

The St. John's Pulpit

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THE CHURCH AS STEWARD OF GOD'S POWER

Acts of Apostolic People 1:1-11; Ephesians 1:15-23

Season of Easter, May 8, 2016
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If you watched the TV series, *Downton Abbey*, consider Mr. Carson. Carson was the steward of Lord Crawley's estate. Each decision and action of Carson faithfully expressed Lord Crawley's time, talents, resources and power. Carson could be grumpy, impersonal, unforgiving as well as cheerful, relational and gracious. He was always a faithful steward.

Jesus described his followers as stewards. Jesus taught that when you commit your life to follow him as an obedient learner, you receive God's power to help you be a faithful steward.

You know about power. The world is consumed by a hunger for power. Political, military, industrial, corporate and economic powers vie for advantages over one another. Advertisers appeal to your desire for power. You see power used in destructive and constructive ways. You see racism, prejudice, fear, hunger, violence, hate, greed, terrorism, abuse of the environment and many other evil uses of power. Meanwhile, you fix sandwiches in the Lounge for the homeless; pack weekend snacks for school children living in poverty; host homeless persons and families within our facilities; build compassionate relationships in Enderly Park; mentor teens in Right Moves for Youth; build Habitat Houses; teach the youth and children of St. John's; read to children in schools; visit the lonely; support a school in South Sudan; and serve banana pudding on Friday nights at the Men's Shelter. When you follow Jesus, you do not seek to have power 'over' others. **God's power shows up in you as servant power.**

A few weeks after God raised Jesus from the grave, Jesus told his followers, "All power has been given to me... *You will receive POWER when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.*"

After saying those words, according to Luke, Jesus ascended. **The visible Jesus withdrew his tangible presence from his followers so they could experience and express his**

spiritual power. By saying, “*You will be my witnesses,*” Jesus meant, ‘you will continue my work.’ Those early followers of Jesus were learning how to experience and express the power of God. They were living in the midst of and dealing with conflicting powers of the world. Over time, they opened the Church to all people in a religious world that drew lines of distinction, fear and bias. They learned how to offer hospitality, grace and inclusiveness. They learned how to deal with diversity, conflict and new cultures in an expanding world. Two thousand years later, we are still learning how to be faithful stewards of God’s power amidst conflicting powers. **God’s power is at work in you; you are stewards of God’s power.**

Paul wrote to Christ’s Church in Ephesus what has been called ‘*The Epistle of the Ascension.*’ Paul knew that commitment to God can drift. We can focus more on the powers of this world than on the power of God – maybe, especially in a presidential election year.

Paul begins his Letter to the Ephesians by praying for them. He had heard of their faith in Jesus and their love for one another. Yet, Paul knew their faith and love could drift; they could become blasé Christians. So, he prayed they would know God better each day. He prayed for the eyes of their hearts to be enlightened. He prayed for them to claim their inheritance of living in the power of God. **When you become a follower of Jesus, God’s power enters your life shaping your faith, inspiring your love, enlightening your wisdom and transforming your service.** You are stewards of God’s power. I pray you understand what this means for you.

The longest human journey is the short distance from the head to the heart; from cognitive comprehension to sincere humility. Humans do not fail to understand God’s power due to a lack of human intelligence, but because we refuse to serve God as humble servants.

Since September 11, 2001, the sacred space of Trinity Church, Wall Street, has become popular. The Reverend Jim Cooper notes that more than 2 million people pass through their doors each year. He laments, “*We have tourists galore; they are nomads in a fractured world.*”

Friends, you go forth as stewards of God’s power to serve ‘nomads in a fractured world.’ They will never know you are Jesus’ disciples by whom you choose to isolate, marginalize, judge, condemn, blame or draw outside your circles of loving and serving. Jesus said, “*They will know you are my disciples by how you love one another.*” **Let us be faithful stewards of God’s servant power! Amen and AMEN!**