

Do What You Have the POWER to Do

Esther 4:13-14 & 2 Timothy 1:7

Mother's Day & Women's Ministry Sunday ~ May 12, 2019 ~ Rev. Jo Ramsey

In case you missed it, it is Mother's Day, so we're going to start with a Mother's Day Survey...

- Who here among us has tried to calm a crying baby to no avail?
- Who has put a load of bedding in the washing machine at 2 am after your child awakens with the stomach flu?
- Who has waited an eternity in a grocery checkout line with a fussy, demanding toddler?
- Who has struggled to comfort their tear-stained adolescent after they've had an ugly fight with a friend?

If you have, you may just laugh out loud at the notion that mothers are powerful!

Most mothers I know don't feel powerful at all. In fact, they feel just the opposite! While having or adopting children can be exciting, romantic and fulfilling, parenthood is also one of the most intensely challenging experiences we can have as human beings. "To have a child is to decide forever to have your heart go walking around outside your body," (Elizabeth Stone) Parenting is a deeply vulnerable journey.

So when Billy Sunday says, "There is more power in a mother's hand than in a king's scepter," we might roll our eyes. But, on some level, we get it. We understand that mothers have a huge influence on the lives of their children. Their words can hurt or heal; their mood sets the tone of the whole household. Children absorb and follow their mother's example and attitude. What we say and do, what we don't say and don't do, make a huge impact! As the sayings go, "When mama ain't happy, ain't nobody happy!" Or on the positive side, for those married moms among us, "Happy wife, happy life!" Moms have power!

The word power implies strength, authority and control. It can have positive or negative connotations—depending on how it is used. Years ago, I worked as a Legal Advocate at the Women's Center and Shelter of Pittsburgh. At first, I assumed that domestic violence was all about anger, but I was wrong. Domestic violence is all about power and control. That kind of power, the power of threat, isolation and abuse, is not good!

But power, in all its forms and expressions, is a reality of life. Many things, both good and bad, have power over us. Things like...

- What other people think
- Memories that we find hard to let go
- A busy schedule or too many bills
- A difficult relationship
- Something addictive like cigarettes, alcohol or food
- A fearful or hopeless way of thinking

Sometimes it feels like everything negative has power over us. All sort of external factors and internal messages impact how we feel and behave. Last week, Pastor James reminded us that nothing has the power to separate us from the love of God—nothing can erase God’s grace, steal our worth, or drain away the meaning of our lives.

But our circumstances and mistakes can wield a lot of power over us, especially when we’ve endured trauma, complicated grief, depression or anxiety. Such experiences are more common than we think. In fact, all of us go through tough times at one point or another. Since May is national Mental Health Awareness month, Pastor James and I are exploring God’s desire for us to be healthy and whole—body, mind and spirit! Last week, we talked about how God’s light shines in the darkness, and the darkness shall not overcome it.

Today, we consider a brief verse in the second book of Timothy. Paul gives us a simple, inspiring recipe for well-being that’s easy to memorize. “God does not give us a spirit of fear, but a spirit of power and of love and of a sound mind.”

First things first – God does not give us a spirit of fear. Instead, he wants us to experience peace, joy and abundant life. God desires freedom and healing to those who suffer from worry and anxiety.

Next, God does give us a spirit of power – Power, as in, I have the right to exist, I can set limits. I can make choices about what I say and do, and how I respond to the people and circumstances around me. This is the right to be a whole and complete self, created by God for a future filled with hope. Our personal power reminds we are separate, unique individuals.

God also gives us the spirit of love. That means God also calls us to be in relationship with others in caring, supportive, meaningful, loving ways. I can make choices about showing compassion and respect to those around me. The spirit of love connects us to one another. Love is the power that bonds us together.

And finally, God gives us the spirit of a sound mind. God intends well-being for us. He wants us to get the care we need--mentally, spiritually and physically--so we can feel secure, grow, heal and thrive.

I surely needed this good word many years ago when I was in college. I became an R.A. which is kinda like a dorm mother, on a challenging floor of female athletes. My two best friends were studying abroad, one in Japan and the other in France. That fall term, during finals before Christmas, the college required all dorm residents to complete a survey about dorm life. I guess you could say that the results from one group of girls on my floor were NOT flattering. They were awful, and they slid them under my door one by one, so that every time I got back to my room there was another nasty note for me to read.

When I went home for Christmas, I was really beat. I felt terrible. So I met with my youth group leader, Pam, and explained the situation. Pam said to me, "Jo, what about your power bar?!" I said, "What are you talking about—my power bar?" She explained, "You have a power bar inside of you. It's yours. No one can take it from you. But, you have given your power bar away to these girls. You must take it back."

She explained that I needed to picture it, like a little golden bar, a precious symbol of my worth, my strength and my power. It was something I needed to hold on to and treasure.

When I went back in January, I approached the girls who had been so mean, one at a time and then as a group. I asked about their survey comments, and we got to the bottom of things. After that, I was more assertive and more friendly toward them. It recalibrated the dynamic and things worked out. The next two years were much better! No more terrible surveys!

That image of a power bar has become a valuable tool for me throughout my life. In fact, I now have a necklace that my family gave me to remember my power bar. It says, "Be-YOU-tiful."

My necklace echoes with the central message of our recent mental health awareness efforts... YOU MATTER! You matter...no matter where you were born, who your parents are or what they've done. Whether you're beautiful or plain, skinny or curvy, young or old, able-bodied or not. There is no one like you— with all your gifts, flaws,

feelings and foibles. We are each uniquely and wonderfully made. In our uniqueness, is our power. And God can use us right where we are.

We see this in the lives of the Biblical women we mentioned this morning in our Call to Worship. They each used their own unique power to make a difference for God. The women who are part of Jesus' lineage each found themselves in strange circumstances, yet they chose to step out in faith and exert their influence in remarkable ways. These strong women became the grandmothers and mother of our Lord!

Later, in our Old Testament reading, Queen Esther listens to the advice of her cousin, Mordecai. She must ask her husband, the king, to spare the Jewish people. "Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this," Mordecai suggests. The moment has come for Esther to stand up and use her power.

A thousand years later, another woman in a small house in Bethany followed suit. You might remember her...she anoints Jesus with costly perfume from an alabaster jar. The men begin to scold her for being wasteful. But Jesus replies, "She has done what she has the power to do." This phrase resonates in the lives of many women who remain unnamed in the Bible, but because of their valiant actions of long ago, we still know the truth of their power. Do What You Have The Power To Do is the name of a book about six women in the New Testament, and the sermon today. It is also what Jesus asks of us...to recognize, claim and wield our own unique power in faithful ways.

Not only do we each possess our own individual power, as Christians, we also are filled with the transforming power of God, made real on Easter morning! This is the power to overcome, to climb out of our tombs and step into the light, to be set free to discover the life that is truly life.

God creates and loves each one of us. We are amazing, unique creatures. And God has given us a spirit of power, love and a sound mind. All he asks is that we do what we have the power to do. Whatever that is, wherever we find ourselves. For us moms, it might be something as simple as changing a diaper, playing a game, giving a hug, folding laundry or making a grilled cheese sandwich. But I trust that, like Queen Esther, we are right here, right now, for just such a time as this!

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.