

Sermon July 15th 2018

This particular Sunday I did not preach from these notes BUT “rambled” through revsing the last twoo weeks adding thought ascribed to these notes.

My ‘ramble’ was somewhat long as rambles can often be, sorry for that good folk!

POWER ENABLING RATHER THAN POWER OVER

I guess one of the many questions we could ask ourselves is how do we measure success?

Today we continue to be shaped by the stories from the storyteller we call Mark.

I hope that you find ‘Mark’ to be an exciting storyteller?

“When we enter the story world of the Gospel of Mark, we enter a world full of conflict and suspense, a world of surprising reversals and strange ironies, a world of riddles and hidden meanings... [where] Jesus [is always] the dominant character”

Having now heard three or four of Mark’s stories over the past few weeks perhaps you have begun to sense some of that ‘conflict’ and ‘surprising reversals’ and ‘hidden meanings’ woven creatively, in the story.

Having said that, let me have another look at the stories which we have heard over the past two weeks:

- the stilling of the storm,
- the healing of the woman with the haemorrhage
- The young girl having died
- a visit to his hometown,

and then between that homecoming and John losing his head, is the sending out of the disciples, two by two.

Many sub-themes are interwoven into all these stories. In all my comments this past couple of weeks I have only touched on one or two of those themes. There are numerous other themes.

Last week's story highlights one such sub-theme - 'power'. And of course, this theme is also in the other stories as well.

- Power over nature.
- Power over illness.
- Power over death

But interestingly enough in last week's stories, 'power' is experienced in deep contrast. For Jesus, it was a limiting of power.

As we continue to look at this 'power' sub-theme for a bit, I'll play back and forth between all these stories.

- In the story of the stilling of the storm...

Mark and other storytellers of the day saw the ability to control the sea and subdue storms as characteristic of one having 'divine power'

So when the storm hit the boat threatening to sink it, the disciples don't just reproach Jesus for his seeming indifference.

They attack him personally. "They project on(to) his concern for their well-being and survival, they seem to be emptied of the inner resources to deal with the storm themselves" (*Wink/LookSmart website 2006*).

Once awake, so the story goes, Jesus "performed the characteristically divine act... and the disciples were... filled with a different kind of fear... realising they were in the presence of one who disposed of power nothing less than divine"

- In the story of the woman with the haemorrhage...

For 12 years, so the storyteller says, a woman suffered from a continuing loss of blood that clearly debilitated body, resources, and morale. In almost a last lunge for life, she thrusts her feeble fingers toward the hem of Jesus' garment.

Then a 'power drain'.

She felt drained by the sheer energy of her action and confession.

He felt drained by the force of her need.

The story of the 12yr old ... the father who is presumably in a position of power approaches Jesus. The story encourages not to lose faith even in the face of death and calls the girl back to life, Jesus power over death, another divine act

Then the story of the hometown visit...

As a result of the scepticism of his hometown family and neighbours, our storyteller says Jesus' power to heal others was 'limited'.

These stories are certainly:

“...a world of surprising reversals and strange ironies, a world of riddles and hidden meanings”

But one other story remains.

- The story of the sending out of the disciples...

Mark the storyteller says Jesus sent his disciples out two by two. Here I want to offer the comments of Process theologian, Bruce Epperly.

“Unlike the rulers of the earth”, suggests Epperly, “they travel simply and affirm their need of others in order to live their vocation. Jesus' disciples are challenged to see their healing vocation[calling] as relational”

Epperly says, “In the healing adventure, giving and receiving are interdependent, relational. The openness, generosity of others enables us to fulfil our vocations, relational. The disciples accept hospitality but also do not blame or punish those who turn their backs on

them, it's relational. They let go of failure, knowing that success is not entirely in their own hands. They can't control the belief or unbelief of others. Freed of the need to succeed, they simply go on to the next healing [ministry] adventure. Great things happen!"

"As God's partners, friends, collaborators in healing the world, we need to cultivate healthy models of relational power...").

So what is this 'relational power'?

Relational power seems to be about having the ability to both absorb and exert an influence.

To influence others and to be influenced by others is all about relational power.

Relational power is where relationships play a constructive role in the creation of healthy individuals, healthy groups, healthy nations. The outworking of Relational power means, individuals, groups, nations have the freedom to be, to express themselves.

Good example Germany after ww1 & ww2

More recently,
Wednesday's paper, 'World-first wellbeing budget – the government, our country to announce a world first well-being budget and how we measure success as a

country using what is known as the four capitals. These four capitals are interdependent, relational to each other.

- Financial capital such as GDP,
- Natural Capital ... the quality of our environment,
- human capital ... how are our people, and
- social capital ... how connected are our communities?

Taking those four dimensions in sync, in relation to each other, will give us a much better picture of how healthy we are as a nation.

If we applied those to us here in St Andrews I wonder what picture we would draw in regards to our wellbeing;

Financial capital -

Natural capital-

Human capital-

Social capital-

So what is this 'relational power'?

Relational power seems to be more about having the ability to both absorb and exert an influence.

To influence others and to be influenced by others, for the better of the whole.

And where relationships play a constructive role in the creation of individuals and groups and in their subsequent freedom to be themselves.

Such power stands in sharp contrast to its opposite: 'unilateral power'.

Nations, Governments, institutional church have and do exercise unilateral power over others.

That is, some people believing they have the power to control what other people could think, or believe, or do, and are determined to call others 'into line'.

I asked a 30yr recently, what keeps your age group from being involved in the church? I think he was being nice to me because he said it is not just the church there are other clubs, society, organisations and workplaces he and others want little if anything to do with.

He said it has to do with the prevailing attitude that is too often found in such places where people who say, can't do that ...

We don't do it like that ...

We have never done that ...

This is the exercise of unilateral power ...

Remember now Mark recalls the story of Jesus to influence his community in a time of

Now it is clear our storyteller Mark shows Jesus using 'power'.

Sometimes that 'power' was power over...

Over demons, nature, as shaped and understood in its day

But most times, and especially with people, that 'power' Jesus exercised was power enabling...

Enabling **others** to accomplish their hopes.

Enabling **others** to widen their understanding.

Enabling **others** to break through restrictive habits of thinking and seeing "(and) in expanding the freedom of the hearer, and in persuasion concerning how that freedom might be used"

Of course, there is the use of 'power' in our lives, especially if society is to function at all, but we need to be also aware "that power is an invariably corrupting experience for humans"

The historian and moralist, who was otherwise known just as Lord Acton, expressed this opinion in a letter to Bishop Mandell Creighton in 1887: "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

So once again I am reminded of the wisdom of one who has, over the years, helped in shaping my theological thinking:

"The earth belongs, or ought to belong, to those who make the largest claims on life. The largest claims are not made nor are they makeable in the form of unilateral power. They are made by those who attempt to embody most fully the life of relational power, for they are claims made not only for themselves but on behalf of all peoples"

Beatitudes Matthew 5 3-11

And, I would add, because of our daily choices,
become 'good news' to both themselves and to others.