

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Eleventh Sunday after Trinity, August 15, 2010

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Hymns: 339, 367:4, 358, 221, 361.

Lessons: Isaiah 50:4-10, Acts 1:4-11, Matthew 9:1-8.

Text: Ephesians 1:19-23

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Paul has just been praying that the Ephesian Christians “*may know* [God’s] *incomparably great power for us who believe.*” Then he goes on “*That power is like the working of his mighty strength.*”

Mankind has discovered some really powerful weapons. The end of World War II was hastened by the explosion of two atomic bombs which utterly destroyed two cities and killed hundreds of thousands of people. Even today there is world-wide concern that rebellious nations are making nuclear weapons which could create the same kind of destruction. So we have seen pictures and evidence of tremendous power which mankind has unleashed, and we really do not want such nuclear power ever used again for fear that millions upon millions of humans would be destroyed.

We could talk about the power of individuals in the world. There are dictators who exercise unlimited power in their own countries, killing people on their slightest whim. We could look at people who are governing in our own country and marvel at the power that they have shown to motivate other people and to accomplish things.

But in our text we have an unparalleled example of the power of God. Today let’s look at

GOD’S POWER WORKING FOR US

- 1. God’s power working for us is greater than all earthly power.**
- 2. God showed that power when he raised Christ from the grave and seated him at his right hand in heaven.**
- 3. That power is working for the Holy Christian Church, for all believers.**

If we are to look at God’s great power, we must start in eternity, before the world and all in it, including mankind, began.

We believe that God created all that exists by his Word. We believe – and can see – how God has preserved mankind. We confess this in the explanation of the first article of the Apostolic Creed: “I believe that God created me and all that exists, and that he gave me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my mind and all my abilities. And I believe that God still preserves me by richly and daily providing clothing and shoes, food and drink, property and home, spouse and children, land, cattle, and all I own, and all I need to keep my body and life. God also preserves me by defending me against all danger, guarding and protecting me from all evil. All this God does only because he is my good and merciful Father in heaven, and not because I have earned or deserved it. For all this I ought to thank and praise, to serve and obey him.”

In the Holy Scriptures we also have many examples of miracles. A miracle is a suspension of the normal laws of the universe as God set them in motion. In the Scriptures we have examples of God rescuing humans from certain death, such as Daniel in the den of lions, or Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace

when they refused to worship king Nebuchadnezzar. We have Jesus performing many miracles, starting with the first one recorded when he changed water into wine. We have examples such as Jesus taking a small basket of food and feeding thousands of people from it. We have examples of Jesus healing diseases.

So we can see from the Word of God that God's power working for us is greater than all earthly power. But most specifically in our text, God talks about the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and his ascension into heaven as examples of his supreme power. After Jesus died on the cross, punished for the sins of all mankind, he was buried. But Scripture is perfectly clear that God raised him from the dead. That is recorded in many places, such as Acts 13:27-31: ***"The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath. Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed. When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead, and for many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people."***

Paul makes an application of this resurrection to the life of the "new man" in the Christian in Romans 6:4: ***"We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."*** So Jesus was plainly raised from the dead, despite what men try to prove in their unbelief with their flawed wisdom.

God's eternal plan of salvation was devised already in eternity but it was carried out in time. The words of our text are really part of Paul's prayer that God enlighten the Ephesians to see God's gracious power.

Where is the proof of God's power? Paul points to what God did in and through Christ. ***"That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms."*** For the believer, and on behalf of the believer, an incomparably great power is at work, which is like the power God demonstrated in connection with the resurrection of Jesus. Although Jesus was always true God, he humbled himself and laid aside his divine power. He obeyed his Father, even unto death.

But it took incomparably great power to bring Jesus back to life. That is something that no human has ever been able to do – to bring someone back to life after dying. Death is something mankind has been trying to avoid ever since sin came into the world. And because mankind can't avoid death, there have been many attempts to prepare for some kind of life after death. Ancient peoples such as the Egyptians made elaborate preparations and structures and plans for people after death. We think of the great pyramids and elaborate embalming procedures made for the Pharaohs so they could "live" in some way after death. But they were completely unable to bring them back to life. Even now there are people who are trying to use scientific and technical tools to preserve a dead human being – such as cryogenics, that is, freezing a body immediately after death so that body can be brought back to life when there is some cure for whatever disease killed that person. But man can't do it. Only God can resurrect someone who is dead.

In addition to showing his great power in the resurrection of Jesus, God greatly exalted him, beginning with Jesus' ascension into heaven. When Jesus bodily ascended into heaven, as you heard in our Epistle lesson this morning, he was given a position of power, exalted ***"far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given."*** In fact, Jesus is in charge of everything that happens. We read that ***"God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way."*** This is the assurance that God can and will keep his promises to us. The power that God has given his Son makes it absolutely certain that God can and will do anything.

God put Jesus over all persons of authority and put him in charge of absolutely everything, and he did it **“for the church, which is his body.”** Christ’s rule is absolute and all his power is now used for one grand purpose, the good of his church, the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints.

Later in this same letter, we read of Christ loving and caring for his church: **“In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church.”** Ephesians 5:28-29.

But in this chapter, Paul’s point is that with the all-powerful Christ feeding and caring for us, we, the members of his church, can rest in complete security.

But Paul says yet another thing regarding Christ’s relationship to the church. He calls the church **“the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.”**

But what does that really mean? Christ is completely self-sufficient. Christ fills everything in every way. Yet he chooses to be empty and unfulfilled without his church. Why? Simply because God is true to his eternal plan. From eternity he elected and predestined the members of his church – and he will not rest until he has accomplished their salvation, and made them part of the body of Christ – in heaven. Only then will he be truly fulfilled. Paul prays that the Ephesians and we may see this truth with enlightened eyes.

In God’s filling up the church, the body of which Christ is the head, we learn from Scripture that both Jews and Gentiles are saved by grace. The Jews, to whom God gave the Law, are saved by grace, because there is no way they can obey God’s Laws – all of them – perfectly and thus earn eternal salvation. In fact we learn about our sinfulness from the Law. The Gentiles are saved by grace because God’s love, his grace, is totally undeserved by anyone, including the Jews, those who were first in line to receive God’s salvation. So we Gentiles need not feel second-best, or like second class citizens in God’s church.

God’s salvation was necessary, for it is plain, not only from Scripture but when we look around us at other humans and especially when we look in the mirror, that **“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”** Romans 3:23.

No one is exempt from sinning – except, of course, Jesus, the very Son of God. All, Jews and Gentiles, have sinned and cannot earn salvation. But Jesus died for all, and thus all are also **“justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”** This is the second part of the passage we just quoted from Romans 3:23.

That means we are declared “not guilty” of all the sins we do. Oh, yes, we sin. We sin by committing disobedience to God’s laws. We sin by omitting the things we should do. But God looks at us through Jesus Christ, and says “you are not guilty” because my Son paid the punishment you deserved for your sins.

As a result, Jesus’ gracious invitation is extended to all mankind: **“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”** Matthew 11:28.

God’s power, the same power which raised Jesus from the dead and raised Jesus up to heaven to sit at the Father’s right hand is at work in us who, by the grace of God, believe in Jesus as our Savior. That invitation still stands, and it is open every day for us to come to Christ with any and every trouble, hurt, pain, or problem. God gives rest for our souls with his almighty Word, and when we leave this world, he will give rest for our bodies and our souls in heaven at Jesus’ feet.

Thank you God, for exerting your power in us, and please keep us in your power! Amen.