

First Presbyterian Church

Cheyenne, Wyoming

July 5, 2009

Rev. Bob Garrard

Worship Theme: Renewable Power

2 Corinthians 12:2–10, Mark 6:1–13

Humanity is on a search for renewable power. It is “power generated from natural resources—such as hydrogen, sunlight, wind, rain, tides and geothermal heat—which are renewable (naturally replenished). “ Any renewable power that does not add to our carbon footprint is a vital heaven on earth concept to help rescue us from the changing climatic conditions that endanger our world today. There are debates going on as to which of the renewable powers are best. What are the climatic, sociological, economic and ecological side effects of each one? Whatever side you may be on, renewable power is a serious subject with sobering consequences for our life on earth. (Wikipedia)

Both passages of scripture today also speak to the serious subject of renewable power, whose source was vital to Jesus and Paul as they ministered in God’s name. They both encountered situations that caused them to tap into renewable power to accomplish their missions. Their examples can guide us as we search for renewable power both in climatic and spiritual terms.

First of all, we have Jesus. As we heard from Rev. Roger Rapp last week, Jesus had been out and about teaching, healing a woman and then a little girl who was thought to be dead. In these healings, he met people of great faith whose belief in God opened the way for these dramatic miracles to occur. This week, he traveled back to his very small home town, Nazareth, where he was rejected, despised and insulted. His former neighbors despairingly remarked, “How could this son of a local carpenter and a carpenter himself become a Rabbi, maybe even the Messiah? How could he leave his mother and brothers and sisters and try to rise above the ranks of his station of life and try to be more?” Jesus found very little faith or respect in his homeland, and exclaimed an old truth, “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.” After all the successes in his ministry in the hinterlands, only to come home and be rejected in his own home town and family, must have been a power drain and depressing experience for Jesus, at least in the human part of him. How could Jesus possibly go on?

Next, we hear of the Apostle Paul and his troubles with the Corinthian Church some 20 years after Jesus ascended to heaven. Paul had been preaching and teaching them that “in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us,” (2 Cor. 5: 19-20), and that one must live a holy life of love that reflects the teachings of God in Jesus Christ. As it turned out there were other teachers who had come to Corinth, “super apostles,” as Paul called them, who claimed Paul was a self-serving fraud and his teachings on Christ were inadequate. They turned many in the Corinthian church against Paul who had worked so hard and suffered so greatly to build the church in Corinth.

As we heard, Paul wrote in response to all this by telling about the unspeakable vision and experience of heaven God had given him as a validation of his call to

preach and serve Jesus Christ. Maybe the “super apostles” had spoken of theirs to show their superiority to Paul, so he had to respond in this way. But he pointed out that a vision was not a basis by which to judge him, judge him instead by his life style and its consistency with the teaching and life of Jesus Christ. Is this not what makes a true teacher and leader, trustworthy? Do they walk the walk as well as talk the talk?

Along with the harassment from the “super apostles,” God also allowed an unknown and unexplained thorn in the flesh to be given to Paul by the power of evil to keep him humble. What power drain and depressing experience all this must have been. How could Paul possibly go on?

Yes, Paul had his challengers and the unnamed thorn in the flesh. Jesus had his despisers, and his thorn was that he was a human being as well as God with us. What should they do? Paul said it well, “Three times I appealed to the Lord about this (thorn in the flesh), that it would leave me, but he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.’ So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.” No doubt Jesus prayed for his home folks and we have many verses in the Gospels where Jesus declared that his strength came from his father in heaven. Even in his last breath, Jesus turned to God for help. The crucifixion and resurrection are the greatest examples of how God’s power is made perfect in weakness. Yes, in the face of those who tried to undermine them and despite their thorns-in-the-flesh that weakened them, Paul and Jesus knew God’s grace and power were greater than any of their weaknesses.

We know this, too, do we not? Yet, do we remember it when our lives are out of control; as when illnesses or the death of a loved one occurs; when financial, personal or family problems arise, or when ecological disasters threaten? It is so easy to sink into the despair of our own weaknesses and forget that God’s grace and power are stronger than anything that can attack us. I get this way sometimes. It is like being the little fish in this story. “A little fish once overheard some grown-up fish talking about the importance of water. ‘Isn’t water wonderful?’ they were saying. ‘Without it, we would surely die.’ The little fish began to panic. Frantically, he swam from fish to fish, asking how he might find this wonderful water, which was such a necessity. The others only laughed at him, saying, ‘You’d better find that water soon, little fish, or you’ll die!’ Finally, one kindly, old fish smiled at the little one and said, ‘Do you want water? Well, just relax and enjoy it: because you’re swimming in it! It’s all around you.’ Sometimes, tormented by our own ‘thorns in the flesh,’” our own weaknesses, “we are not aware that the grace and power of God in Jesus Christ is all around us.” We have only to drink it in or accept it by faith. We only have to re-commit our lives to Christ, and move forward in life to take on whatever challenges come at us as we are renewed and sustained by the grace and power in Jesus Christ that surrounds us. “Emphasis,” Jul/Aug, 2006

The fact is this grace and power from God never ends. They are constantly renewable. They are the source of both the creation in Genesis and the new creation in Revelation and everything in between. When beaten down and despised, both Jesus and Paul turned to this ever renewable power and grace of God. Jesus moved on from Nazareth to recruit 12 disciples, begin a mission to spread God’s word that thrives two

thousand years later and become the Savior of the world. His family became believers. Paul was renewed and continued on to become Christ's greatest mission worker.

So how about you and me? To a world that searches so hard for renewable power, shall we also proclaim in word and deed, "God's grace is sufficient for us, for (God's ever renewable) power is made perfect in weakness." Yes, let us do so, energetically! To strengthen us in this mission, Jesus invites us to his table where by his body, blood and spirit, we will be renewed in his grace, power and presence. Come let us prepare to remember, as we eat, that Christ is the ever renewable grace and power of God.