

The Figment Gospel – Final in series of Six on POWER IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

Ephesians 3:14-21 (ESV)

Saint Marks United Methodist Church, Charleston, WV 9th Sunday after Pentecost (July 26) 2015

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, ¹⁶ that according to the riches of his glory he may **grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being**, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that **you**, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ **may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth**, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, **that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.**

²⁰ **Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think [IMAGINE]**, according to the power at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Today's sermon concludes a series based on the concept of POWER.

When the worship committee first looked at the notion of power, these were the symbols of power that came to mind:

- Raised fist
- Lightning bolt
- Crown
- Whip
- Gun
- American flag
- Eagle
- Battle Hymn of the Republic

Then when the question was put this way: ***What are Jesus' Symbols of Power***, the committee responded like this:

- Quiet power/they remembered the way Harold Slate lived
- Empty Tomb/Empty Cross
- Walking on Water
- Healing
- Feeding (the 5,000, the 4,000, the Last Supper)
- Robe of Jesus (the power that went out to the woman who touched it)
- Mount of Beatitudes
- Jesus carrying the lost sheep – that same quiet power, but it also requires physical strength
- Dove coming down from heaven (Baptism)
- Salt & leaven & mustard seeds

- Water: Baptism, Flood.

By the time the Worship Committee had finished their discussion, it had a sermon series in which these were the words that summarized the teachings on Kingdom of Heaven Power. We called or texted one another each week to remind ourselves of these POWER symbols:

- 1. Gently**
- 2. Release**
- 3. Healing**
- 4. Redemption**
- 5. Rest**
- 6. And today: IMAGINATION**

Observation: When asked for symbols of power, our default responses are secular symbols. When asked to focus on the Kingdom of Heaven, we came up with different things. WHY IS THAT?

The Kingdom of Heaven POWER is not our normal way of doing things. Jesus, Himself, had an uphill battle getting people to see things differently.

Today's scripture lesson helps us answer these issues:

grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that ... you ... may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and ... that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think [IMAGINE], ... to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever!

The NRSV version of this text uses the word "**Imagination**"; the English Standard Version (which, for the most part, I really like) waters it down with the mere word: "**think.**"

So much of what we do in life, and, even in the Church, today is to exalt the verb: THINK. Indeed, so much of today's religion takes Jesus Greatest commandment and changes it to "Love the Lord, your God, with all you mind, mind, mind, and mind." We believe that our "thinking" is the Alpha and the

Omega. But IMAGINATION – now that’s even more far-flung, even more expansive. We can imagine so much more than our mere thinking will allow.

That’s one of the reasons why FIGMENT in the Walt Disney EPCOT Center is my favorite attraction. It’s all about using the FIGMENT of your IMAGINATION to unbind your mind.

At any rate, today’s scripture tells us that the **POWER OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN is greater than all we can ask, think, or even imagine.**

That’s really big.

And for most of us, one of the primary questions we need to ask ourselves: **Is our God too small?** Or, in other words: **“Just how big is your God?”**

Many of us have a problem of a God that is just too small. **We want a God we can worship, but not one that is bigger than we can think or imagine.** That kind of God is much too hard to C O N T R O L.

And, although it is not everyone’s problem, most of the people that I rub shoulders with today, when they are really honest, will admit that **BEING IN CONTROL is one of their biggest needs/problems.**

The God that Paul is writing to the Ephesians about IS MUCH, MUCH, MUCH TOO BIG TO BE CONTROLLED BY OUR PUNY THINKING.

HOW BIG IS YOUR GOD?

Do you believe that YOUR GOD can equip you with more power than you can ask or even imagine? Or is your God more of a lucky rabbit’s foot to carry around while YOU DO YOUR BEST TO BE GOOD and also a GET OUT OF HELL FREE CARD?

HOW BIG IS YOUR GOD?

In his book *Credo*, 20th century author and preacher, William Sloane Coffin says:

[F]aith is not believing without proof, but trusting without reservation [repeat this for emphasis]

The power that Paul is writing to the Ephesians about is **not “lucky rabbit’s foot faith based.** The power that Paul is writing to the Ephesians about **comes from TRUSTING GOD.**

We may have doubts in our beliefs. That's OK. The key is that we trust God not ourselves.

Again, this morning, we repeated in the "What I call Affirmation of Faith" found in our membership vows: What we count on, what we trust, is **the freedom and power GOD GIVES US to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves.**

That's **CHRISTIAN FAITH**...which is different from the **functional atheism** which passes as Christian faith in too many places: **I must do all I can to be good, and do good, and live up to God's expectations, and not attempt to do ANYTHING that I know will fail without God's intervention.**

21st century author and seminary professor Steve Charleston writes that we can learn from those who settled America before us:

"One of the fundamental differences between European and Native cultures is how they understand TRUST as a spiritual value: ... **white people want to see the data and read the fine print before they commit themselves to believe something. In other words, their motto is 'I will believe it when I see it.'** On the other hand, **Native Americans assume that only an experiential encounter with the holy can reveal the truth. They follow the motto: 'You will never see it if you don't believe it.'**

"... Jesus confirmed this [Native American] traditional attitude on more than one occasion. When he is about to raise Lazarus from the dead, he says to Martha: **'Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God.'** When Thomas cannot believe that Jesus himself has risen from the dead, Jesus says to him, **'Because you have seen me you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed.'**"

Sisters and brothers, if we are to experience this incredible KINGDOM POWER that comes not in the secular ways of power, but MORE: in power that is more than we can ask or even imagine, we have to T R U S T God.

It's not about DOCTRINE ... do we believe the doctrine of the Trinity or do we believe the doctrine of the Virgin Birth, etc., etc. **It's about TRUST.** When we trust, we will experience this power that is more than we can ask of even imagine.

English songwriter/singer Karen Money sings about this TRUST that empowers in her song, Surrender.

Here are her words:

I surrender all to You
The past, the years to come, right now
With every breath I bring to You
My hopes and fears and long discarded dreams
Take them from my trembling hands
Before I lose my nerve and change my mind
Tear to shreds my safety net
And rip up every back up plan I make

If I could only see Your face
I would never hesitate
I'd give my all to You
Through I do not see You now
I will turn my back on every doubt
And I am going to trust that You
In Your own time will work it out

If I could only see Your face
Empty hands bring peace of mind
Your burden is far lighter than my own
And every step I take to You
Leads me ever closer still to home.

Do you trust enough to *tear to shreds your safety net and to rip up every backup plan you have?*

How BIG is your God? Big enough to trust?

It's all about relationship.

It's all about trust.

When you trust, without reserve, you will experience power – KINGDOM POWER -- that is more than you can ask or even imagine.

Imagine that.

To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.