

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
COMPASS, PA

January 29, 2023 – EPIPHANY 4 / YR. A

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Sermon: “*Stay Plugged in to the Power of God*”

Micah 6:1-8 (What does the Lord require? Do justice, love mercy, walk humbly)
Psalm 15 (Those who are blameless may dwell with God)
1 Corinthians 1:18-31 (The message of the Cross is foolishness to those perishing)
St. Matthew 5:1-12 (Jesus teaches the Beatitudes)

Both this Sunday’s Epistle lesson from St. Paul’s first letter to the Church at Corinth began with, and Last Sunday’s Epistle lesson ended with, these words: “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those that are perishing; but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” It seems that if we hear this twice, then the Lord wants us to really look into the meaning of this Scripture for our lives.

Remember the Energizer Bunny TV commercials? You know, where the little pink rabbit in sunglasses appears beating a drum, and the announcer says, “It’s *still* going!” And, as the rabbit charges across the desert, over mountains, and down lonely highways, nothing seems to stop the Energizer Bunny. “It’s still going, and going, and *going* . . .” Now, the point of the commercial was not the bunny—as cute as he may be—it’s about the battery. Because, it’s imperative to have good batteries.

Why? Weak batteries cause problems. A truck with a drained battery won’t start. Flashlights will go dim, portable radios will fade out. Wireless phones with weak batteries will have static-filled connections and cell phones will shut themselves down. Why? because the battery is the power source. Yet even a good battery is only half the solution.

A man was having trouble getting his car started. Every time he would turn on the ignition he would get that dreaded, empty, “clicking sound.” So, naturally he thought the battery was dead. Without checking with anyone, he sent his son to purchase a new battery. When his son returned, they put the battery in and turned the key. But there was the dreaded clicking sound—again.

Finally, he called a mechanic, who took one look at the cable ends and analyzed the problem: “Sir,” he said, “you have a good battery but your cables are bad.” That day the man learned a very valuable lesson about his car: Always make sure you have a good connection to the battery.

Dear friends, we too, as redeemed believers, must make sure we have a good connection to *our* power source. Scripture declares that source is the Cross of Christ. Today’s Epistle reminds us for those who believe, it is the very power of God for every Christian to live in, by, and through the Holy Spirit. And like the car battery, we must have clear and solid contacts in order to keep that power flowing.

How do we do that? We prayerfully aspire to being in harmony with God’s will for us, as revealed in Holy Scripture; in prayer; through the wisdom of our fellow Christians; and through the Holy Spirit’s direct revelation to our minds and hearts. At the Annual Meeting, I mentioned that the Bible is God talking to us, and prayer is us talking to God. If we are not connected to God daily in a reciprocal relationship nourished by prayer and/or Bible reading, our “contacts” to the power source will grow rusty. Add to that, any unrepentant sin or unforgiveness, and the contacts will become completely corroded. And we know that corrosion, whether in the cable contacts or the battery itself, causes a complete power failure. So, as followers of Christ, we must maintain a clear and uninterrupted connection to God.

Far too many go through life hearing the dreaded “clicking sound.” There’s power under the hood, but that power can’t get through to the engine. Every time they switch on, all they hear is empty clicking. And, in our Epistle lesson for today, St. Paul says that for those outside the faith, Christ crucified and His Holy Cross seem to be nothing but foolishness. “Who cares about some dead guy nailed to a tree, a couple thousand years ago?” is basically their thought process. That is why St. Paul encourages the Church in Corinth to have godly wisdom and *share the truth, the eternal importance*, of the Cross of Christ with those who are struggling in unbelief and powerlessness.

But what about that “foolishness” of which Paul writes? Perhaps it is Christ’s command to love our enemies or pray for those who hurt us. Or possibly, it’s our conviction that “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). Maybe it’s our assurance that we will be blessed when the world reviles us, or persecutes us, or utters all manner of evil against us falsely—as Jesus talks about in today’s Gospel lesson. Or could it be to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God? (as the Old Testament prophet Micah urges us to do).

Let’s hear again God’s word for us today: “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing; but unto us who are being saved it is the power of God.” When St. Paul speaks of the Cross as the power source, he’s referring to what the Cross symbolizes: Christ’s sacrificial death for our sins; His blood shed on Calvary; His death, burial, and resurrection. Through the power of God, the crucifixion of Christ as a symbol of shame and death was transformed into the unshakeable reality of victory over death and life eternal.

This truth reminds me of a visual that some churches come up with during Holy Week: They take the bare wooden cross of Good Friday, stark and foreboding, then decorate it with bright, colorful flowers, garlands, and ribbons, for Easter morning. A good image to keep in mind when we’re going through tough times and are concerned God can’t turn our circumstances around.

Paul’s preaching about Christ and His crucifixion was, for the Jews, “a stumbling block.” Their strict monotheism did not allow for God’s quote-unquote “Son” to come to earth and die as a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. And for the Greeks, it was “foolishness.” They too, could not believe in a God who would come to earth and die. No philosophical arguments would cover that one! But, says Paul, to those who are called, whether Jew or Greek—or any other Gentile—Christ is salvation, Christ is the answer. He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. He is the chief cornerstone of our faith. The enduring legacy of the Cross is our power source; it is our spiritual energizer that just keeps us going, and going, and *going* ...

And then there are others who are simply hooked up to the *wrong* power source; they’re trying to use a six-volt battery to empower a twelve-volt life. Far too many are depending on their own skills or their own power to get them through life. But when troubles come—and they will, when heartaches befall—and they will, that battery is far too small. In electricity, an alternating current is one that reverses its direction many times a second at regular intervals—and some folks suffer from being hooked up to A/C. They attend church or pray when it’s convenient. If they help others, it’s on an irregular basis. They may reverse their commitments to give to God’s work. A/C followers of Christ are motivated by how they *feel*—God’s not in charge of their lives. Their personal likes, preferences, emotions, and comfort level are.*

Then, there are those who are hooked up to D/C electricity, a direct current flowing in one direction only. Kind of like how Jesus said, “Whoever starts to plow and looks back is not fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62). The Lord is looking for disciplined disciples who keep moving forward, allowing the Direct Current of His power to flow consistently and steadily in their lives. God is seeking men and women who will “press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us” (Philippians 3:24, NLT). Christ is looking for believers that yearn to mature in the faith and keep on going, and going, *and going* ... until we reach our life’s end and transition to heaven.

When you need real power, when you need spiritual intervention, you’d best be connected to the power source that created the universe in all its majesty: God Almighty. Ground yourself by clinging to the Cross of Christ, then plunge into the “foolishness” of loving those who hate you; of praying for those who persecute or use you; of believing without seeing. Plunge into the foolishness of being poor in spirit, of being meek and mourning, of being pure in heart, and a peacemaker, as Jesus teaches us in today’s Gospel.

When you need spiritual, emotional, moral, and even physical power, Jesus is the ultimate “Ever-Ready.” Those who crucified Jesus on the Cross and buried Him in a borrowed tomb tried to drain Him of his eternal power. But early on Easter Morning, He rose with all power, that which created and maintains the universe, in His Hand. And Christ ever lives to share it with those whom He loves and who believe in Him. In the weeks ahead, prayerfully yield to His transforming power, and allow Him to conform you to Himself, and to lead you toward everlasting Glory. *Amen.*

* Adapt. J. Jeffrey Smead, “How Are You Connected?” 28 February 2015, <https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/how-are-you-connected-j-jeffrey-smead-sermon-on-power-191905?page=2&wc=800> 23 January 2023.