

*2 Sam. 5:1-5, 9-10*

*Mark 6:1-13*

*Preached at Stone Church of Willow Glen by Rev. Evie Macway*

*July 3, 2022*

## The Power of Christ

Happy July 4th, 2022. I have so many feelings this year as we celebrate the birthday of this nation of ours. I imagine you do too. Sometimes there is gratitude and pride. Other times it is shame and anger, and wondering what the future holds, and what is my part to play in that future.

This text from Mark's gospel that we shared just now spoke to me this week as I reflected on who we are as a nation and what it means to be a follower of Christ here and now. The word, 'power' is what struck me as the thoughts and feelings whirled around in my body as I considered the recent Supreme Court decisions, my life and my children and grandchildren's lives as a woman in this country, the news about the January 6 hearings, the continual drumbeat of conversation about the insistent needs of citizens of our country to own guns whose soul purpose is to kill as many people as possible. Where is my power? What is my power? How does my faith speak to me, comfort me, call to me in the face of all of this?

The gospel of Jesus Christ challenges us to think about our sense of power. On this July 4th weekend, 2022, as residents of what most people would still consider the most powerful nation in the world I find the question of what it means to be powerful particularly challenging. The Gospel of Jesus Christ pushes us to look at power and how we are called to live with it, and to live it out, in some challenging ways.

There is no aspect of our lives that is untouched by power. Where ever there are relationships there is power. Sometimes it is subtle and unspoken. Other times it is clearly spelled out. Sometimes it is used for good. Other times it is terribly misused and abused. Age, race, gender, how much money we have or do not have, occupation are only a few of the things that impact how power affects our relationships. In the face of all of this power we sometimes have and sometimes do not have, the question that arises for us is, where does our faith in God come in?

The answer of course, is everywhere. Our faith is part of who we are, therefore it can and must be integral to all that we do and say. The challenge for us is how.

The gospel of Mark from which we read this morning, is known for not making life easy for followers of Christ. This question of how to live with power comes up over and over again. Mark is the gospel that is the harshest on the disciples. It is a passionate, concise treatise on who Christ is and what it means to be follow him. In Mark's version of the Good News of Jesus Christ the disciples continually find themselves to be confused and often completely off base regarding what Jesus is teaching about power. Our struggles with how to understand power in light of our faith in Christ are not new.

There are two parts to the gospel story we read this morning. First there is the account of Jesus teaching in his hometown, a place where one would expect people to recognize and welcome the power and authority Jesus has. Instead Jesus finds rejection. Though Jesus is the son of God, the humanity in him shows through in this instance, and the rejection and scorn of the crowds surprise even him, and leave him without power to do that which he was called to do.

The story says, Jesus said to the people, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." Jesus could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief", and I would imagine hurt and frustrated as well. They gave him no authority. Power ebbs and flows in our lives and in our relationships, changing how we relate to one another.

The second part of the story we read today is Mark's version of Jesus' sending out of the disciples to do the ministry to which he has called them. It is an interesting juxtaposition of stories. On the heels of the rejection and powerlessness Jesus finds in his home town he turns and equips his disciples for ministry. *The ministry, and the power, of Christ is not stifled by one rejection.*

Precisely how Jesus calls and empowers the disciples here must have been one of those times when they were more than a little bit surprised and confused. Jesus did not equip them with higher education, nice clothes and a make over, or an expense account and a week long training seminar in how to spread the gospel. Instead he empowered his follower by doing three simple things.

First, Mark says Jesus *called* the twelve. With his word he gave them authority, power to do the work before them. This reminds me of the sacrament of baptism. When we celebrate the sacrament of baptism we affirm God's **claim** on the person being baptized, God's call to them, God's relationship with them through Jesus Christ, and we remind ourselves once again, each time we baptize, of God's claim

on of us. When we baptize we publicly affirm this **eternal gift** God gives to us in Christ. By water and by the Holy Spirit we are made members of the church, the body of Christ and joined in ministry of love, peace, and justice. Our lives are changed, **empowered by the call** of Christ.

The second way in which Jesus empowers his followers is with the gift of community. Jesus sends his followers out in pairs. This mission is to be communal. This does at least two things. First, in legal terms it assures the validity of their witness. Two people with two different styles and life experiences bear witness to the same healing power. That is a powerful witness.

Our denomination, the Presbyterian Church USA has its share of conflict through the years. We are a connectional church, a united church, but we are also a diverse church. It can be very challenging to live together, to minister together with people with whom we do not agree. Yet God calls us to do exactly this, ministering together, side by side. Jesus sent them out in pairs.

The second aspect of the communal nature of the mission is that it provides community for the disciples. We all know this from personal experience, but church family, community, is critical. We are meant to live and work and pray **together**. We are called to care for one another. We have each other, and that in itself is empowering. Look at all these wonderful, unique people in the pews around you. We are empowered, born up, strengthened by the presence of one another, a *community* of faith.

The third dimension of this empowering Jesus does here, in addition to calling them and placing them in community with one another, is that he tells them that in order to do their work they will be dependent upon the hospitality of the people to whom they go. Jesus instructs his followers to take nothing except the tunic on their back and the sandals on their feet. *Part of the power of Christ is to be found in our ability to be interdependent.*

Essentially he is telling them that they must learn to be at home among strangers. They must not only minister *to*, but they must live *with* the people to whom they are sent. And if they are rejected, and they clearly will be, they are to simply shake off the dust of resentment and hurt that will cling to them and move on. They are called to trust and to share. They, we, are empowered when we risk new relationships of giving and receiving.

What a counter intuitive kind of power this is! This is a power that calls us to be vulnerable. To live in the *power* of Jesus Christ means to open our selves to the call of Christ, whatever that might be for us, to live and work in community with others, with all of the challenges and joys that come along with that, and to live our lives interdependently, trusting in the hospitality of others.

I thought a lot about this definition of power this week, as we celebrate our nation. What does it mean for us today to live into and out of the power Christ lived and preached as citizens of this country of ours?

I think, given all the recent happenings and my struggles with how to be in these realities, it is the steadfastness of Jesus in this story that gives me the most comfort and hope. The pain of rejection, though real, did not cling to Jesus for long. And he gathered those most dear to him, reminded them (and probably himself a bit) of their call and connection to their creator. He gave them one another for support and strength. And he said, ‘You will be your best selves when you risk new relationships and possibilities.’

This is true power, power that changes lives and I hope and prayer and believe (most days) nations. This day, this weekend, and always may we live into and out of the power of Christ. Amen.