

Jesus Does POWER Differently (GENTLY) -- 1<sup>st</sup> in series of Six on POWER IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

Mark 4:35-41; 2 Corinthians 9:6-8

Saint Marks United Methodist Church, Charleston, WV 4th Sunday after Pentecost (June 21) 2015

Mark 4:35 On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." 36 And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. 37 And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. 38 But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" 39 And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. 40 He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" 41 And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

2 Corinthians 9:6 The point is this: he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide in abundance for every good work.

1. Are you feeling some anxiety and insecurity because of how those 9 people were killed inside Emmanuel AME Church, in Charleston, South Carolina this past week?
2. Are you angry and wanting to strike back at someone or something because of how those 9 people were killed inside Emmanuel AME Church, in Charleston, South Carolina this past week?
3. Are you hungering for a peace that passes understanding, in the midst of a world that somehow seems to have gone mad, when 9 people were killed for offering hospitality, inside the Emmanuel AME Church, in Charleston, South Carolina this past week?

Then this sermon will be of interest to you.

**HOWEVER**, there's one other question I need ask first. On the yellow bulletin insert, it's on the inside right side, right after the quote from Jesus – where Jesus said: **Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do ...**

The question is like the ones in the Ophthalmologist's office: "A or B?"

- (A) For you, is Christianity merely the worship of God's son, whom we can never approach, except in adoration? OR
- (B) Does being a Christian also mean accepting what Jesus came to show us – how WE, like HIM (made in the image of God) are meant to live – how we are INTENDED to discover / enter the Kingdom of Heaven which is at hand, and what we are to do in that Kingdom AND WITH ITS POWER?

If it's **A**, then this sermon probably won't speak a lot to you. I'm just being honest. But it is **B**, then hang in there – this IS important.

Today's Gospel lesson captured my attention and curiosity. In the midst of those all around Jesus going crazy with fear and insecurity and not feeling ANY kind of peace, Jesus WAS ASLEEP. In fact, they had to awaken Him to do something.

I picture Him yawning and saying:

**“What?**

**“Geez, are you guys afraid AGAIN?**

**“Shhh! Wind. Shush! Back off, waves, please. Thank you.**

**“When are you guys going to get it?**

**“Now, if there's nothing more, I'm going back to sleep.”**

So I went back through all four Jesus biographies – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – to look at all His healings. I think I have them all listed in the yellow insert (without duplications.) In only the last one – the raising of Lazarus from the dead – are we told that Jesus raised His voice. Jesus YELLED to bring him back from 4 days dead in a stone tomb.

In all the others of these accounts, **JESUS WAS GENTLE**. Hold onto that word: **GENTLY**. That's our THEME WORD for Kingdom Power today.

The Broadway musical, later movie, *Godspell* made popular the words of 19<sup>th</sup> century German philosopher/theologian Friedrich Nietzsche [1844-1900], in the song “Day by Day.” Perhaps you remember the song, if not Nietzsche.

Day by day  
Day by day  
Oh Dear Lord  
Three things I pray  
**To see thee more clearly**  
**Love thee more dearly**  
**Follow thee more nearly**  
Day by day

In the contemplative practice, called CENTERING PRAYER, that has become the lifeblood of my spiritual discipline, the GOAL (simply put) is to be completely submissive to God’s direction, even letting go of conscious thinking – to allow God to shape you at a level deeper than mere words.

Without going into all the details, a metaphor to explain it is to think of SEEING GOD MORE CLEARLY, as if looking through clear water in a jar. When thoughts get in the way, the instruction is to GENTLY (there’s that word again!) let the thought simply drift to the bottom. GENTLY LET IT GO.

What good does this do? Perhaps the quickest way I can explain it, in easily understood language is SCIENCE. The back page of the yellow handout summarizes just the tip of the iceberg of the emerging scientific proof that this kind of prayer *not just* changes our relationship with God, not just changes how we see the world; IT ACTUALLY CHANGES THE HARD WIRING OF THE BRAIN!

Back to the metaphor for Centering Prayer: Some of you were given a small jar or water when you came into worship. I asked you to hold them quietly, without agitation. Have you done so?

Help me illustrate, please. [I call upon a few of the people to illustrate what happens when they NON-GENTLY SWAT AWAY a thought.] See what happens? It muddies up the whole water. NON-GENTLE ACTION does not allow us to:

**To see thee more clearly  
Love thee more dearly  
Follow thee more nearly**

Allow me just one more thought, before we tie it all together, with a nice big bow:

The Epistle lesson, from 2 Corinthians: Some of you probably got worried when you heard this, thinking I was going to preach about giving money. Only, indirectly – to serve as an example for the larger point:

Let me ask you: **Whom do you know who is a “cheerful giver”?**  
**What is it about them that makes them seem to be “cheerful givers”?**

This notion of being a cheerful giver ONLY comes to those **who sew bountifully**. Only then, can they know the JOY and PEACE of giving.

They only get there by going all out – bountifully, not stingily or even out of a sense of duty.

**It’s a spirit of GENTLENESS.**

Let me tie it all together now:

GENTLENESS is the way of Jesus’ living, teaching, dying. e.g. ***Father, forgive them who are crucifying me.***

**GENTLENESS – seeing clearly, loving more dearly, following more nearly.**

Stir up all of the “what we call NATURAL” emotions to the horror of last week: Righteous Anger, Revenge, Fear, Harsh words, Striking out at

whatever your political persuasion calls you to strike out – **ALL OF THESE**  
... **SIMPLY MUDDY THE WATERS.**

Listen, carefully here to this WORD – the POWER of Jesus that is done  
**GENTLY: WHEN YOU SEE SOMETHING THAT IS WRONG, BE**  
**GENTLE. SIMPLY SHOW PEOPLE A BETTER WAY. DON'T STIR UP THE**  
**WATERS OF HARSH, NON-GENTLE THOUGHTS OR WORDS.**

Hard? Yes, at first. But, only, because we are so used to REACTING  
with non-gentle ways, that we think that's all we can do. STOP. Stop. Let go  
of muddying it up. Allow a different response.

PRAYER is at the heart of it.

Not just intercessory prayer. But GENTLE SEEING GOD MORE  
CLEARLY, LOVING MORE DEARLY, FOLLOWING JESUS MORE NEARLY  
– and gently – EVERY DAY.

The CHOICE is yours. Jesus ALWAYS gives you the choice.

**But you can't do it half-way.**

**You either CHOOSE THE KINGDOM FIRST or you DON'T CHOOSE**  
**IT AT ALL.**

May you chew on that.

Gently. Chew. Ponder. May the Spirit rest upon you as you do.

And, if any of you would like to learn more about the DISCIPLINE called  
CENTERING PRAYER that teaches you the habit of keeping the water clear,  
please contact me.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.