

(Video shown¹) POWER. Specifically, human power. It's impressive. It's exciting. It's God-given. It was given to Adam and Eve. (Genesis 2:15) Our power seems limitless and amazing – space shuttles; fighter planes; fast cars, atomic bombs, all of which we have designed and built. Humans have amazing power.

That power is an expression of the shared power of God, which God has imparted to us. God shared it with us because we are infinitely precious, the most unique and special part of God's creation. We are different from all other created beings; not just creatures of nature who are blindly subject to the forces of nature. Rather, we have considerable authority over the world.

It's in the Genesis story. You know that story, right? People unfamiliar with it are rapidly increasing in number. But at First Presbyterian Church Duncanville, we still know it (although we remember these stories by reading our Bibles everyday!). We know that in the beginning when God created Adam and Eve, God gave humans a purpose, freedom, and tremendous power. Only God possesses greater power than us. That power of God is expressed in Jesus' resurrection.

But the Corinthians weren't sure about that, even though Paul had previously taught them about the truth of the resurrection. So that's one of the issues Paul deals with in this letter to the Corinthians. Paul writes that Jesus' resurrection is the most important thing about the Christian faith. Without it we are toast – there's no reason to believe. Let's listen to what Paul says. (READ 1 Cor 15:1-11.) Now turning to Isaiah 52:13-15, we read a prophecy about the resurrection.

Jesus was raised from the dead on the third day. But it wasn't like he had been instantly killed by a gunshot wound, or dropped dead of a heart attack before his raising. His was not a normal death; He was brutalized and beaten beyond recognition. We need to picture what really happened, as described in Isaiah so that we do not sterilize it and lose its power. It's hard to even say it though, because images of the movie *The Passion of the Christ* come to mind, a movie which portrayed the scourging and crucifixion true to all we know. So for Jesus to be alive and to be physically okay three days later is indeed stunning. This is one reason no one recognized him. How could it be?

This act of great power is the very foundation of our faith. The resurrection.

It is an expression of power that is far greater than anything that we possess. No matter how devastated a person can be by illness in the body or mind, God has the power to overcome death with life. That power we received when we became Christians; that power of the resurrection – Paul says we stand in it right now; and it holds us from now to the future. It's what makes a Christian funeral Christian – that power saves us eternally. Jesus lives, even after a horrible death. Those who believe in Jesus Christ will live after death because God wills it.

But how do you tell that to people who don't know anything about Jesus? Richard Peace says, *Not very well*. So he wrote a tract. But it wasn't very good. You will study it this week if you are

in small group or Sunday School. Dr. Peace says a guy met a Christian while on a long bus ride. The Christian seemed to have energy and a passion for God that was contagious. When they parted company, the Christian gave the man a tract, which he read. Or at least he tried to read it. It was so confusing, he finally threw it away.

Dr. Peace printed the tract in his book. He instructs us to circle the words that might be confusing so I did – (see Holy Conversation, p. 43). Some of the words are: Are you saved? All men are lost. Transgressions. Redemption. Justified. Atoning death. Are those words drawing you closer to an understanding of Jesus? Feeling like you want to know Jesus yet? Well, how about if I say you need to repent, confess, and be regenerated.

Evangelism is not looking good, is it! And it's Evangelism Sunday! So Dr. Peace asked his students at Fuller Seminary – how do you share the good news? They came up with things like, “propitiation” and “expiation” and “soteriology.” Theologians don't help either. It's amazing that Christianity has survived!

Paul, on the other hand, tells people something really simple. He says it's all about Jesus. He cites the historical facts – what really happened – the fact that Jesus died, was buried, raised, and then appeared to specific people who documented it. Oh, that's so much better.

He adds just two theological explanations – It happened according to the Scriptures and Jesus died for our sins.

Sin is an unfamiliar word these days. Most people say “choice.” We make poor choices. You've heard that, right? How many times do you hear people say *I sinned today*. Sin encompasses the element of offending God, whereas choice might be something bad for you, but it is spiritually neutral. Choice would be like when you're really, really hungry and you see an ad for a Whopper and you go eat it. It may be bad for you, but it doesn't really offend God, at least I don't think it would, but maybe I'm wrong. ☺

Sin on the other hand, is when we offend God because we act against God's demands. The Bible says there's a problem between humans and God. We are not spiritually neutral. We are disconnected from God. Isaiah the prophet says, “We have each turned to our own way.” Or as C.S. Lewis said it, “I want to take care of my own soul, thank you very much.”

Now, what if, instead of a theological explanation, we used a story from the Bible to portray that strained relationship with God. In the story that Jim and Janet told, humans had dignity, purpose, and power; lots of it. But it wasn't autonomous power. Humans had two freedoms and a boundary. God gave them a vocation, generous provision, and one prohibition. God said, *you will absolutely not eat from this one tree*. So the humans were subject to God's demands; to God's absolutes.

But there was this force, the serpent, who enticed the woman to circumvent God's demand. He said, “Why serve the claims of God? Avoid them. Be free of God. And that voice speaks today and every day.

So we have the plans of God, the Creator, whose very name “Creator” has the nuance of “potter,” and the free will of humans and they gave into their own will.

This plays out in many ways for all of us today. Because of this disobedience, we experience broken relationships, lack of purpose, addictions, moral failure, rage, fear, depression. We’ve seen this over and over again in the videos we have watched over the past year. People spoke of brokenness. The root cause of our brokenness is not that your parents didn’t do a perfect job raising you. It’s not that your family is dysfunctional. It’s that we all have this dysfunction. Are you free from it? Do you know anyone free from it? It’s pervasive. It stems from disconnection with our Creator, and a desire to “be in charge of our own soul.”

So where’s the hope? What’s the good news? In the story of Adam and Eve, God gave grace. Is that amazing to you? Do you see the grace? The fact that they lived is a miracle. They turned against God, which warranted death, yet God spared their lives. God us full of grace for you. Grace is what astounded the apostle Paul.

Paul was a man who felt he did not deserve grace. Do you feel that way about yourself, that you have done stuff so bad that you cannot conceive of God forgiving you? Yet God does forgive you and wants to give you new life. That’s the thread that runs through the whole Bible. In fact, God came to the garden looking for Adam and Eve. You think God didn’t know? Certainly God knew. The surprise was God loved them and would not let them go.

We can hide too, just like Adam and Eve, even in the church. But, we begin to experience the power of God when we stop running and turn around and low and behold, we find grace. So we open ourselves to it; we trust it. We embrace it. That’s what the word repentance means.

Paul said, “I was unfit. I was a terrible person. I encountered Jesus and He forgave me.” His encounter of Jesus was not just a vision; Paul tells us “Jesus actually appeared.” It so impacted him that that power changed his lifestyle forever.

Has that happened to you? It’s one thing to read Paul’s 2000-year-old words, but is this still happening? Is there the power of the resurrection for us too? We need a subjective witness. Let me give you an example.

Wednesday we held Teresa Rodrigues’ funeral. After the service a pastor named John Boedeker came up to me, with a huge smile on his face and gave me a big hug, along with several members of his congregation in Oak Cliff. I was just so surprised to see him. I hadn’t seen him for 25 years. Many years ago I visited his little church in Oak Cliff as a young woman, because another friend told me to try it. I had a 15-month-old son and was pregnant, and my husband had left us.

Pastor Boedeker and that congregation helped me in my time of need. The people of the church befriended me; babysitting for me, fixing my car when it broke down, taking me to the hospital when I went into labor. I couldn’t have done without them, and God knew that. But the thing that meant the most was the small group that I joined who opened the Bible and talked about Jesus. They showed me that He is really here, and I began to see the power of God in their lives. They

said “you have a place and a purpose, and God wants to use your gifts. And the power of that message began transforming and healing my life. In fact, John said to me, ‘you have the gift of evangelism.’ And here I stand. Wednesday, looking at John’s beaming face and recalling those days, I know the power of a resurrected Lord that’s absolutely incredible.

Isaiah said, “Kings will stand speechless in his presence.” It’s not just kings, but anyone who hears and responds will experience more power than you can imagine. Have you responded fully to Jesus?

I don’t know about you but the day I got down on my knees and said, okay Jesus, you take this mess, when I got back up, I’ve never been the same since. Jesus is alive and His power is unmatched. AMEN