

April 3, 2011

Title: In Whose Power?

Gracious God, May these words be your words of grace. Amen

The word “power” tastes so sweet on your lips OR leaves a bitter taste in your mouth depending on which end of the equation you are on. We often think of power in only one way – “power over”.

- The power to control a situation or person.
- Power to actually make a phone company do what you want
- The power of the cable company to make you waste half the day to fix your service.
- The power of corporations to fix oil prices
- Military power, political power, the “power” of the punch
- The power of an old sister over a younger brother
- The power of global sisters & brothers over other siblings.

But Jesus saw power in a different way. He saw the power flowing through him was God’s. And he saw power as his ability to love beyond any human capacity... to heal those who were broken.... to share jolting words of hope to the powerless. His power was one of connections and vulnerability. His identity wasn’t tied up in the Roman Empire or the temple government. It was in God. And that was freeing. He had enough strength of love to be vulnerable, to let his disciples know when he needed prayer, when he was tired or grieving. His power was not about perfection. It was about the depth of connection.

Our scriptures today have introduced us to 2 people of faith who help us see power from a different perspective.

Samuel was a trusted spiritual leader to King Saul. But God had called him to anoint a new King. What God called Samuel to do was risky. If Saul found out what he was doing, his career and his life would literally be over. But Samuel took a ram’s horn full of oil and he took a ram that he could use as a diversionary sacrifice and headed to Bethlehem to anoint a new King. What in the world processed him to do something so risky? It was because he knew that his power came not from the King, but from God. And so he did anoint a new King – that King was a small boy with red hair and smelled like sheep.

We also meet today an anonymous woman who sits on the fringes of society. She breaks all social custom and enters a glitzy social gathering and proceeds to pour the most expensive Chanel all over Jesus. The whole room is shocked as it fills with the strong scent of the perfume. It is extravagant, outrageous and costly. It stinks up the whole room. But it is her act that causes people to gasp and gag. She is judged & admonished. But Jesus understands it. He adores her generous gift of love. She understands what will be his generous gift of love. It is as if the two are standing alone with God in a room full of people gone ballistic. The anonymous woman – did she have power? You bet. This

simple, striking, powerful act was so shocking and made a mark that it made it into all 4 gospels.

Both Samuel and this woman see life through different lenses than the rest of the world. They don't see their power through politics or money or reputation. Their connection to God makes them free & generous, and because of this, they are people of vision. They let go of the way life "ought to be". And listen to God's hope and grace. If Samuel had his druthers, he probably would have stayed home and tried to make Saul a better King. He certainly wouldn't have chosen the youngest of seven sons to be King. I suspect that if the anonymous woman had her druthers, she would have sold that perfume for a good price, bought a home and lived off of the rest of that money for a year.

How does knowing that our sole power comes from God impact us? We are called to trust God, to listen to God, and from our relationship, have the courage to live out God's vision, not society's vision, not the status quo, but God's vision. It calls us to let go, release ourselves into God's hands. It calls us to freedom.

There is a Jewish Kabbalist creation story. It sounds kind of like the Big Bang theory. In the beginning was the infinite light that emanated everywhere. An accident happened that shattered the light. That light scattered everywhere. There are divine sparks hidden in our world – even within us. Our call, according to this legend is to discover the light and become repairers of the light. That is our call – to bring the world together. Our power from God is one of repairing a broken world.

I was so deeply disturbed by the preacher in Florida who did in fact recently burn a Quran ... and then his pride was so great that he made sure it was posted on u-tube. An explosion of violence burst open in Afghanistan, putting so many at risk. Is this really the act of one with vision, of one who embraces the love of Christ in a way that heals the world? I don't think so. Our actions – how do we know if they are of God? They must be in sync with the commandment – "Love the Lord our God with all of your heart and mind and soul and strength. Love your neighbor as yourself." We are called to use every ounce of strength in our being to receive God's energy of grace and then to share it.

In Judy Cannato's book "Field of Compassion", she shares this story. Nate Sears, working on the shores of Cape Cod, was checking the beach one day. He spotted a 10 foot whale coming to shore .. then he saw a second and third one, all heading to land. They moved so quickly that they ended up on the beach before he knew it. He threw off his shoes and socks, rolled up his pant legs and waded into the water. The first whale was thrashing about. He could see cuts on the body. He placed his hands on the whale and held them there. This was the whale's first encounter with a human being. The thrashing stopped. The whale was now calm and he gently turned the whale around, away from the shore into the ocean. He did this to the second whale and helped with the third. This willingness to be gentle, compassionate, resting with the whales, guided them home. The power of transformation, compassion and kindness gave those whales and us a new direction.