

Good Morning,

So, today's Scripture lesson may seem untypically short. That's because I chose today's lessons instead of using the standard lectionary assigned readings. And I chose them especially for you. Besides keeping the morning bible study on their toes, I chose the lessons we read today because I wanted to preach on power.

What should have been the assigned Gospel lesson, which we didn't read, depicted Jesus sending out seventy of His followers to tell people that "the Kingdom of God has come near." As I read it I noticed that it had a lot to do with power and authority. Jesus gives the seventy instructions and authority, and they come back excitedly talking about exorcisms they've performed, saying: "Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!" The assigned Gospel reading we

didn't read is a great text, and it says some interesting things about the power, authority and ministry. But as I thought about power and the conversations I've been having over the past month about ministry in this place, I felt the need to preach a very particular message about power.

*As I was being prepared for ministry in Seminary, I was taught about power. Particularly power as it is used in a congregation. One way to think about the power in a church context is that you got three kinds of power: *Power Over, Power Within, & Power With.**

Power Over is the power you have because of the official position you may occupy. I being a pastor have the power to marry people. "I now pronounce you married. You may kiss each other." But, don't worry, I won't start just doing that arbitrarily. Kevin, as president of the

congregation, you has the power to set agendas, which is the power to get people talking. If you say: "Let's talk about... this or that or the other thing... we're going to talk about it. That's Power Over.

Then there is Power Within. This second kind of power is the power people give us because we show ourselves deserving of it. If I take the time to truly listen to you, and keep my mouth shut when it needs to be shut, and speak when it's helpful, then what generally happens is that people trust me. It is called Power Within because it is the power we get from what's within us. Barb, I've meet so many people who think the world of you and trust you, and it's because you're genuine and well-meaning, and generous, and helpful, and a great dancer. Okay, I made the dancing thing up, but the rest I'm certain of. And because of all that, this

congregation leans on you. You occupy a place of power.

The last kind of power is Power With. This is my favorite kind of power. I am absolutely infatuated with this kind of power. Power With is the power we all have, and yet no one of us has it alone. Power With is shared power. We exercise Power With when we ask: "What is it that we can accomplish together that we could never accomplish apart?" Power With is wrapped up in the compliment: "Thank you, I could have never gotten done what I needed to get done were it not for you." Whose the pastor going to make an example of now? Don't worry, no particular person needs to be the example. I'll stop tarnishing your Lutheran humility. Power With is all of us coming together to make-up the vibrancy of the communities we belong to. I choose the particular lessons we read

today, because in them we find a God who shares His power with His people.

The second lesson and the Gospel lesson are verses that are used to talk about a particular piece of theology called the Office of the Keys. The Office of the Keys is basically about the authority to forgive. In the Catholic Church it is used to talk about the authority the Pope has. We Lutherans, even though we supposedly don't buy-in to all that Pope and church hierarchy stuff, we still take these verses and the theology that comes from them and lock them up in a pastor. Even today, in our own service, during the confession and forgiveness, we took these verses and their theology, their power, and locked them up in me. "As a called and ordained minister of the church of Christ, and by his authority, I therefore declare to you your entire forgiveness."

Well, I want to mess with the pastor-centric way we go about things. I want to play with the Lutheran tendency, that despite our Reformation history of standing up to the man, we Lutherans love to make things all about the clergy. And I want to do this because I believe we have a God who shares His power with each and every one of us.

Our Old Testament Scripture reading for today show us a God, who is willing to have His mind changed by us. Moses goes to God and tells God to chill out. Moses says: "Hey God! What are you doing? Don't you remember? You love us a whole bunch, so enough already with the wrath and disaster stuff!" And apparently, God chills out. God is willing for you to influence Him. God wants you to make a difference in God's life. God wants to make room

for you in what's going on with God. You are important to God, and according to this Bible text, you are even influential.

In our second lesson, Paul the Apostle, is telling the church in Corinth that they get to forgive people too. If Paul can forgive people because of Jesus and the Christians in Corinth have the same Jesus as Paul, then they have the same authority in Jesus' name as Paul does.

But it is the Gospel lesson that is the climax of what I'm talking about. The Gospel lesson from Luke uses the language of binding and loosing rather than forgiveness. Forgiveness is an amazing thing. And I'm constantly learning about how important and needed forgiveness is in the lives of the people I meet. But God is sharing with us so much more than the specific act of: "You are forgiven." God is telling us in Scripture that what you're

up to, God wants to be apart of. God is telling us that we get to participate with God in including people that find themselves excluded. Today's readings are about more than forgiveness, they are about belonging. They are about you and me having the power to invite people to belong to the family of God. To invite people to belong to this family. You and I, together with God, have the power to say to anyone who wants and needs to hear it: "You belong here. This place is for you. God's love is for you." And each of us can have the confidence that God will make it just so.

I know we read some short lessons, but there's powerful, powerful stuff in there.

We Lutherans are now the largest church body to say to the GLBT community: "You belong in God's family." And today's scripture lessons

tell us that God honors our actions. God honors the authority we took up to include the excluded. Scripture says that we “are one in Christ”, but for too long Lutherans have participated in creating an “us and them”. And of all places we create this “us and them” in the Church; where love, compassion, and justice are supposed to overflow into the world. I am so glad to be done with exclusion. I’m so excited to live out inclusion. And God will work with us as we begin to fully live out what it now means to be a whole family. This was us living out the conviction that God shares His power with us.

This notion of shared power will be critical for us as a congregation during our upcoming ministry together. I believe that new life, and full life, in this place will only happen to the degree that we participate and make room for others to participate. I

believe that a fulfilling experience of the faith is not determined by programs or events that keep you busy doing stuff. It is about making room for someone else in your life. I believe that it is in the midst of genuine human interaction that God is with us. Those basic human moments of eating and laughing and drinking and talking about life and love, that is where God is. God is in our midst. God promises: “Where two or three are gathered, I’ll be there.”

Revitalization won’t happen because you got a new pastor, but because we, together with God, use the power God gives all of us to allow people to belong to this family of God. You have the power to welcome, to love, to include, to give another person a fundamental human connection in the busyness of L.A. life. Will you participate in making this the kind of place someone says: “I belong here. I

belong here because the people of this place make room for me.” Will you take up the power you have to love each other, to connect with each other, to make room for each other?

Leave here today, and enter whatever the day or week holds for you, knowing that God loves you, connects with you, and makes room for you. And God gives you His power to do likewise.

May you be blessed in the hearing of the word of God, as I have been blessed preaching it. Amen