

In Power and Authority We Are Sent

Luke 9:1-6

Rev. Jeff Chapman ~ June 17, 2018 ~ Faith Presbyterian Church

¹Then Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, ²and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. ³He said to them, “Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money—not even an extra tunic. ⁴Whatever house you enter, stay there, and leave from there. ⁵Wherever they do not welcome you, as you are leaving that town shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.” ⁶They departed and went through the villages, bringing the good news and curing diseases everywhere. (Luke 9:1-6, NRSV)

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It happened again the other day. I’m at an event which needed the weather to cooperate and the weather wasn’t cooperating. A few of the people who were there who knew that I was a pastor in my spare time suggested that I use some of my special connections “upstairs” (their word, not mine) to see if we might facilitate a more favorable forecast for the afternoon. They were half joking, which means they were half serious. Did you know that pastors have insider status and, therefore, special powers when it comes to influencing the weather? It was certainly news to me.

My friends had one thing right. There is indeed a God in heaven who controls the weather, or at least has the power to control the weather when he chooses to do so. Furthermore, the testimony of Luke’s Gospel is that this God came to earth at a specific point in history in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ, in whom we saw the power and authority of heaven embodied in a carpenter’s son from Nazareth. Remember the story a couple of weeks ago when the disciples are in a boat in the middle of the lake in the middle of a violent storm about to drown. Jesus simply speaks the word and the wind and the waves disappear at once. Then Jesus meets a man possessed by a legion of demons and, with another word, casts out the evil and sets the man at peace. Last week we watched Jesus remove 12-year-old shame and sickness from a woman with only a touch and a word, and then turn around and bring a dead girl back to life in a way that made it look like he was simply waking her up from a nap.

When you watch the way Jesus behaves in the Gospels you are left with the distinct impression that this man behaves like a king. Think about it this way. You’ve

never met an actual king, but you know enough about them to know that true royalty – not the kind we have in England today but *true* royalty – has absolute power and authority. In his kingdom, a King’s will goes unchallenged. He is sovereign within his realm. What he says goes. If the king doesn’t like you and wants to be rid of you, off with your head. No questions asked. If the king declares that everybody must wear green, everybody wears green. If the king wants more taxes the king gets more taxes. A kingdom is not a democracy. In a kingdom the will of one person becomes reality, the one person who sits on the throne.

Jesus, you see, is a King. Specifically, he is King of Kings. And he has come to our world to establish a kingdom, the Kingdom of God. It’s a very different sort of kingdom than the ones we have known on this earth, but it is still a kingdom in the sense that within the Kingdom of God the will of the King is sovereign. Storms that drown people are not the will of this King and so they are quieted. Demons that inhabit people are also not in the will of this King, so they are banished. Sickness and shame have no place in this kingdom, so they are snuffed out. Death itself is expelled from this kingdom.

Remember when Jesus declared this at the beginning of his public ministry, “**The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.**”¹ There is so much in our world today that is contrary to the will of God. But the declaration of the Christian Gospel is that God is on the move working to make everything new again and right again. And not from a distance! The King himself has come into our world and taken everything in the world that is not of him, ultimately sin and death, taken it all upon himself on the cross so that it would be overcome once and for all. Three days later when Christ rose from the dead, the fuse was then lit for the in-breaking of God’s Kingdom in the world, heaven coming to earth as Jesus once taught us to pray. The promise is that a day will come when Christ will return in glory and on that day every last thing on this earth that stands against the will of the King will be banished because every square inch of creation will finally and forever be reclaimed as the Kingdom of God. Again, the definition of a kingdom is the realm in which the King’s will is unchallenged. In the Kingdom of God the will of God

¹ Mark 1:15, NRSV

becomes reality. Everything is – and will be! – as God wants it to be.

Do you understand what this means? Let me make it concrete. Violence is not God's will. Poverty and hunger are not God's will. People living on the streets; that's not God's will. Mental illness is not God's will. Racism is not God's will. Nation against nation, tribe against tribe, barriers that separate people one from another, these are not God's will. Cancer is not God's will. Heart disease, diabetes, paralysis, blindness, none of it is God's will. Hatred, jealousy, betrayal, greed, pride, resentment, not God's will. Shame is not God's will, ever. Addiction is not God's will. Suicide is not God's will. Pain is not God's will. Grief is not God's will. Loneliness is not God's will. Gravesites are not God's will! They never have been and never will be. And any time or place that any one of these things is overcome, it is there on this earth that you discover the very Kingdom of Heaven having broken in. And one day, maybe sooner than we realize, heaven will break in fully and cover the earth the waters cover the sea.² Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven!

Now with all this in mind, I want you to notice something amazing here in our text for this morning. Listen again to how it begins: **“Then Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal.”** Did you catch it? King Jesus bestows upon his subjects (that is, his disciples) the same power and authority that he has over that in this world which is not of his kingdom – mainly evil and illness – and then sends them out into the world to join him in the establishment of his kingdom. This is, in fact, Christian discipleship, doing what Jesus is doing. Jesus heals; his disciples heal. Jesus loves the outcast; his disciples love the outcast. Jesus confronts and overcomes evil; his disciples do the same. Jesus forgives; his disciples forgive. Jesus loves his enemies; his disciples love their enemies.

You see, one thing we have to overcome in the contemporary church is this very unbiblical and, frankly, unhelpful idea that being a Christian is mostly about just believing all the right things about Jesus. Now don't misunderstand me, biblical theology is critical. I work overtime to make sure I preach the truth about God, about us, about life, in accordance with how the message of the Bible declares the truth. Right

thinking about God is essential. But right thinking always must lead to right living; information must lead to transformation. In other words, if you truly believe what the Bible teaches us *about* Christ it will then transform the way you live *in and for* Christ. Specifically, your life will begin to increasingly resemble Christ's life so that bit by bit the sole mission of your life will become the sole mission of his life, which was the establishment of God's Kingdom here on earth.

We planted an orange tree in our back yard a couple years ago. It was very small when we stuck it in the ground. Last summer it was bigger. This summer it's even bigger. Still no oranges, but I see progress. But the tree is on the clock. We didn't plant that tree for shade or ornamental value. We planted it to produce oranges. So if several more years go by and this orange tree doesn't produce any oranges, it may find its way into the yard waste bin. I'm patient, but my patience has a limit. If you advertise yourself as an orange tree, than you need to eventually produce some oranges!

Consider that Jesus said the same thing about us. Speaking about how to discern his true disciples from false disciples in the Sermon on the Mount he declared, **“Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.”**³ If we advertise ourselves as Christians but do not, over time, demonstrate in our lives that we, by his grace, are producing the fruit of seeing our lives increasingly resemble his life in who we are and what we do, then what good is our faith? This warning ought to prompt us to honestly examine our lives, asking ourselves, “Compared to last season, how does my life look more like Christ this season? Am I more like him in the way I love now than I was before? Am I more able to do the things he did than I was before?”

The Great Commission is the name the church has long given to the last recorded words Jesus spoke on this earth. In Matthew 28 Jesus declares to his disciples,

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”⁴

It would be good for you to know that our leadership has been wrestling with these verses all year long. If

² Reference the vision in Isaiah 11:9, **“They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.”**

³ Matthew 7:19-20, NIV

⁴ Matthew 28:18-20, NRSV

this truly is the *Great* Commission given to the church, constituting our central calling as Jesus' disciples in this life, then we need to know what it's about. Simply put, the church's main job is to make disciples. We don't do this on our own authority, of course, but on the authority of the Risen Christ who has all authority in heaven and on earth. He is King!

But what does it mean to be a disciple. Well, in the Great Commission Jesus says it means two things.

First, a disciple of Jesus is one who is baptized in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Put another way, this is the man or woman who, by grace and through faith, has been included in the family of God. When my kids were born or adopted, they took on the name of our family. Isabel *Chapman*. Noel *Chapman*. Godebo *Chapman*. Bereket *Chapman*. Part of what that means is that they are now free to enjoy all the privileges and benefits of our family. They live in our house free of charge...for now. They eat out of our refrigerator and have a place at our dinner table. They go to school on our dime. More importantly, they are loved by us like no other human beings on the planet are loved by us, loved as unconditionally as any human being can love another. Esther and I would die for our kids.

That is what baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit means, but in an infinitely greater sense. When you become a Christian, one who places your ultimate devotion and affection in Christ as your Lord and Savior, you are welcomed into the very family of God to enjoy all the privileges and benefits of that family. Every blessing the Father shares with the Son is passed on to you in turn. Life. Joy. Peace. You are cherished as a beloved son, a beloved daughter, delighted in for all time no matter what. That is the first thing it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

But it doesn't end there, because membership in a family brings with it not only privileges but responsibilities. As a part of my family, for example, each of my children has to share in the maintenance of our household. That translates into chores. As a child of ours you are also expected to treat others in the Chapman family with respect and kindness. When you are out in public, you are to represent our family in certain ways. You respect authority when authority is behaving as it should. You work hard in school. You follow the traffic laws. You tell the truth. You cheer against the Dodgers. It's what Chapmans do.

Jesus is clear that his family operates the same way. Yes, Christians are baptized into the very community of God with all its intrinsic blessings and privileges, but that baptism also carries with it great responsibility.

Specifically, Jesus says that when the church makes disciples we are to be **“teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.”** The orange tree has to bear fruit. If we are Christians, then our lives must increasingly resemble Christ's life. We are his representatives in this world. When we go out into public we are to represent him in certain ways. We heal others. We share good news. We love enemies. We look out for the poor. We give generously. It's what Christians do. Basically, we join our King Jesus, who has all authority in heaven and earth and is with us always, in the establishment of his Kingdom on this earth.

With all this in mind, watch what happens here in our text this morning. *Jesus' disciples are sent out into the world with authority and power.* The same is true of us, though the specifics of our part of the mission may not be exactly the same as theirs. But in both cases, as the church is sent out into the world we go with Jesus' authority. In the same way a child can act in the stead of her parent, or an ambassador can act in the stead of his government, we go into the world authorized to act in the stead of our Lord because our very identity is that of sons and daughters of God, ambassadors of Christ. In Galatians 5:20, Paul writes, **“We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.”**⁵ He is!

But not only authority, we also go with power. When we are sent out into the world this week Christ, as he promised, will be with us. And not only with us but, by the Spirit, within us. When we then take up the responsibilities of God's family and, in faith and by grace, act in obedience, we will find that God's power is there to help us do what he himself did. We pray for healing and we should expect to see healing. When we offer forgiveness it will be granted. When we love enemies we will see hearts changed, our hearts if not the hearts of our enemies as well. We declare good news and lives will be transformed as a result. Paul writes in Galatians 2:20, **“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.”**⁶ When we go out as disciples of Christ, we go out with Christ!

Consider an analogy. Let's say your phone goes out one day and you call the phone company. That afternoon two technicians show up at your door. You don't know either of them. Never seen them before. But they are each wearing a uniform and name badge printed with the name and colors of the phone company. Their repair truck also has the logo of the company painted on the

⁵ NIV

⁶ NIV

side. These things are symbols of their authority to act on behalf of AT&T. So you let them in.

But that's not enough, right? What good is authority without power? Thankfully, each of them also wears a tool belt full of tools and showed up with a van full of even more tools. On top of that, they have been trained by the company to fix problems like the one you are experiencing. That means that they not only have the authority to represent the phone company but have been given the power to act on behalf of the phone company to actually fix my phone.

Maybe that helps you understand what happens when Jesus sends his disciples out into the world. We go with authority, marked in baptism as his children. But we also go in power, filled with the Spirit so that when we obey what Christ has commanded us to do, Christ works through us to build his Kingdom. And as we go there are two things we seek to accomplish. Jesus makes this clear at the end of verse 2 when Luke tells us that he sent his disciples out to **“proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal.”**

It's the same with us. Think about this with me for a moment. When we go out into the world this week we are sent first to proclaim the kingdom of God, to declare to those we meet that God, through Christ, is at work setting all things right in this world. And we have such good news to share! Right? Let's be specific. What good news do we, as followers of Jesus, have to share with the rest of the world who doesn't know Jesus? (*Take ideas from the congregation here.*)

As we share good news, we are also called by Christ to bring healing. To love enemies so that hatred can be healed. To forgive those who have done us wrong so that bitterness and resentment can be healed. To welcome in strangers so that loneliness can be healed. To care for and pray for the sick so that bodies can be healed, sometimes miraculously. To give food so that hunger can be healed, clean water so that thirst can be healed, employment so that dignity can be healed, education so that ignorance can be healed.

As the disciples are sent here in Luke to share good news and to heal, Jesus gives them some specific guidance that, in some ways, guides us as we go as well. Let me just touch on three things.

First, Jesus tells them, **“Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money – not even an extra tunic.”** This is not a one-size-fits-all-command for all disciples in all times. There were, in fact, other instances in the Gospels where Jesus instructs his disciples to take supplies. Still, there is a reminder here for us all that when God sends us out to

join him in building his kingdom we don't need to load ourselves up with equipment. *We* are the equipment. If we are humble and willing to be sent, that is all that Christ needs. He will provide the rest.

I love how Dallas Willard puts it,

No special talents, personal skills, educational programs, money or possessions are required to bring this to pass. We do not have to purify or enforce some legalistic system. Just ordinary people who are his apprentices, gathered in the name of Jesus and immersed in his presence, and taking steps of inward transformation as they put on the character of Christ: that is all that is required.⁷

Second, as we go we can trust Christ for the results. Jesus tells his disciples, **“Wherever they do not welcome you, as you are leaving that town shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.”** As you go to declare good news and offer healing, some people will receive you with hospitality and others will receive you with hostility. We cannot control the response. When we as Christ's ambassadors are received well, we go in and serve, and love, and offer hope. Where we are not received well, we are to walk away and refuse to take it personally as we do. I'm reminded of an old Hasidic saying that goes, “It is not within our power to place the divine teachings directly in someone else's heart. All that we can do place them on the surface of the heart so that when the heart breaks they will drop in.”⁸ Our part is simply to share good news and offer healing. The rest is in God's hands.

Finally, when we go we must be assured that we will see victory. In verse 6 Luke reports, **“They departed and went through the villages, bringing the good news and curing disease everywhere.”** The 16th century Spanish mystic Teresa of Avila once declared, “I know the power obedience has of making things easy which seem impossible.” When we, in faith, obey and follow Christ out into the world to share in the building of his kingdom here on earth we go marked by his authority and full of his power because he, himself, is with us. How then can we not see victory? We will! We will see God work, sometimes in undeniable ways but, more often, in more subtle and ordinary ways that few others may notice even in the moment.

The other day I was waiting with my son in the cashier line at Home Depot. The gentleman just ahead of us

⁷ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart* (NavPress, 2002), 251.

⁸ Source unknown.

was signing up for a new Home Depot credit card so the line was stalled. I wasn't in a hurry so we waited patiently. After five minutes, however, the cashier opened up in the next line and we hustled over, paid for my items, and left the store. As we pushed our cart through the parking lot to my truck, I suddenly noticed that same man, the one with the new credit card, approaching me. He didn't look happy.

At first I assumed that he was going to apologize for holding up the line. I was prepared to assure him it was no big deal, that we weren't in a hurry anyway. I was surprised when instead he accused me of being rude, not only to him but to the cashier. I had rolled my eyes at him, he said. I'd made it all-to-clear how annoyed I was that he was holding up the line and now he wanted to make sure that I understood such behavior was unacceptable. He deserved an apology, as did the cashier back inside.

On another day he might have been right. If I'm honest, there have been times when I have stood annoyed in line behind others I believe are unnecessarily holding things up. My eyes may have even rolled a time or two. But not that day. Honestly, I was genuinely stunned because of how badly he had misread my body language. I didn't deserve this attack. His unkindness was not justified. What right did he have to accuse me of these things without first asking me if they were true? He didn't know a thing about me.

I tell you this story because it's a perfect example of the countless opportunities we have each ordinary day to join Christ in the building of his Kingdom in this world. It is not God's will that these sorts of hostile, hateful interactions take place between people he loves, and he loves all people. I stood there in that parking lot in the authority of Christ, full of his power, because he is my Lord and Savior, my King. I am his child. With his help, and with his leading, the opportunity presented itself for me to act as Jesus would act if he were in my shoes because, in a way, he is in my shoes. This was a kingdom moment to return kindness for unkindness, to love those who hate, to embrace humility rather than pride, all in an ordinary, every-day encounter in the parking lot of Home Depot. Among other places, that's where the Kingdom of God can break in, through those who are willing to represent the King.

I know you're wondering how I responded. That's really not the point, but I'll tell you this much, I wish I had the encounter to do over again. Fortunately I will, a thousand times over most likely. As will you as we each are sent, even today, into the world with the power and authority of the King who goes before us and with us at all times to establish his kingdom on this earth. Amen.



The Next Step

A resource for Life Groups and/or personal application

1. Read Luke 9:1-6 again. What stands out to you here?
2. Luke tells us that Jesus gave power and authority to his disciples. What does that mean? Power to do what? Authority over who or what?
3. Do you imagine yourself today as a disciple of Jesus full of his power and carrying his authority with you? Why or why not?
4. Luke tells us that those first disciples were sent out by Jesus to "proclaim the kingdom of God." What does that mean? How would you define the kingdom of God?
5. Remember the example of the orange tree. How does that compare to your life? As you look back over the last few years can you see yourself growing more like Christ, producing the same fruit in your life that he produced in his life?
6. Share a time recently when you had an opportunity to represent Christ and contribute to the building of his kingdom. Maybe it even happened in an ordinary place like the parking lot of Home Depot.
7. Where do you sense God is calling you today to go and be his representative, to share good news and extend healing?

Table to Table Question

A question for kids and adults to answer together

Do you think that God has jobs for us to do in this world?
What job do you think he has for you to do?