

USE YOUR POWER FOR GOOD



Scripture:

Esther 7:1-6, 9-10, 9:20-22

¹So the king and Haman went in to feast with Queen Esther. ²On the second day, as they were drinking wine, the king again said to Esther, “What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled.” ³Then Queen Esther answered, “If I have won your favor, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me—that is my petition—and the lives of my people—that is my request. ⁴For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have held my peace; but no enemy can compensate for this damage to the king.” ⁵Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, “Who is he, and where is he, who has presumed to do this?” ⁶Esther said, “A foe and enemy, this wicked Haman!” Then Haman was terrified before the king and the queen.

⁹Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs in attendance on the king, said, “Look, the very gallows that Haman has prepared for Mordecai, whose word saved the king, stands at Haman’s house, fifty cubits high.” And the king said, “Hang him on that.” ¹⁰So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the anger of the king abated.

²⁰Mordecai recorded these things, and sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far, ²¹enjoining them that they should keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar and also the fifteenth day of the same month, year by year, ²²as the days on which the Jews gained relief from their enemies, and as the month that had been turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, days for sending gifts of food to one another and presents to the poor.

Mark 9:38-50

³⁸John said to him, “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.” ³⁹But Jesus said, “Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. ⁴⁰Whoever is not against us is for us.

⁴¹For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.

⁴²“If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea. ⁴³If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. ⁴⁵And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell. ⁴⁷And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, ⁴⁸where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.

⁴⁹“For everyone will be salted with fire. ⁵⁰Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.”

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



USE YOUR POWER FOR GOOD

The Pope is here in the United States! Did you notice? How does one person draw a bigger crowd than the Rolling Stones and the 49ers in a winning season all put together? What is it about the Pope that draws people to him?

In the past, when the Pope wasn't Francis, I had a harder time understanding the magnetic power of the Pope. Now that this Pope is so charismatic and compassionate, I can more easily understand the enthusiastic attendance at his gatherings.

And I believe one of the reasons this Pope is so exceedingly popular is because he is very good at forgiveness. He recently made it clear that God forgives all the women who have had abortions in the past and they should not feel unwelcome in the church. Astounding! This is earth-shattering!

POPE ASKS FOR FORGIVENESS

After sixteen months on the job, this Pope gave a sermon in a mass with a group of victims of sexual abuse invited from various countries. He started it out by humbly asking for forgiveness for all the sexual abuse by priests that had occurred in the past. He also mentioned it yesterday when he spoke to the bishops, too.

**He said, "I ask for the grace to weep,
the grace for the Church to weep
and make reparation for her
sons and daughters who betrayed
their mission, who abused
innocent persons.
"Before God and his people
I express my sorrow for
the sins and grave crimes
of clerical sexual abuse
committed against you.
And I humbly ask forgiveness."**

What is more attractive than a penitent compassionate forgiving Pope? When asked about gay priests in July 2013, Francis famously replied, "Who am I to judge?"

To congress last week the Pope invoked the Golden Rule and identified himself as the "son of immigrants." Then the Pope asked lawmakers not to "turn their backs on their neighbors," whether they be immigrants who come across the United States southern border illegally or are part of the human exodus flowing from Syria. And when he talked about the sanctity of life, he emphasized the need to end the death penalty.

There is an expectation that the Pope's focus on climate change and the need to protect our earth will have an influence on the congressional actions on these issues. That is powerful!

What made this Pope so powerful? He is personable with people and especially with the handicapped and those in poverty. Pope Francis was known in the early 1990s as a bishop who would keep tabs on precisely how his priests were helping poorer parishioners. In Argentina, he spent his days travelling around the diocese, so that he could keep poor people company, help out in soup kitchens and visit Aids victims.

HE RIDES IN THE LITTLE FIAT

The poverty-stricken children who were his peers when he was a youngster in Buenos Aires in the 1940s were in his thoughts and he was determined to use his prominence as a bishop to better the lot of the impoverished, as opposed to rubbing shoulders with the Argentinean elite. He deeply dislikes ostentation, showiness and glamour. Hence the little Fiat he rides around in on his tour of the United States.

WHAT GIVES A PERSON POWER?

But let's assume none of us will ever be a Pope. What else gives a person power?

Jeffrey Pfeffer, Ph.D., delves into this very issue. Pfeffer, a professor of organizational behavior at Stanford's Graduate School of

Business, released a book, entitled *Power: Why Some People Have it and Others Don't*. He analyzed a lot of factors and found one to be most important: "Your success at work involves your ability to deal with workplace politics."

Our Pope is very skilled at politics which he demonstrated by appealing to both the right and the left in his speech to congress. And he pulled it all together at the end with a big "God Bless America!" which inspired a standing ovation from all of Congress.

WHAT POWER WOULD YOU CHOOSE?

A popular question on Facebook posts is: If you could have any Super Power, which one would you choose? This is similar to the question God asked Solomon in 2nd Chronicles chapter 1. God asked Solomon what favor from God he wanted as King of Israel. Solomon asked for wisdom and knowledge. God replied: "Because this was in your heart, and you have not asked for possessions, wealth, honor, or the life of those who hate you, and have not even asked for long life, but have asked for wisdom and knowledge for yourself that you may rule my people over whom I have made you king, wisdom and knowledge are granted to you. I will also give you riches, possessions, and honor, such as none of the kings had who were before you, and none after you shall have the like."

Solomon chose well and I agree with his choice. No one can take away knowledge. That is why I love going to school for educational degrees. Wisdom and knowledge are the powerful things no one can take away from you once you have them.

Esther was powerful because she knew how to be politically savvy like the Pope. As the story was told in our first reading today, Esther knew how to protect her people by being close to the most powerful of the day, the King.

The Jewish Holiday celebrated in March called Purim is a commemoration of Queen Esther who influenced the King to save her Uncle Mordecai and her Jewish community from being annihilated by the king's advisor, Haman.

A DIFFERENT WAY TO POWER

But Jesus shows us a different way to power, doesn't he?

Instead of sidling up to the powerful for power, Jesus chose to make friends with both the rich like Nicodemus and the poor like Mary Magdalene. He encouraged humility and an attitude of service rather than accumulating wealth and admiration from others. Jesus didn't need earthly power because he had heavenly power.

In today's passage, Jesus rebukes the disciples who were upset that other Jesus' followers, some who were not among their elite group, were healing people in the name of Jesus. Rather than being joyful that people were being healed, the disciples were concerned that the special privileges were being usurped. They wanted to be able to control who was healed and who wasn't in Christ's name.

SO HUMAN

**Isn't that so human?
That is why the Bible is so believable.
Its message overall is authentic.
If someone was going to make up the
Biblical stories, they would have made
the disciples superheroes.
Instead, the honest truth was, even
after much teaching and preaching,
the disciples still did not get
the main message of Jesus
which was to first and foremost love
your neighbor as yourself,
and to think of others as
greater than yourself.
Yet the disciples were only human
and had the power grabbing
tendencies we all have.**

But Jesus doesn't give up on them. He reminds them that if others do deeds of power in his name for the good of others, then no one should interfere. He actually gets really serious and warns them to not be stumbling blocks in front of the good works that can come out of imitating Christ. He warns that if they keep trying to compete, and one up each other over who has the most power, they will end up as bad off as someone who is thrown into hell.

If Jesus was to write a book like Jeffrey Pfeffer's on power, his guidelines would mostly be the opposite. Rather than shining a light on our achievements and playing political games with the powerful, Christ has taught us to:

- Make friends with the lonely, lost, and impoverished.
- Think of others before ourselves.
- Seek out those who need help.
- Feed the hungry.
- Heal the sick.
- Be companions to the lonely.
- Love all, serve all, be forgiving and merciful.
- Seek peace and reconciliation.

Even though the Pope is politically savvy like Esther, he is also preaching the same love and compassion that Christ taught. That is the key to his extreme popularity these days.

Spiritual writer, Marianne Williamson believes that "Our deepest fear is not that we are weak. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. ... As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."

So be powerful like Jesus and humble yourself before others. Seek to do good with the power you have. And your power will increase, so you can do even more good for those in need.

I will conclude with Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's thoughts on power. He said, "Love is the most powerful and still the most unknown energy in the world." "Someday, after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love, and then, for a second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire."

Brian McLaren has a perspective that complements these thoughts on Christ-like power. (A video of Brian McLaren was shown to the congregation.)

Benediction:

Leo Buscaglia had a Christ-like understanding of power. He said, "Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential power to turn a life around."

So harness that power and use it daily. You may be surprised how powerful you really are!

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us now and forever more. Amen



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September 27, 2015**