

***“Trinity Means Power”***

A Japanese folk tale tells us that there once was a stonecutter. While working at the bench in front of his shop, he saw the emperor approaching, carried in a sedan chair by four servants. As the emperor passed, each citizen had to bow down. When the emperor reached the stonecutter, he bowed respectfully. As he did, he thought, *“Now, that's power. The emperor is the most powerful man in the world. He can have anything he wants. I wish I could be the emperor.”*

And he magically became the emperor. He gave orders; they were followed. He demanded things; they were given him. One day he passed through the city in a sedan chair carried by four servants. The sun beat down upon him; the sweat ran down the sides of his face. He looked up and thought, *“Now that is power. The sun is the most powerful thing in all the heavens. Nothing can surpass the power of the sun. I wish I could be the sun.”* And he was.

This pattern of wish fulfillment continued. Each time he became what he believed to be the most powerful force, the former stonecutter confronted another power he perceived as superior. As with the sun, he was surprised that a storm cloud could block its warming rays. As a storm cloud approached, he was stunned that these torrential rains could be displaced by the wind. At the wind, he marveled that a stone was immune to its efforts.

Finally he became a stone. He was steadfast and unyielding. He could not be moved because of his great size, and he was unaffected by sun, rain, wind, or even time, for a stone is ageless. He remained so until the day when he felt his very substance being altered, shaped by external forces he could not prevent. He looked up and saw a stonecutter, and thought *“He who can fashion the very stones according to his will is mighty indeed. That is power. I wish I could be a stonecutter.”*

This story probably has many applications, but I share it this morning to

suggest to you that power comes in many forms and degrees, and from different sources. This morning, I invite you to consider the power of the Holy Trinity. Within and among the three persons of the Trinity — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — different kinds of power are in evidence. And each of these sorts of divine power has a correlation in a power that God has provided for our lives.

God the Father has *creative power*. This is what Martin Luther termed “*right-handed power*.” Right-handed power is direct, straight-line power. It is a very useful power to possess, since it enables us to use a fork to bring food to our lips, or strike a nail with a hammer and actually make the nail bite into the wood, or pedal a bike down the road.

God’s creative power is what we see at work in today’s First Lesson. Even though God does not use any hand to create in Genesis, this is still “*right-handed power*.” God has a purpose in mind for His power to accomplish and that is precisely what it accomplishes. In Genesis we recognize that God exercises right-handed, direct power through His Word. He creates and, the author of the Letter to the Hebrews tells us (1:3), sustains the creation by his “***powerful word***.” Indeed, God’s Word IS His power — He speaks, and it is so.

Do you, like the stonecutter, wish for such power? Episodes of Star Trek: The Next Generation show characters speaking into a machine and \*poof!!\* there appears a complete meal of Chicken Cordon Bleu, Rice Pilaf, and Steamed Asparagus — no mess, no fuss, no pots or pans to clean . . . an idyllic world.

I am sure that there are times in your life when you desired to have that very power . . . To tame the unruly two-year-old with just one, “*Stop that!*” instead of forty-seven; or to cause that driver in front of you driving twenty miles an hour in the forty-five mile zone to take the next turn and get out of your way; or to influence your golf ball, bowling ball, baseball to go in the hole, hit that pocket, or stay fair.

God alone has creative power; not just creative-by-word power, but

creative power — period! And what creative power! Again and again and yet again, the writer of Genesis repeats this phrase: “***And God saw that it was*** (טוֹב — tov) ***good.***” — just right, exactly what it was supposed to be. Richard Dawkins, in his book The God Delusion, closes his argument against the existence God by suggesting that there was indeed an intelligent design to the creation of the world — it was extra-terrestrial intelligence . . . and thereby shatters his claim to be an atheist. He has a god; it is called scientism, and if there is a God Delusion, guess who got caught up in it? I am supposed to bow to the idea that aliens from a different galaxy is an acceptable theology, but the creative, loving Father God of the Bible is not? I don’t think so!

You and I have access to God’s creative power. We cannot ourselves possess creative power — at best we could but imitate it. This does not mean that we cannot access the Father’s creative power.

Through prayer, first or all, we gain entry into God power. Do not misunderstand this (as many do!); prayer does not give you power. Prayer connects you to God’s power. God is ever in control of His power; He does not yield that. But we, through prayer, begin to see that power go to work.

Second, we access God’s power when we love God and love others. Jesus taught us that the greatest commandment is to love God with all you heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love the neighbor as yourself. Love is creative. We love only as God’s love flows through us in return to Him and toward others. We have no other capacity for love.

Third, we have God’s Word, His power, at our disposal. We use the term, “Word of God” in three ways: creative, incarnate, inspired. When we share the inspired Word of God with others, we are giving away the very power of God.

The power of the Son is somewhat different. This is the Incarnate Word alluded to just a moment ago: “***And the word became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth.***” (John 1:14) Jesus’ power is what Luther

termed “*left-handed power*,” power that is hidden in weakness. The message of Philippians 2 is: “[*Jesus*] *emptied himself and took on the form of a slave*” — echoed by Jesus throughout the Gospels (e.g.): “*Do you not think that I could ask my Father and He would send me more than twelve legions of angels?*” [Matthew 26.48-58] — the Good News announces that Jesus chose weakness through which to wield power.

He chose this because such left-handed power is the power that works in relationships. You tell that aforementioned two-year-old to leave the cat alone, and no sooner has that command left your lips and she is moving toward the cat who unsuspectingly is cleaning herself in a patch of sunshine by the living room window. So you say, “*Leave the cat alone.*” maybe even emphasizing this with, “*I mean it.*” You know that two-year-old twinkle, the one that says, “*What are you going to do about it?*” What are you going to do about it? Hogtie her to the dining room table? Smack her bottom until it turns crimson? You know what you’ll have to do if you tell that child “*If you touch that cat, I’ll cut off that hand,*” and she touches the cat — you gotta cut off her hand! But you can’t! And even if you could, you won’t.

Because right-handed power (“cut of the hand”) can only take you so far, that’s when left-handed power becomes real power — you sweep that child up in your arms, you hold her close to your breast, you embrace her with all the love you can give — yes, you tell her that what she did was wrong and it made you angry, but you love her into loving you back until she wants to obey because that’s what love does: it honors the other and does not grieve them.

Permissive? Maybe . . . but what are you going to do when this obstinate, obdurate, willful child time and again grabs the cat? Take her out and shoot her? No! Now, what do you think God should do with you in your obstinate, obdurate, willful ways? Yeah, I thought so. Which is what He has done in Christ.

In Jesus Christ, God has swept us up into His embrace and told us that our behaviors, our attitudes, our thoughts, our words, our use, misuse,

and abuse of others, His creation, our very own selves just drive Him nuts — but He is absolutely crazy nuts in love with us, and wants us to leave the cat alone because He knows that if we grab that cat’s hind paw, that cat is not going to be happy and will (not may — will!) bite and scratch us.

The world is out to do us harm. Satan wants us dead in trespasses and sins. Our own bodies seeks to cause us harm. God says no, stay away from that stuff! But on we go, eyes atwinkle with purpose and pleasure, willfulness and wickedness . . . and what will God who loves us do? He will give us Jesus, nail Him to a cross, watch Him die, then turn to us and say, “*There! Take that!*”

How do we access that power? We follow Jesus. We do not imitate Jesus. We do not presume that we can be like Jesus, or even grow to be more like Him.

Remember all those bumper stickers and wrist bands that cropped up more than a decade ago — WWJD (“What Would Jesus Do?”)? The problem with that acronym was two-fold: 1) it presumed that you could figure out what Jesus would do (“What would Jesus Drive?” “Who Would Jesus Date?” “Where Would Jesus Dance?”) and 2) it presumed that, having figured out what Jesus’ course of action would be, that you could imitate Him.

The New Testament does not call us to imitate Jesus; it calls us to follow Him — WWJD = “*Walk With Jesus Daily.*” This includes following Jesus’ lead in several matters. In his lively book, The Jesus Priorities, Christopher Maricle details eight “essential habits” of our Lord that we should see alive in our own lives. I will not go through all eight now (great sigh of relief!) — but I will highlight this: Maricle says that if you want to follow Jesus more and more, you need to learn “*to see with your heart.*” That’s left-handed power — power at work in relationships, power that can transform your life and the lives of those around you.

The Holy Spirit exhibits many different forms of power.

Can anyone explain to mean how electricity works? I don't mean, "*Gee, Pastor, you flip a switch and there ya go! Duh!*" I mean, "*What exactly is electricity? One text said it was the flow of electrons from atoms. Okay. Why do they flow? Do they flow in just one direction? Why? Why not? I understand that switches interrupt or allow that flow (which is why the light bulb in the fridge is not always on, but only on when the door is open . . . are you sure?)*" Can anyone answer this for me? No? I didn't think so. How many of you will rely on electricity today? I thought so.

The power of the Holy Spirit is like that — we may not be able to explain it or even describe it — but we know it's there, and we know that, without it, life just couldn't go on in the way we need it to go on. We saw that power be poured out on the Church last Sunday — and remember how that power took shape — first as wind, then as fire, then as voices speaking in unknown speech, then in confusion (yes, confusion is a sign of power!), then in sanctified witness. Same Spirit — five different power outlets.

Wind . . . uncontrollable, unpredictable, invisible yet tangible, felt, realized, experienced. Fire . . . dangerous, potent, potentially destructive, scary, hot. Voiced . . . familiar, yet unknown, amazing, awe-inspiring, wondrous. Befuddling, mind-boggling, can't get your arms around it, can't quite grasp it. But life-forming and transforming, life-affirming and altering, life-giving, breathing. That is the power of the Holy Spirit.

Writers have described the Holy Spirit as "*the shy mode of God,*" and as "*a gentlemen who does not come in uninvited.*" Yeah, right. Bernard Goeschel has it right: the Holy Spirit is God "*in His outrageous mode.*" Kicking in doors, flooding rooms with wind and fire, thrusting disciples into forms of ministry for which they did not volunteer, about which they had no idea, toward which they had no training — just boom! "*There it is!*" That same Spirit is at work today. Why do we not see or seem to experience that power? Is it because we have convinced ourselves (because we listen to our own voices much more often than we hearken to the voice of the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit?) that we don't need

that power?

Dusty Basmagy gave me some years ago a CD with some rather silly skits and songs on it (which is good, 'cause I like silly), one of which is about a guy out "*just drivin' in my car*" — not paying attention to the traffic lights or signs, running over this and that, being chased by the police, passing through a roadblock, but "*I'm just doin' fine, I'm just ridin' in my car.*"

Is that our spiritual pilgrimage? "Just doin' fine" all by ourselves? Or might we need to pay due attention to some disciplines that could bring us deeper into contact with the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit's power? If you will to rely on the Holy Spirit (as you rely on electricity) then you need to discipline yourself toward: Greater time in quiet solitude before the Lord; deeper time in God's Word (power!); prayer time.

Finally, let me warn you against one form of power — inertia! The greatest threat to your spiritual life in the power of the Trinity is inertia. Inertia cuts both ways, though, so it can become the greatest boon to your spiritual life. Staying stuck where you are is one form, and it will eventually stifle your spiritual life. But once the Spirit gets you going, you can keep going stronger and stronger in the Lord.

Perhaps today you cannot say, "*I want to grow stronger in the power of the Father Son and Holy Spirit.*" Can you at least say, "*I want to want to grow stronger in the power of the Father Son and Holy Spirit.*"?

Let's ask the Triune God for that gift: Blessed Three-in-One, our spiritual lives often feel like they lack power, joy, creativity, growth — yet we know that such gifts do come from You. Open us more and more in this coming week to listen for You and to hear You, to see you and to see with Your love, to follow Jesus intentionally, willingly, joyfully. We are Your baptized children. Give us grace in this also, that we might live more fully into the Name of the Father and of the Son (+) and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.