

Sermon for Sunday, March 22, 2020 - "God's Power Within You"

Fourth Sunday in Lent
Online Worship
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa
Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

Scripture passages Isaiah 43:1-5a, Psalm 23, Ephesians 3:14-21, Mark 4:35-41

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

"A great gale arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped."

Oh, do we know what that feels like. The massive storm of the coronavirus has arisen. The gale force winds pound. The waves beat against our boats. We are already being swamped.

This storm is real. This storm needs to be taken seriously. *And* there is something even more real, even more important for us to remember. We are not alone in the storm. God is present with us in it. It may feel like God is sleeping, like God is not doing anything in this storm. We may wonder, like the disciples did, "Don't you care that we are perishing?" Yet the power of God is at work.

The power of God brings peace amidst the storm.
The power of God brings faith when we, like the disciples, only know fear.
The power of God brings hope out of despair, life out of death.
This is what God does.

Still we wonder, how is this power of God at work? We don't see Jesus simply stilling this storm with a simple word. So how is the power of God at work in these days of global pandemic? As Ephesians reminds us, God's power is at work within us. We're reminded that God "**by the power at work within us**" is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine."

God's power is at work within us. God's power is at work in this storm, within each of us, to work faith, hope, courage, creativity and acts of love in this time.

God's power at work within us helps us to organize even when we can't meet in person to care for each other and the most vulnerable. I've seen this happen in Decorah this past week as the Decorah Area Faith Coalition and the newly formed Decorah and Winneshiek County Mutual Aid Network are working together to care for our community. I've seen this happen at Good Shepherd as Pr. Marion and the Social Justice Subcommittee work with me to organize our congregation into flocks with designated shepherds who will help to care for us all in this time.

God's power at work within us also helps us to be creative and resourceful in this time. I see this creativity at work in people who are sewing masks for our medical professionals. Many hospitals around the country are providing protocols for how masks can be made and delivered to where they can be washed and put to use. I'm hoping we can do this for Winneshiek Medical Center as

well, soon; the hospital in Cresco is accepting masks. If you live elsewhere check your local hospital website for their recommendations.

I also see resourcefulness at Good Shepherd. Brooke got us ready to livestream worship in less than 24 hours last week. Our Communications Subcommittee and administrative assistant have worked to launch a way for people to give offerings right from our website so that we can carry on our mission as a congregation even when we can't gather. Watch for more on that soon.

Kathryn Thompson has continued her amazing ministry by generating a number of resources for children, youth and family; and Youth Forum will be meeting using Zoom after worship today. Many who have never used Zoom have figured it out this week. I have had such joy seeing some of your faces during our Bible Study, Faith Coalition and Social Justice Subcommittee Zoom meetings. Other congregations are also being creative and resourceful using the different gifts they have. We will be sharing these and collaborating together in the days to come.

God's power is at work within us. We can't always see this. We can't always feel it. Sometimes all we can feel are the storm clouds above us. So, this week I have been doing a meditation that's been helping me to be attentive and open to God's power at work within us.

This meditation is called a Light Visualization and it's a very helpful secular meditation technique. You visualize sunlight above your head washing over you and filling up your body from your toes all the way up your head. This visualization helps you to experience calm and peace even amidst storms. I've been praying this meditation this week with our Ephesians passage for today in my mind. Our Ephesians passage is a prayer that we may be strengthened in our inner beings with power through the Spirit and that we may be filled with all the fullness of God.

So, this week I've visualized that sunlight above my head as the love and power of God. I've imagined it washing over me and filling me with all the fullness of God, strengthening me in my inner being. I've imagined it doing the same for you all dear people of God as I've prayed for you all this week. That power and love of God is always there - above our heads, within us, all around us. This exercise just helps us to notice it and receive it and experience it.

Let's take just a moment together and I'll lead you through this prayer practice so that you might experience being filled with all the fullness of God and being strengthened in your inner being.

Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. Then let your breathing return to its normal rhythm. As you breathe in and out, imagine the sunlight of God's love and power above your head. Imagine it washing over you, filling you with warmth and peace and light. Imagine it filling you up, starting with your toes, moving up your legs, past your knees, then to the upper half of your body through your chest, filling you up while continuing to flow from above, flowing down into your fingers, your wrists, up to your elbow and shoulders, filling up your neck, your face, your forehead and the top of your head. Then simply let your mind rest in this awareness that you are filled with the love, the power, the fullness of God.

As you move through your day, when all you feel is a dark cloud over your head, you can take a moment to flash this image quickly. Just take a breath and imagine being filled with the sunlight of God's love and power from the tips of your toes to the top of your head.

The power of God is at work in this storm. It is at work within you. God works peace amidst the storm; God works faith out of fear, hope out of despair, life out of death - for you, for me, for this world God so loves.

Let's take a moment for silent prayer.