

# The Power of God

Trinity Sunday 2018

Isaiah 6:1-8

Visiting the rest homes this week we were all talking about the royal wedding - and that preacher! Bishop... There was a mix of feelings on the matter. One resident said "I didn't like him" while the next, sung his praises. The man aside, during chapel I managed to focus our thoughts not on the man but on the content of his sermon - "There is power in Love' he proclaimed so passionately.

'Power' - not a common word these days we use to speak about God. Not in NZ Anglican circles at least it seems. We speak a lot about a nurturing God, a protecting God, a guiding and sustaining, and loving God – but not so much about a powerful God – and yet, it is absolutely the case. God is very powerful. God is ultimately all powerful - "Thine is the power' we pray in the Lord's Prayer.

Listen to this from the Book of Job speaking to the power of God: "God stretches the northern sky over empty space and hangs the earth on nothing. He wraps the rain in his thick clouds, and the clouds don't burst with the weight. He covers the face of the moon, shrouding it with his clouds. He created the horizon when he separated the waters: he set the boundary between day and night. The foundations of heaven tremble; they shudder at his rebuke. By his power the sea grew calm. By his skill he crushed the great sea monster. His Spirit made the heavens beautiful, and his power pierced the gliding serpent. These are just the beginning of all that God does, merely a whisper of his power. Who, then, can comprehend the thunder of his power?"<sup>1</sup>

God's power in and over creation "are just the beginning of all that God does" says Job, these things are "merely a whisper" he says of what God can fully achieve. In other words, God's power is much more than we can ever comprehend, 'for now we see through a glass, darkly' as the saying in Corinthians goes, but one day, we will know fully.

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<sup>1</sup> Job 26:7-14

What other illustrations of God's power can we find in the First Testament? The Creation Stories, the burning bush, the plagues set upon Egypt, the fiery pillar, the parting of the red sea, the providence of water from the rock and manna from the heavens. In the first Testament God rose up kings and prophets.

In the New Testament God's power sent Jesus in to the world. Jesus, by the power of God, performed many miraculous things. He healed, drove out demons, forgave sins, raised the dead, commanded the wind and sea, walked on water, turned water into wine, multiplied bread and fish to feed 5000. God's power raised Jesus from the dead. God's power sent the Holy Spirit into the world to help us. We look forward to God's power shown one day in Christ's Second Coming, when, as St. Matthews reads: "the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory".

God is powerful.

Where might we see the power of God in the history of our world? We might think of where theology has played a role in responding to events and attitudes throughout history, some examples are:

- Political theology arose in Nazi Germany when Christian Churches seemed silent on matters of justice.
- Black theology, started amongst young African American students, who fought for equal rights and equal opportunities.
- Minjung theology of South Korea sought social justice.
- Liberation theology, popular in Latin America, involved social concern for the poor and political liberation for the oppressed.
- Feminist theology, which seeks to redefine tradition, practices, Scripture, and theologies from a feminist perspective, played a part in why Anne, Geneth, Faye and I are able to be ordained.
- Public theology is about Christian ethics and values rendered understandable and offered as gift to the public square.
- Ecological theology focuses on the interrelationships between religion and nature.

All of these are fragments – with all their ambiguities - of a fullness which will only come about beyond history, and all are examples of the Church seeking to be a channel of God’s transformative power in the world.

With this we can begin to feel, a little at least, the sheer magnitude of God’s power and reign throughout history which continues to roll over and through and around life happening today, in this very moment too.

God’s power can move “mountains” social, political, or any other kind; God’s power can also move, shift, change, and transform the smallest of things in us. God’s power can be like the thunder, it can also be as soft as sea spray. God’s power is present in the simplest of sermons where one dare utter a word about God. In the pressing upon the infant’s forehead, the cross, the sign of Christ. In the look a husband gives his wife on their wedding day, and the smile he receives in return. In the sacred silence that comes about often during a pastoral visit.

God’s power can be felt in every day moments of wonder and amazement. When we look upon the beauty of something like a Palmerston North sun rise. When we watch from the car window the rolling and crashing waves along the Kapiti Coast. In the cheekiness of the Fantail who follows us along the trail. In the mighty, shaking thunder and flashes of lightening that awoke us from sleep last week. In all of these, and more, the power of God can be felt, and, in some way, great or small, our very beings are undone, renewed, changed, and made more whole.

One place we all have in common where we may experience God’s power, is in the act of worship.

My favourite definition of Christian Worship comes from a book I read years ago given to me while preparing for ordination: ‘The Life and Work of the Priest’ by John Pritchard. He says: “As the priest comes to prepare worship for the next Sunday, therefore, he or she will need to be very clear that we are not dealing with a pitiful form of Christian entertainment. God is central. Worship is the lightening conductor through which God’s life strikes the earth. Its exciting and dangerous to be mixing these divine and human chemicals together without being able to predict the outcome. Priests are meant to be able to handle this divine alchemy without blowing anyone up.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The life and Work of a Priest, pg. 12

It was in such an exciting and dangerous act of worship that *Isaiah* came face to face with the power of God.

There in the temple with Isaiah, in fear and trembling, we lift our eyes to behold “the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty”. Seeing the angels attending God, hearing their voices echo around the room – “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts” – sensing in our joints the shaking of the foundations, and smelling the smoke upon the altar, we come undone. Before God we cry out our unworthiness among an unworthy people. The angel touches the live coal of forgiveness upon our lips. Our guilt cleansed, we hear the very voice of God, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Stunned, stammering, pushing the words of response out through our burnt lips, we yield, “Here am I; send me.”

By the power of God, God speaks throughout Christian worship as a meeting ground between God and humanity. For Isaiah this involved thunderous voices and winged angels. For some of us it may be the God who dwells in silence whom we hear. Whereas if we quiet our busy minds, clear away all noise and bother, we might discover true silence for the holy to draw near.

In Christian worship earth and heaven come excitingly close in the sacramental meal of the eucharist. We re-enter the Upper Room and quietly sit at God’s table anticipating the final meal at the end of time, praying *maranatha* ‘lord Jesus, come’.

God is powerful. Bishop Michael Curry is spot on there is power in Love. God is Love. God chooses to express this power in the form of Love. Love that can wow us, move a great many mountains, is like terrible thunder, is also like the soft sea breeze. The power of God’s Love is gifted to us in a great many ways not least of which being the moment the wine of Christ touches our pallets and dissolves into our inner being, warming our soul with belonging. God may call to us with thunderous voice and winged angels, or God might speak to us in true silence, remembering too, that even if we are unable to notice God, God still speaks, looks, and embraces us.

God is powerful. Remember. Believe. Trust. Marvell. Wonder. Listen. Confess. Receive. Be called. Be sent. Give thanks. Amen.