

“THE TURN AROUND”

Acts 3:11-20 April 14, 2024

The city of Tallmadge, Ohio was founded in 1807 by the Reverend David Bacon as part of the Connecticut Western Reserve. It was Bacon who laid out the picturesque Tallmadge Circle based on the New England design of the day. Today, the Circle is still the central focal point of this community of over 17,500 people.

While most turning circles have no more than 4 exists, the Tallmadge Circle has 8 routes which are oriented to the eight true directions of a compass. Each route is identified by and bears the designation of the compass direction it assumes. The circle of land in the middle of these routes still hosts the historical Old Town Hall Building and Rev. Bacon’s Congregational Church.

Some people like these driving circles and others don’t. They were designed to keep traffic flowing, instead of everyone having to come to a full stop and wait for each other, which some people think is optional. But for the circle intersection to be effective you have to get moving on and off. And if you have 8 choices you better know which one you need to exit at, either that you keep going around the circle. You can’t back up on the circle and even the exits don’t make it easy to turn around.

In this morning’s scripture passage, Peter is challenging the crowd’s assumptions about God. He is attempting to turn their thinking around and take them off on a different theological lane. Of course, most people don’t like their thinking challenged any more than they like circle intersections and eventually Peter and John get thrown in jail. But not before we once again see the power of the resurrected Christ at work. This morning, I want to speak about our

understanding of power, in particular God's power, and how we participate in it. It may just turn around how we do ministry and mission.

On this particular day Peter and John go to the Jerusalem Temple to pray. They encounter a regular beggar who had been lame since birth. The family dropped him off daily to beg from the would-be worshippers, which means everyone recognized him. When Peter sees the man, he tells him, **“We have no money but I what I have I give you, in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk.”** The man is instantly healed, and he begins to shout and jump and praise God in the Temple. This man's life is suddenly turned around.

When people recognize who the man is or was, it sets the whole place abuzz. The people are filled with wonder and amazement. How can this be? Then Peter asks, **“Fellow Israelites, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk?”**

On the surface this sounds like a dumb question. By all accounts a miracle has happened and the people are shocked and perhaps frightened. This is a normal reaction to such a miraculous healing, even in our day and age. It's not every day we see such dramatic cures take place, even with modern medical knowledge. But Peter is not asking the question to belittle their reaction. His question gets their attention so he can talk about Jesus Christ and the power of the resurrection.

I. POWER - RESPECT

I don't know if any of you got caught up in the **Eclipse frenzy** of this past week. Of course, if you remained in Hawley, you probably didn't see much of

an Eclipse. Thank you, cloudy skies! However, if you were able to see the eclipse clearly, you were wearing very dark filtered glasses. Why? Because the light from the sun is powerful and if you don't respect it, you can damage your retinas. Power is not a bad thing, but it can be misused.

The nineteenth-century English historian **Lord Acton** wrote, “*Power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely.*” Acton's observation is interpreted to mean that the more power someone has, the more their sense of morality is weakened. Interestingly, he wrote that in a letter to **Bishop Mandell Creighton** about how historians should judge the abuse of power by the government and the church.

Needless to say, we humans tend to not handle power very well. “**Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power,**” Don't get me wrong. We have done some marvelous things with power, including in areas of architecture, communication, transportation, agriculture, medicine, and many a modern convenience. But we have also abused power, polluted the earth, oppressed people groups, and used powers and weapons that destroy on a mass scale. When left unchecked we tend to use power selfishly and then justify our bad behavior.

Peter said, “**The God of Abraham, and Isaac and Jacob, the God of our ancestors, has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. But you rejected the holy and righteous one and asked to have a murderer given to you, and you killed the author of life...**”

For Peter, the greatest crime and abuse of power was the **crucifixion**. Look what you did to Jesus of Nazareth. You condemned an innocent man, let

go a murderer in his stead, and killed the author of life. Your human power killed the living Son of God. While technically, we did not crucify Jesus, yet every time we use power to stamp God out of our lives, we are rejecting Christ. It is a kind of crucifixion to believe we live by our own power and might. To deny God's presence and involvement is to spurn life. That ultimately leads us down the road of destruction and death. Human power unchecked is dangerous because of our sin tendencies.

II. ALTERNATIVE POWER SOURCE

Believe it or not, civilizations have been using **alternate power sources** for over 2000 years. These were mostly in the form of fire, water, and wind power. More recently we have developed alternative power sources that include **geothermal power, wave energy, hydroelectric energy, solar thermal energy and even space solar energy**. Besides these five, scientists are trying to tap energy from some interesting places, such as human movement, saltwater mixes, and even evaporation. It's exciting to see greater care for the resources of this world. The great characteristics of all these alternative energy sources is they are renewable, self-sustaining, and in most cases have little impact on the environment.

This morning, Peter points us to another alternative power source. It's called **RESURRECTION POWER**. Peter tells the crowd, **"...you killed the author of life, whom God raised from the dead. And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know, and the faith is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you."**

You know the old saying, “**You can’t keep a good man down.**” Well, that truly applies to Christ. More to the point. Peter tells us that you can’t kill God’s plans because they are backed with resurrection power. This same power has the ability to turn tragedy and sin into opportunities for new life. It brings healing on multiple levels.

The good news is the resurrection was not the end of God’s deeds, but the beginning. It began a fresh release of the Holy Spirit. That same power that raised Jesus is at work and available today. It is a renewable power, an alternative to all the other powers we attempt to garner for ourselves. The question is, “How do we tap into it?”

III. FAITH THE ACTIVATOR

One of the gifts my middle granddaughter received for Christmas was a **slime making kit**. For the uninitiated, slime is a gooey play do like blob that’s fun to squeeze. In the kit there were items to make your slime different colors, give it scent, and even add sparkly beads. You could make regular slim or fluffy cotton candy like slime. I volunteered to help her make the slim, because it was important to read the directions, a step my granddaughter was apt to neglect. Mixing the ingredients in the proper portions is essential.

In my opinion the most important ingredient was the activator. Without the activator all you end up with is a colored, smelly, glue mess. It is the activator that turns the glue into flexible, moldable slime.

The main activator of this resurrection power is called **faith**. Faith that Jesus is the Christ. Faith that Jesus is the author of life, the forgiver of sins, and the lover of our souls. Faith that Jesus has the power to grant eternal life. Faith that we can trust our lives to him. Faith is what activates and allows us to tap

into resurrection power. However, there are other ingredients that flavor our faith activator.

1. RP can't be used for **selfish pursuits** or purposes that are counter to God's. Resurrection power is to bring life, wholeness, peace, salvation to others, and glory to God, not ourselves. **RP points people to Jesus.** **The Apostles were only channels of resurrection power – not the source of it.** They were aware of their own limitations and dependence on God. God certainly works through us, but resurrection power is a movement of the spirit in order to do the ministry at hand, which is why it is usually temporary.

2. **Repentance** – Peter said, **“Repent, therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.”** Resurrection power doesn't work very well if we are consistently turning away from God. Sin and an unforgiving heart clog up our spiritual wheels so to speak. It's one of the reasons Jesus urges his followers to forgive one another. This doesn't mean we have to be perfect to tap into RP, but at least try to move in the right direction. Resurrection power works best when we are listening and walking with God.

3. **A willingness to step out in faith.**

When Peter sees the lame man, he doesn't just pass him by. Instead, he stops, looks at the man, and then says, In the name of Jesus stand up and walk. He takes the man by the hand and lifts him up. A third key to tapping into Resurrection Power is the willingness to step out in faith. Peter speaks a word of healing and hope to a man who probably didn't have a whole lot of either. Peter risks failure and being embarrassed and ridiculed for attempting such a public display of faith. What if it didn't work?

H. George Anderson, from “Stewardship As A Lifestyle writes, **“The basic problem of faith today is the question of God's existence, or, more precisely, whether or not God “makes a difference” in our life or the world. The reason it's so hard to find the answer to that question is that we do everything in our power to make sure that God won't have to make a difference.**

We guard against every unforeseen occurrence; we minimize the variables; we insure ourselves against every possible accident, including “acts of God.” In short, we try to put our life on such a secure and self-guaranteed basis that there is no room for any will other than our own. It's as though we set out to discover life in a laboratory that we had tried our best to sterilize. No wonder it is difficult to discover the “mighty acts of God.”

One of the biggest obstacles to resurrection power is our unwillingness to trust that God will act. So, we risk little and play it safe. We do no more than what we already know we can do. We only venture as far as we can see. Fear rules us instead of faith. We limit the work of the Spirit in our lives. If we risk nothing, we gain nothing.

It is time to turn our thinking around and attempt something great for Jesus. It is time to spread the good news of Jesus Christ. It is time to do something that changes lives. It is time to risk doing something in Christ that we have never done before and be channels of God's resurrection power. Turn and do something that can not possibly succeed unless God is at work. Step out in faith and see what God can do. Amen.

First Presbyterian Church in Hawley

Sunday, April 14, 2024

Second Scripture Lesson

Acts 3:11-20

¹¹While he clung to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's Portico, utterly astonished.

¹²When Peter saw it, he addressed the people, "You Israelites, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk?"

¹³The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him.

¹⁴But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you,

¹⁵and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses.

¹⁶And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you.

¹⁷"And now, friends, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers.

¹⁸In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer.

¹⁹Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out,

²⁰so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah appointed for you, that is, Jesus,

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be To God.