

Chapel Hill United Church of Christ

Sunday Sermon

# Clothed With Power

April 26, 2009

Acts 3:1-13a, 16  
Luke 24:36b-49

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*“And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”*

Prayer: Holy God, as you reveal to us your word, please also let us understand it in the way you wish, so we may be empowered to serve you. Amen.

Over the years, have you noticed how the word ‘power’ is used in several different places? There’s the power-broker, that high end Wall Street big wig. There are power-books also known as ‘self help’ books. Power-surges can threaten computers. There’s power-steering on cars and power-tools in the shed. You can go on a power-trip, or if your obsessed with power, you’re called a power-freak. There are power-drinks, power-lunches, power walks, and Norma’s favorite, power-naps! I wish it were my favorite, too!

Today, both our Bible texts invite us to consider a new use of the word ‘power’— the Power-Spirit! In the story from Acts, Peter and John say to the lame man, “In the name of Jesus Christ, stand up and walk!” Power-Spirit at work! And the man gets up and starts “walking and leaping and

praising God!” Later Peter and John affirm that it is God’s power at work in the name of Jesus. It’s God’s power at work in their words. It’s God’s power at work in the faith one has in God through Jesus Christ.

In Luke’s text, we have a resurrection story of Jesus alive. The disciples could see him, touch him, watch him eat some food. Power-Spirit at work! Jesus opened their minds to understand scripture—Power-Spirit at work. Then he promises to send the Power-Spirit upon them, and it would clothe them with power from on high. Power-Spirit at work! They were clothed with God’s Spirit, and marvelous things occurred, such as the lame man being healed, and whole households coming to Christ.

I invite us to remember that Christ Jesus has not stopped sending us the Holy Spirit. It continues to come to each of us and to clothe us with power from on high.

But, what does that mean exactly? It certainly doesn’t mean that we have our own personal power at our fingertips that will do whatever we want when we want—like ‘the Force’ in *Star Wars*. We can’t make the light saber that is sitting over there magically fly to our hand... we can’t raise a ship out of water at our command. For all the good understandings we can gain about God from ‘the Force’ in *Star Wars*, individualized power is a major

flaw, in my opinion.

Being clothed with power from on high does mean that God's Holy Spirit is in us. It can work through us doing what God wills, not what we will necessarily. Clothed with power means that we are instruments who are used by God. When we are clothed with power from on high, we become God's partners, involved with what God is doing.

I like the old story about a country preacher who was traveling around the countryside, and he came upon a farm of one of his parishioners. He got out of his truck and began to walk in the fields. He noticed how well they were kept, how the weeds were non-existent, and the crops were full and lush. At the end of the row, the preacher came upon the farmer who was working and had sweat coming off his brow. The preacher said, "My goodness, farmer! God has blessed you with a marvelous farm! It is wonderful! Lush and beautiful! How great is our God!" "Yes, God has blessed me," said the farmer, "but, you should have seen it when God was taking care of it by himself."

God's power always works better when it is in partnership with us. We are the givers of God's care when we care for one another. That's why I believe in the Building Bridges Committee so much. Our visiting teams go

to people who are going through difficult times, or to those in the hospitals, or those who are lonely. They are building bridges. They are expressing God's care. We are the bearers of God's good news in Christ when we proclaim God's promise in Christ to others. That is one reason why our Mid-Week program has been so successful over the last seven years. God's good news is proclaimed here!

We are the servants of love, the bringers of hope when we welcome every person here in our church without judgment or distinction. We are clothed with the Holy Spirit's power and are partners with God.

God's Holy Spirit works through us, and because of that, we do not need to worry... about anything. We don't need to panic in a rough economy, despite the media's incessant hype about foreclosures, unemployment, interest rates, home values, stocks falling, and all the rest. If Wall Street would not panic so much and trust in God instead of greed, then Washington D.C.'s politicians wouldn't panic so much. And, if the politicians wouldn't panic so much, the panic-hysteria portrayed by the media wouldn't be nearly as much. And we wouldn't be reminded of our fear so much and lose our faith in God.

Fear is the antithesis of hope. I heard an economist speaking the other

day on the radio. He said that he's been preaching the message over and over again that the economy will come back. It will come back. He's been on Good Morning America touting this message. But two of his well-educated friends who are economic analysts say that the prospects are grim. All of a sudden fear flowed over him, and his hope faded away. *What if we DO lose it all? What if we ARE heading for another Great Depression.* He went home and shared his fears with his wife, who looked at him and said, "Who are you, and what have you done with my husband?" Fear is the antithesis of hope. Panic is the antithesis of faith.

Our hope rests in our faith that God is still speaking, in our belief that Christ Jesus is still sending us the Holy Spirit, and in our understanding that we are still being clothed with power from on high. Speak and proclaim this message uncompromisingly, that hope is found not in what we own, not in what we've achieved, not in fear of the future. Our hope is found by having faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Jesus, and our God. If there is no faith in God for tomorrow, then there is no power in people for today. Being clothed with power from on high gives us faith and hope for our future.

Being clothed this way also gives us encouragement to live and walk in God's ways and not our ways. God's ways, even though unconventional at

times, are filled with respect for others and integrity for one's self. God's ways seek to break down walls and build up bridges, bringing restoration and reconciliation to broken or cold relationships.

Over the years there has been an understanding that the President of the United States doesn't bow to anyone. However, when President Obama met the King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, it is clear that he bowed honoring this world leader. Also on that trip, President Obama was seen being jovial with Hugo Chávez, Venezuela's dictator and received a book from him.

Over the years we in the USA have lived in the mentality that peace is maintained through strength. My point is not about the rightness or wrongness of President Obama's gestures, nor is it about political ideologies or parties. Whether one is for Obama or not, doesn't matter. My point is that even though it remains to be seen how effective Obama's trip will be, such an effort to show respect, to breathe new life into cold and tense relationships, to extend a hand of goodwill does in fact clothe one with more power than the peace through strength model, in my opinion. Why? Because it's closer to the way that God in Christ has taught, and we are asked to have faith in God's way—all the time.

God's way finds power when one is clothed with love. God's way

discovers strength when respect is shown. God's way grows healthy clout when one is humble. And, lo and behold, God's way of love and light spreads from one person to another, and many others are clothed with power from on high so that the good news continues.

Remember our Christmas Eve worship services? How we take the light from one candle and light each other's candles? In this way, the light is spread throughout the whole sanctuary. That is what it means to be clothed with power. We receive it and spread it around. The flames don't go out; rather they are increased exponentially. That's the way it works in our church—we spread the light around.

That's the way it can work in our families—we treat each other with respect and love, and it goes around again.

That's the way global relationships with other nations can work, too—the door gets opened to decent human relationships, a willingness to sit down and listen and respect each other can happen. Such good will gets spread around.

That's the way it is supposed to work in our capitalistic economy, too. You have a job for someone to do or you need a service performed, and you pay someone for their services, they pay their vendors, the vendors pay

companies, companies pay its workers, workers pay for services, and the goodness goes around, jobs are created, and the economy makes a comeback.

Let's never forget that the Power-Spirit is at work, always. We are its partners spreading light and love around. May our prayer be the lyrics of this song as we leave worship today: "Lord, the light of your love is shining, in the midst of the darkness shining." May we be clothed with power so that we may have hope, so that we may have faith that the Light of the World will shine upon us and set us free by this truth now brought to us through him.

Please stand and sing. Amen.