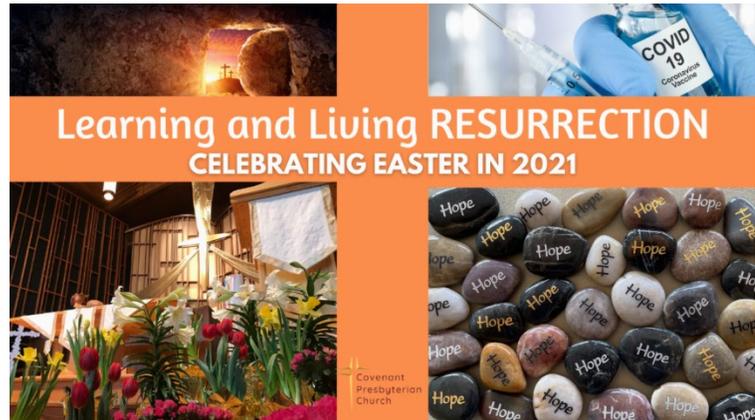


Seventh Sunday of Easter: "Strength for the Journey"

ACTS 1:6-8

CHARLIE BERTHOUD | SERMON FOR SUNDAY, MAY 16, 2021

Happy Easter! Yes, we are still in the season of Easter—it lasts for seven weeks and technically ends next Sunday on Pentecost. Why so long? Well, the Bible says that Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit, was 50 days after the resurrection of Jesus. And another good reason to have a long season of Easter is to give us time to reflect on what the resurrection of Jesus is all about.



In our sermon series this Easter season, we've been "Learning Resurrection" with the hope of "Living Resurrection."

Maybe for you, resurrection means newfound appreciation that God forgives our sin, and gives us a fresh start, an opportunity to turn away from foolish ways.

Maybe for you, resurrection means new appreciation for the gospel promise that death is not the final word, that Easter opens us to the mystery and joy of abundant, eternal life.

Or as we've suggested in the sermons with certain key words from the book of Acts, which help us understand resurrection, resurrection means the coming of God's KINGDOM, the new reality of God which is coming into the world, with justice and righteousness.

Resurrection means CHANGE. The gospel invites us to repent, to change our minds, to change direction, to see things in new ways, to learn new

things and go in new directions.

Resurrection makes us AWAKE. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus make us more alert to the blessing of life every day, and helps us to live with clear purpose.

Resurrection people live in COMMUNITY, sharing and growing together, with teaching, fellowship, prayers, and meals. We need each other.

Resurrection means INCLUSION: With the resurrection we know that God shows no partiality, that God's love is for everyone, so we need to tear down the walls that divide us.

For the final sermon in the series, our key word is POWER. Resurrection means having new power and strength to continue in the way of Jesus. Listen for God's word from Acts 1:

So when [the disciples] had come together, they asked Jesus, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But 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."

This is a fan. I know it has been not very warm lately, but one of these weeks, it's going to be hot and humid, and it will be great to have a fan. The fan works great, unless it's not plugged in to give it power.

This is a flashlight, which is great to have when you're camping or looking for something in a dark basement or dark place outside.

The flashlight works great, unless it doesn't have batteries to give it power.

I have a car outside. I'm glad I do because I live four miles away, and that's a long walk.

The car works great, unless—you guessed it—there is no gas, or electric charge, and it has no power.

All of these things need POWER to get the job done.

So do we.

In Jesus' final words to the disciples in Acts 1, he tells them that they will have POWER to be witnesses, in Jerusalem where they were, and a little farther out in Judea and Samaria, and then even across the world.

We have the power to be witnesses. Let's ponder that for a minute.

A witness in a court setting uses words. But a witness can also be a reflection, a mirror image. Jesus asks his followers to be witnesses, to live in the same way that he did, to essentially continue what he began in his life and ministry:

- feeding hungry people,
- reaching out to forgotten people and making them feel welcomed and valued,
- forgiving people when they say and do foolish and hurtful things,
- helping people turn away from selfishness and find meaning in life,
- loving neighbors.

Martin Luther King Jr knew the connection of power and love. He wrote:
Power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love.

In Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit, God offers us the power to learn, to love and to live.

But are we plugged in to receive the power?

Just like a fan, a flashlight, or a car, we need a regular, consistent source

of power to live as Christians and to be witnesses, to continue doing what Jesus began.

Maybe we're more like an electric car. We can go for a while on a charge, but after a while, the energy drains out and we need to recharge.

- We recharge and get that power in worship, so thanks for being here today.
- We get God's power in our time for prayer and scripture and devotions.
- We get God's power when we spend a few minutes on our phones with a devotion or meditation app before we check email or Facebook or play games.
- We get God's power when we sit quietly for a few minutes and take some deep breaths, remembering who we are.
- We get God's power when we take a shower and remember how the water of baptism cleanses us and calls us to new purpose, or when we put on our shirts and pants and skirts or whatever and remember that we can clothe ourselves every day with compassion, kindness, and love—bearing witness to Jesus.

If we're going to be healthy and strong in life, we need to stay close to our source of power. We can't run on empty. In other words, we take care of ourselves.

Listen to the words of Presbyterian author Frederick Buechner:

“Mind your own business” means butt out of other people's lives because in the long run they must live their lives for themselves, but it also means pay mind to your own life, your own health and wholeness, both for our own sake and ultimately for the sake of those you love too. Take care of yourself so you can take care of them. (from *Telling Secrets*)

For Christians, we take care of ourselves by staying connected to our power source, to the resurrection love of God.

Staying connected to God will give us power for living and strength for the journey.

Do you ever use the phrase: “Lord, give me strength”? Maybe you’ve thought it, or whispered it, or maybe you’ve shouted it out loud. It’s actually a great prayer.

Pretty much every day I pray for strength, and I’d like to conclude this sermon with an extended prayer, asking for God to give us strength—that power that Jesus promised the disciples.

So I invite you to join me in praying for God to give us power with a meditative prayer that will take a few minutes.

Wherever you are, I encourage you to be comfortable and alert. You may want to sit up a bit, with your feet on floor and your hands relaxed, your shoulders relaxed, your jaw relaxed.

Take a deep breath or two and close your eyes.

Lord, give us strength.

Give us strength when we are tired and weary.

And we are tired and weary from Covid, from politics, from social divisions. Some of us are carrying heavy burdens and it’s a struggle to just get through the day.

Give us strength to get us through this day and to do the best we can with our challenges.

Take another deep breath.

Lord give us strength.

Give us strength when we face temptation, when we lose our way.

We are surrounded by distraction and things that aren't good for us. It's too easy for us to over-indulge, to waste time, to give into lust or greed, to abuse alcohol or drugs, to go down the wrong path.

Give us strength to make good choices today God. Give us strength to turn away from evil and turn to good.

Take another deep breath.

Give us strength God to avoid falling into bitterness, cynicism, and despair.

With so much negativity online and in the news, we too quickly think the worst of others, or even of ourselves. We can very easily become self-righteous and excessively judgmental.

Give us strength, God of hope. Help us to be patient and forgiving with each other. Help us to speak the truth in love. Help us to seek the common good, together.

One more deep breath.

Give us strength Lord to remember that you love us and call us to love each other.

We lift up to you our loved ones—our spouses and family, with all their quirks and imperfections, and aware of our quirks and imperfections.

Make us strong in love. Help us to love our neighbors and even our enemies, the people who irritate us. Keep us rooted and grounded in your abiding and strong love.

Thank you, God, for the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the one who came with love, the one who gives us strength for faithful living. Amen.