

“Power and Prayer”

17 January 2021 - Led by Rev. Sam Mawhinney

Welcome & Call To Worship

Hymn of Preparation: This Is Amazing Grace

Prayers of Adoration & Confession

Reading: Acts 1:1-14

Sermon:

I. Power of the Holy Spirit (v.8)

One of the influences of my father and Karen’s father on me was that I learned to use tools, like spades, saws, hammers, screwdrivers, rakes. But today, most of us don’t rake our leaves in the garden; we blow them with a powered leaf blower. And we mostly don’t use a handheld screwdriver because a powered drill is much easier and better. If there is power available, it is good to use it.

- Power gives us the ability to do something. Money gives us power to purchase, qualifications give us power to do a particular job, gifting enables us to paint or sew, to write or to act, for example.
- Power gives authority, say of an elected official or a member of an executive board.
- Power is good when used to serve others.

Jesus promises the Apostles a gift (v.4,8): *“wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about . . . You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you.”* It is a definite promise given to the Apostles by Jesus: “you will receive power”. The remainder of the book of Acts tells us more about the manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit shown in the Apostles and the Church community. We believe those who are Christians are born of the Spirit through faith in Jesus. Therefore, one of the exciting challenges in reading the Acts of the Apostles is to understand what having the Holy Spirit, having power, means for ARPC. I pray we’ll have conversations about that with each other and be excited to see what the Holy Spirit is doing and will do among us. So let’s start the conversation.

- A. Power is a God-given gift.** We are gifted power. Power is the ability to do, so we are gifted by God with an ability to do something. He gives us authority to do something and He gives it for our good, that we might do good to others. What is that? It is the ability to become and live as a Christian. Think through every aspect of the Christian life - it would be impossible without the power of the Holy Spirit. We come to faith by the power of conviction of sin, which is the work of the Holy Spirit as Jesus told the apostles. The ability to see Jesus and believe is a gift of God as our eyes are opened to the truth of the word of God. Our ability to be like Jesus, our sanctification, comes from the power of the Spirit producing the fruit of Jesus’ life in our lives. And our gifting, which allows us to serve, is given by the Holy Spirit. The power to become and live as a Christian comes by the power of the Holy Spirit.

- B. **Power is God personally.** We do not receive a force but a person. He (the Spirit) is the third person of the Trinity and He brings the person of Jesus to dwell in us. The mystery of the Trinity is why Jesus was able to say, "I will never leave you or forsake you" and "I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you." The Holy Spirit brings the presence of Jesus. I was having a difficult day one morning this week and was helped by a Matt Redman song called "Never Once" - never once did we walk alone. That is the personal presence of the Holy Spirit. The power of the Holy Spirit brings the unshakeable presence of God, allowing us to know God as Father and call Him "Daddy", to experience Him as the "Good Shepherd" who walks with and leads us in life.
- C. **Power gives authority.** We see this best illustrated in the life of Jesus. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and filled with the Holy Spirit and He established on earth the rule of the Kingdom of God. To demonstrate this, the inauguration of the Kingdom was accompanied by wonderful signs and wonders (miracles), which we read about in the Gospels. If you read the first five chapters of Mark's gospel, for example, you will see that Jesus, filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, called people to follow and they did. He healed the sick, cast out evil demons, controlled nature, walked on water, stilled storms, did miracles, turned water into wine, fed 5000+ with a packed lunch and had 12 baskets left over. He raised the dead and He forgave sin. The purpose of the life of Jesus was to establish the Kingdom of God in the hearts of men and women, beginning in Jerusalem and expanding in ever increasing circles to establish it worldwide.
- D. **Power is in the gospel.** The Bible is clear that the greatest sign was the raising of the dead, and so we see His power best on the cross and in the resurrection (Romans 1:4; Ephesians 2:6). The power of the Holy Spirit is located for us in the gospel, the word of God. The power to become a Christian, the power to live as a Christian and the power to change to be like Jesus - that is resurrection power.

Romans 1:16: "I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes".

1 Corinthians 1:18: "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

Ephesians 3:20: "Now to Him who is able to immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine according to His power that is at work in us."

The gospel is the power that brings people from death to life; it is the power that changes the sinful nature to be more like Christ; it is the power that will transform our earthly, dying body into the resurrection body that will live forever in fellowship with God. It is the power to become a Christian, to live as a Christian and to bring us through death to glory. We have that power.

- E. **Power to witness.** "You will be my witnesses" - the power of the Holy Spirit gives us both the authority and the ability to tell the world of Jesus and His rule in our lives. I realise that witnessing is a scary thing. I was struck by this quote from the prophet Isaiah, used by Paul in his wrestling with Jewish sceptics: "*how beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news*" (52:7). Speaking of Jesus is a beautiful thing, testifying to what He has done for us. This is possible because of the power of the

Holy Spirit. The power of the Holy Spirit is given to the Church so that she would have the authority and ability to be witnesses of Jesus through the sharing of the gospel. This informs all we do.

II. Prayer (v.14)

When we consider a power tool, it works because it is plugged in to the electricity supply or connected to a battery, a source of power. Howard Marshall comments, “the relationship between the church and power is prayer.” We are often hard on the apostles for being slow to learn, yet as they come to terms with the reality of Jesus’ having gone into heaven and walk back to Jerusalem, they turn to prayer. Luke reports (v.14), “*all joined together constantly in prayer.*”

He names the eleven, but that isn’t the whole church. There are the women (those who followed Jesus whose names are noted earlier in Luke 8:2-3), Mary, Jesus’ earthly mother, and His brothers James, Joseph (Joses), Judas, and Simon (and His sisters - Mark 6:3). This is lovely to hear, because the Scriptures are clear that Jesus’ earthly family were very sceptical about their unusual son and brother; during most of His life on earth, they didn’t believe - but now they do! That is an encouragement to keep witnessing and praying for our family members.

We must let that phrase in v.14 seep into our minds and obey its challenge: “*they all joined together constantly in prayer.*” The priority of the church in this period of waiting was to pray for the gift God promises to the church - the gift of the Holy Spirit. And if the church is to have the power to do the work of witnessing to Jesus’ rule in our hearts and within the Kingdom of God, we must continue as they did and pray. I want to emphasise again the need for prayer in ARPC and encourage everyone, all members to join together in prayer.

In saying this, I am not saying we are prayerless or that we do not already know and believe in the priority of prayer. However, I want us to think afresh about praying in expectation for the power of God in our Church.

Calvin notes the two essentials of prayer are togetherness and perseverance (constancy) and that is what we note here in v.14. They all joined together . . . in prayer. This week, I listened to a radio interview with the chief executive of Limerick Hospital about the enormous pressure the staff are under, which we absolutely recognise. She said the key to them getting through was that they were a team, working together for this purpose. The early Church was united, together, and the focus of that unity was the person and work of the Lord Jesus. He had taken His leave, but they knew He had promised not to leave them and would be with them through the Holy Spirit. They loved Him and wanted to experience the reality of His presence in power. The word “constantly” Calvin noted as perseverance and the ESV translates as “devoted”. It is our love for Jesus that makes speaking to and developing a relationship with Him one of devoted constancy. (Remember Greyfriars Bobby, the Skye Terrier who stayed with his master even after the master had died.) The early Church was focused on Jesus and the work He had for them to do. They knew they needed His powerful presence to get it done; therefore, they came together and prayed.

I accept that when this prospect of prayer is highlighted, we most likely think negatively, considering it to be a burden (work) and joyless. Yet that is not the testimony of the Apostles and early church. “*Then they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple praising God*” (Luke 24:52). Remember: Jesus is not

dead, nor is He absent, nor powerless. The Apostles and the church believed that and with joyful excitement began the task of praying for power to continue His work and witness.

As I say and believe, we are not a prayerless church, but are we, in reality, far from the deep first love experience of the early Church in worship and prayer? If the Spirit is convicting us in this matter, then let's collectively repent and ask God to forgive us for our making excuses regarding prayer, for the joyless, burdensome, unbelieving thing we have made it. Then let us make prayer a priority. It was a priority for the Apostles (6:4) and for the church members (2:42), and it should be for us.

So, let us consider some ways this might be done.

- **Church Prayer Meeting:** Sunday 7-8pm on Zoom. The link is in the Minister's letter and our time is guided.
- **Weekly prayer notes** (from our prayer coordinator): Each week, Winnie compiles a short list of prayer topics for the church, PCI and world. They are used in the 3D groups and by a number of us, as well as those who once were part of ARPC. Our being together in prayer would be enhanced if we all signed up to receiving them and using them at least once a week. That would be a commitment of togetherness in prayer.
- **3D Groups - "Developing prayer-filled relationships":** As you know, we are excited about the 3D groups and one of the three D's is "developing prayer-filled relationships". This is the starting point of every relationship in the Church, as seen in the early Church. We are Jesus' people, we involve Him in our lives and are happy to do so because, as Matt Redman reminded me this week in a song, "You are good, You are good, and Your loves endures."

Togetherness and constancy in prayer cultivates and develops prayer into our everyday conversations. I know that we speak with each other often on the phone, via What's App, Skype, Zoom, etc. Let's include Jesus in these. Invite Him through prayer to work in the people and situations we talk about. I really appreciate when people pray for me and it is always helpful, even to the unbeliever, to introduce Jesus to them and into the situation.

Lastly, we pray not only based on a love for the Lord Jesus, but because He has promised us that He hears and will answer. Jesus, in His final hours with the disciples before His death, said to the Apostles, "*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit - fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: love each other*" (John 15:16-17).

The power of the Holy Spirit is accessed by prayer.

Praise: IPH 195 To Be In Your Presence

Prayers for Others

Announcements

Closing Hymn: Holy Spirit, Living Breath Of God

Benediction: Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or imagine, according to the power at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:20-21)

Discussion & Application:

Discuss the challenges of living as a Christian and Church life.

How does the power of the Holy Spirit help us?

Discuss ways the collective prayer life of ARPC could be improved.