

Annual Conference Sermon
Wednesday, July 4, 2007
“Servants Enabled with a Great Power”

Text: Acts 3:1-8; 4:29-31, 33

(Testimony — read from lecturn OR shown on video screens)

We are hungry for a word from God. The world is thirsty for what is REAL, what is TRUE. Jesus knew that. He experienced it. What do you think it was like for him? He left that place with God where *all* was truth. There was nothing fake at all! No wonder when his disciples sought him out for yet another teaching, saying, “Jesus, teach us how to pray!” he taught them to say, “Our Father...

- A. “Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done—on earth as it is [done, completed, enacted, completely obeyed] in heaven.”
 - a. I believe Jesus taught his disciples to pray for God’s will to be done here because he knew God’s will was full of Truth—it has no falsehood in it. It quenches our deepest desires, calms our greatest fears, builds tremendous purpose into our lives.
 - b. Ultimately, ***God’s will changes us—leading us into fulfillment, purpose and Godliness.***
 - i. If we truly walk in God’s will, we will no longer be orphaned or homeless, like Brian was; but we will be filled with:
 - 1. Life!
 - 2. Fullness
 - 3. Meaning
 - 4. Purpose
 - 5. Joy
 - 6. Ultimately, with POWER

It’s easy to grow accustomed to things around us—even to the point that we no longer recognize they are there! My family moved several times as I was growing up. I still remember with a smile the times that, after everything was loaded up, one of us would “see” the clock on the wall or the nightlight in the electrical socket! We nearly missed them because they’d become too familiar, a part of the landscape, so to speak.

People can become a part of our landscapes. It’s possible that the man begging at the Gate called Beautiful had become a part of the disciples’ landscape. Before you judge them for their previous insensitivities, close your eyes and picture who was outside McDonald’s yesterday. Who have you walked past this week without seeing or hearing? Was it a homeless person, or was it your spouse? Was it the clerk at the counter, or was it your child?

I’d like to tell you a story about how our God likes to increase our senses, so that we can see what has always been there, but we’ve never seen...

Marsha started coming to our church through an after-school club we have each week which involved her daughter. When Marsha would come, she was antsy, nervous, often scared and carrying a bag of problems that would have been overwhelming for anyone. Because of the magnitude of the difficulties in her life, as a pastor I did what a pastor often does—I took her to the Lord in prayer, and left her problems there. I certainly couldn't solve them all! Sometimes I felt inadequate, like “How weak is that? Just praying with her, and then sending her right back into all that junk? Isn't there something else I can do?”—but no. There really wasn't. So we prayed. Over and over, we prayed. Till one day, Marsha came to the church crying, confessing her drug addiction, her inability to handle her life anymore—telling me that she had tried to handle everything herself, and it wasn't working. It was only getting worse. Would I pray for her? She was ready to make a change. She was ready to let someone else take charge of her life. That day, she gave her life to Jesus...the beginning of an exciting journey for us all.

As time went by, Marsha grew in the Lord. Her hunger for God seemed to be insatiable! Questions and more questions—she was just like a four year old who cannot seem to her quota of “why's” in! At a certain point, something changed in Marsha: she quit filling up, and started shifting. She was no longer only receiving, she had grown to a point of giving out, as well.

I don't think I'll ever forget the morning Marsha called me, asking me to pray for “Joe.” “Who was Joe?” I asked. “Oh. He's a homeless man that I talked to over at the gas station. He looked lonely, so I started asking him about his life...He's really got an interesting story...” and she proceeded to tell me about him, and then about Eddie, and then about Larry and Randolph. Pretty soon, there was a whole group of “friends” that Marsha went to see.

She told me, “I asked the Lord what I am supposed to do with these guys. He told me, ‘Just love them.’”—with a flash of a smile, she said, “I can DO THAT!” (She later told me that she thought it was a gift that her sense of smell was gone. The ‘homeless smells’ didn't bother her at all!)

Suddenly, for Marsha, the homeless population of Fresno was no longer “background” in her life—it was “foreground.” The homeless people took on faces, names, lives and real-life needs. As she shared her stories with me, I began to find myself looking at people on the street medians with signs in their hands. Was that Joe, or Eddie? Was he limping? Did he need an umbrella—it's supposed to rain. I began running errands with basic needs, praying for people in the rain, asking people for old blankets, paying attention to aluminum cans and plastic bottles in dumpsters.

What had been dead to my sight and been brought to life. Once I was blind. Now I see.

I could tell you so much more—but that's not today's message. Call me sometime if you want to know more! But for today, the message is this: Marsha started praying for faceless people, who became sisters and brothers in Christ because the power of God's Spirit took root through the love of God in her life...much like what happened with Peter and John in their encounter with the man crippled from birth.

Like Marsha, and perhaps like you and I, Peter and John probably passed by this man daily—without taking much notice. Do you suppose that they purposefully turned their gaze away from him as he called out for help? Is it possible that they expected Jesus

to take care of all of “those types,” so they didn’t have to look him in the eyes? Besides... someone crippled over 40 years! What could they do, anyway? Could they rationalize away their quickened step by remembering that they didn’t have any money anyway—after all Judas kept all that under tight controls? Why should they care—he wasn’t a relative! He obviously didn’t “walk in their circles!” Besides, if they got near him...ugh! It was just messy. Better to just walk on.

You know, if you do that often enough, people can become like familiar wall clocks on moving day.

But all that changed in the course of ONE, SINGLE DAY...the day Jesus told his disciples to wait for...the day they got the “gift Jesus’ Father had promised...the baptism of the Holy Spirit.”—Look it up for yourself! It’s in Acts 1.

- B. Marsha’s story is the story of **the apostles after Pentecost**.
 - a. Their lives were turned upside-down.
 - i. No longer running afraid, they were filled with boldness.
 - ii. No longer powerless, they spoke, they healed and they performed miraculous “signs and wonders” with God’s power at work in and through them.
 - iii. In fact, **in Acts 4:33** we read the *punchline of Pentecost*: “...with great power the apostles continued...” (Acts 4:33)
 - b. While the *punchline of the apostles’ Pentecost* was **POWER**; the power of our ‘Pentecost’ has gotten ‘punchy.’ [*punch-drunk: boxing—out on feet or out on the floor.*] We have wound up with a “couch potato faith”—full of words, with little or no power.
- C. In fact, in the face of persecution, they *prayed for power*.
 - a. Listen to the prayer of the disciples recorded in Acts 4. This was their prayer *after they had been in prison and ordered not to speak or teach AT ALL in the name of Jesus*. Acts 4:29-30: “Lord...enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”
 - b. Through the name of your holy servant Jesus...
- D. What does that mean... “through the name of Jesus?”
 - a. The crippled man was healed “in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth” (Acts 3:6)
 - b. Peter and John were thrown into prison for using this name.
 - c. The concept of “the name of Jesus” is so important, it’s used NINE times in two chapters of Acts 3 & 4.
 - d. The disciples boldly proclaimed that it was by means of the name of Jesus that not only was this man healed, but *that there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved*.
 - e. **Recovering the NAME OF JESUS is essential to releasing God’s Kingdom power on earth as it is in heaven**
 - f. Psalmist got it right (Psalm 121) *Where does my help come from?*
 - i. *My help comes from THE LORD, maker of heaven and earth!*

1. We have forgotten, taking credit where credit is NOT DUE—and thereby confining the works of our hands to the might of our hands.
 2. Human hands bring forth human deeds.
 3. BUT *the hand of God brings forth SUPERNATURAL DEEDS!*
 - a. “Thy Kingdom come on earth—as it is in heaven”—is talking about bringing the supernatural into the natural.
- g. And so the disciples prayed, “*Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.*”—because it is **through the authority of the name of Jesus** that we plain, simple people—yes, even us **Brethren—are enabled to SERVE** God—and not just SERVE God, but **SERVE WITH POWER!!!**
- E. This is how I teach my church about doing something in the authority of someone’s name.

To do something “in the name of” someone, means to do it with the full authority of that person.

For instance:

If I have left my office for the day, and headed out to my car, but then remember that I have forgotten my purse in my office; I may hand my daughter my keys and ask her to go back to my office to get my purse. Now when my secretary sees my daughter with my keys, she may say, “Hi, Alana! What are you doing?” To which my daughter would reply, “Hi! Mom forgot her purse. She sent me to get it.” My secretary would know that I trust my daughter, and that it is not an unusual thing for me to entrust her with my keys or my purse. All would be well. My daughter would get my purse, and return to me with purse and keys in tow.

However, let’s say that another youth who has not been attending our church shows up out of the blue with my keys and is fumbling around with them at my office door. This time, my secretary might say, “Hello. May I help you?” “No, that’s alright,” the youth might respond. “What’s up?” my secretary might say. “Uh, well...the pastor sent me here to get her purse for her.” To which my secretary might rightly respond, “You know what? I’ll take those keys, and get her purse for her. Thank you,” and take my keys out of the possession of the unknown youth.

What is the difference? My daughter was sent with my full authority. She has been given a task to do in my place, with my blessing and with my authority. A central part of this is the concept of **relationship**. We do not entrust our authority to strangers. We give our authority to those we *know and whose character we trust*.

- Jesus was given the authority of God. He did not pass this authority to act in his name to just anyone. He gave it to those

- he knew and who knew him...because then Jesus knew they would correctly handle this authority.
- Jesus passed on this authority to act in his name at Pentecost when God gave the Holy Spirit to the disciples. In fact, Jesus had said, “It is not for you to know [when the Kingdom—the “King’s domain”] will fully come here...but,” He said, “you *will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you...*”
- F. I believe we Brethren have been **afraid of Pentecost power. Why?** Because
- a. We’ve seen the abuses
 - i. We’ve seen when people have used **power without character.**
On the whole: *Not the Brethren problem!*
 - ii. My Mentor once said, “Ataloo, if you err, it will not be on the side of not caring for others...” Of course not! It was a huge part of my upbringing!
 - iii. We *do love* each other. It is what Christ taught! Therefore it has become a huge part of our Godly heritage.
 - iv. In fact, **Our Brethren heritage** of loving service and pious, Godly living is the perfect environment for the arrival of Holy Spirit Pentecost!
 - v. **HOLY SPIRIT POWER IS TO BE USED WITH HOLY SPIRIT CHARACTER.**
 - b. We’ve been **inexperienced in boldness.**
 - i. “Ataloo, don’t worry. We’ll train you how to do chaplaincy.” [Yeah. Right.] Those were the words that the veteran hospital chaplain said to me—I think to placate me—into joining the Chaplaincy Practical Education group. Do you know HOW he trained me? My first day at the hospital, he sat our CPE group down, told us a few things about the hospital, gave us name-badges to make us official, then gave us each a list of sick and dying hospitalized people to visit, and told us to go visit them! I said, “WHAT? I thought you said you were going to TRAIN US???” He said, “I am! Go visit your people, then come back and we’ll talk.”
 - 1. Training meant—I’ll give you authority to go.
 - 2. You GO! Practice in that authority. Then we’ll refine your ministry!
 - ii. Know what? My supervisor was right! I learned alright! **But it took boldness—stepping out of my comfort zone.**
 - iii. **Taking on a new identity** as a minister (because, after all, I wore the hospital badge “chaplain!”).
 - iv. We’ve been inexperienced in:
 - 1. Speaking in boldness—they’ll know us by the manner of our living
 - 2. Perceiving ourselves as ministers *in Jesus’ name*. We have tended to see ourselves as RECEIVERS.

3. Speaking in the NAME OF JESUS—We’ve just been speaking on our own authority. (Like I used to go to the hospital as Ataloa and not as a minister or chaplain. I visited my OWN FRIEND, but never those God led me to.)
- c. We’ve been afraid we’ll **make mistakes**.
- i. We’re afraid we’ll *be judged*.
 - ii. We have to be a people of grace in order to be a people who step out in faith.
 1. Example: People living in our home. “I don’t think my mom would like that.”—In a loving environment, it’s not about right and wrong; it’s about intention.
 2. “Wrong” is gently corrected and patiently instructed.
- d. We’ve been **afraid of the “what if’s”**
- i. What if we ask, and **nothing happens?**—How can we stretch our theology then?
 1. *I guarantee you that if you DON’T ASK NOTHING WILL happen. How will you answer the Lord, then???*
 2. I’d rather have a questionable theology than to stand in question before my Lord!
 - a. If Peter and John had not moved when the opportunity arose, the man crippled at birth would have remained the man crippled at death.
 - b. If we do not move when the opportunity arises, we, who have been crippled in our Christian walk, will remain crippled in our Christian walk. *What a travesty!*
 - c. **WE TAKE THE RISK OF FAITH, AND LET GOD BE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE OUTCOME.**
 - ii. What if we ask, and **something “weird” happens?** How will we look then? *What will people say?*
 1. Which is better: to be ALIVE & WEIRD, or
 2. COMATOSE & NORMAL?
 - iii. What if we ask, and **things get “messy?”**
 1. I’d rather have a baby with all the messes that diaper toting bundle produces, than live my life without the joys of wonder, discovery, growth and maturation a child brings.
 2. How much richer is my life because Marsha cared for stinky, homeless Joe—who rec’d Jesus, brought his dog into our church, sobered up, got off the streets and then died a year later in the arms of Jesus His Lord! That is a mess I want to live with!
 3. Truth is: LIFE IS MESSY!!! It is out of control.
 - a. Those of us who desperately try to control our environments—keeping them “mess-free”—are

called *obsessive-compulsive*, autistic or schizophrenic. Something is not healthy.

- iv. What is the greatest risk here? The loss of our **pride**, the loss of our **theology**, the loss of **control**, the loss of **order**? Or is the greatest loss, the loss of the “stretching out of God’s hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of Jesus?” (Acts 4:30)
 - v. *Is this about US, or about GOD?*
 - vi. **Recovering the POWER OF GOD through the NAME OF JESUS is essential to releasing God’s Kingdom power on earth as it is in heaven. So what’s stopping us???**
 - vii. *Do you want to SEE the AWESOMENESS of your GOD today?*
 - viii. *Do you want LIFE-TRANSFORMING power along with your Godly character?*
 - ix. *Do you WANT what you have read about in scripture to come into being in your life?*
 - x. *Are you tired of having a “couch-potato faith”—filled with words, but no power?*
 - xi. *Are you HUNGRY for MORE of God?*
- G. You know, this is the way the early CHURCH STARTED. It’s how it GREW exponentially. The church didn’t start *until the Holy Ghost showed up*.
- a. God wants to use YOU in a mighty way—like Peter and John—
 - b. Like God used Marsha and is beginning to use Brian
 - c. God is STILL an AWESOME God who is increasing in KINGDOM territory until this earth comes fully under the authority of the KING OF KINGS!
 - d. God can take anyone—ordinary you, goofy me, homeless Brian, addicted Marsha—and turn each of us into a person of power and purpose.
 - e. DO YOU WANT THAT? Jesus died so you could have it.
- H. This morning—I urge you: don’t leave this auditorium without the quickening of God’s Spirit. I’m going to give you the opportunity to receive the “*punchline of Pentecost*”—*God’s Spirit* in a moment.
- I. Scripture says, the Spirit will:
- a. Convict us of sin
 - b. Guide us
 - c. Lead us into TRUTH
 - d. Comfort us
 - e. Teach us the things we need to know
 - f. Bring to our remembrance what we need to say at specific times
 - g. Gift us for God’s Kingdom purposes
 - h. Empower us for God!—Enabling us to SERVE with an Exponential STRENGTH!
 - i. My power as opposed to God power is like walking compared to taking the Concord!
 - ii. *Do you want that? If so, before we pray and ask for it, remember the words of Jesus found in Lk. 11:*

iii. ***“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks the door will be opened.—Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?”***

J. It's a promise from Jesus. You can count on His word. If you ask, you will receive. If you're looking for the Holy Spirit in your life, you'll find it! God loves to give it. Let's pray!