORGIVENESS on year on a senior high church bike hike. The first night together we sat down together and drew up a fairly simple set of rules we all agreed to live by for the week. Things like respecting others' privacy, property, language, etc. We divided into rotating work groups to unload, cook, clean the place where we were staying and reload the next morning.

Each Day (after we were all settled) we would set a time for our evening meal together, and also set a time when we would all gather for an evening group discussion of the day.

On about the third day three otherwise nice boys decided to test the boundaries. After the group supper and the free time while the cooking group cleaned up, they disappeared. They were nowhere to be found at the time they were to re-convene.

We waited a little while and then started our meeting. Sometime later they tried to sort of sneak in, but no one was fooled. We counselors would deal with the matter after we finished the meeting. We put our heads together – Should we send them home? Theirs was an intentional violation of the rules we agreed to. Could we just "let it go" this time? Somehow, we came up with the novel ideas of asking the "offenders" what they thought we should do to then, So, after underscoring the seriousness of violating our agreements together (and our concern for their safety), we asked them what they thought we should do with them. They were taken completely by surprise and came up with far greater punishments that we would have considered. We then offered them God's forgiveness, hoping they had learned something from the experience. They were overwhelmed and were model campers the remainder of the week. I think we all learned the power of FORGIVENESS.

Is the promise of God's POWER realistic?

Do we honestly believe God's LOVE can conquer hatred and win over evil?

Do we look to Paul's "FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT" in the leaders we elect? Are we ready to claim Jesus' promise, Go will grant whatever ask... in Jesus' name? Amen