

Sermon: "Power Living"
With Pastor James Ramsey at the Pulpit
Baptism of the Lord Sunday, Communion Observed

Texts: Genesis 1:1-5
Mark 1:4-11

Preached: 1/11/15



Happy New Year! Happy Season of new year's resolutions!

I wonder if you have any – I'm not talking about those that have to do with chocolate, potato chips or some other high-fat, high-calorie food you intend to avoid in order to fit into your bathing suit or your favorite pair of jeans. Neither am I talking about things that will improve your health, physical or financial.

Rather, I'd like to know about those resolutions that have to do with your spirit and the Spirit of God.

I want to ask you this morning, with 2015 in front of us –

Where do you find the power to hang on in this world?

Where do you find the power to keep going when the things get really tough?

Where do you find the power to invest in love in a world that seems filled with hate?

Where do we find the power to work for peace in a world addicted to violence?

Where do we find the power to believe in good in a world that is filled with so much suffering and pain?

Where do we find the power to claim God's kingdom has come, is coming, will come?

Where do we find the power to live as Jesus' disciples?

Where did Jesus, himself, find the power to even call disciples?

Jesus found John, the Baptizer, out in the wilderness – a man with a slew of disciples, a man who called people to a different way of life, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. John called people to new resolutions and then he marked it with this water ritual. John was a wild man and people followed him – But John knew that the power he proclaimed was not his own. John looked forward to the arrival of the "one who is more powerful than I. . . coming after me" (v.7). While John's witness opened people to the divine gifts of repentance and forgiveness,



John understood that the baptism he offered seekers was simply a symbolic gesture, a baptism with water only. But the one coming, he said, this one offers a truly new gift—he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.



Little did he know that Jesus would come to him in the river – and through his baptism of Jesus with water he would see the power of the Holy Spirit descend. The heavens were torn apart and the Spirit descended like a dove. And the voice...

The heavenly voice that addressed Jesus said, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." The phrase has biblical weight! It seems to be a combination of Psalm 2:7 ("You are my son") and Isaiah 42:1 ("my chosen, in whom my soul delights"). Now Psalm 2 is one of the royal psalms, used at the enthronement of the king, and the Isaiah text introduces what scholars call the first "suffering servant" song. Taken together, these messages describe who Jesus is and what he will do. He is both king and servant; his future includes both enthronement and suffering. He will come to sit at the right hand of God, but not before he suffers the pain and humiliation of the cross, bearing the sin of the world.

Jesus found the power to lead, to teach, to heal, to cast out demons, to raise the dead – through this baptism of the Holy Spirit – symbolized, ironically, by a dove. You don't usually think of a dove symbolizing power. You might think "innocent as a dove" or "fragile like a dove" but "powerful?" Still, you might say (or sing) Christ's power came on the wings of a snow white dove. From that day on Jesus stepped into his destiny and his living was power living.



If you have received Christian baptism, and most of us here have, we can lay claim to the power of heaven -- the power of God's love and grace, a transformative, transfiguring power like no other. The world still doubts this power, mocks its outward appearance in a dove, dismisses its ironic effectiveness.

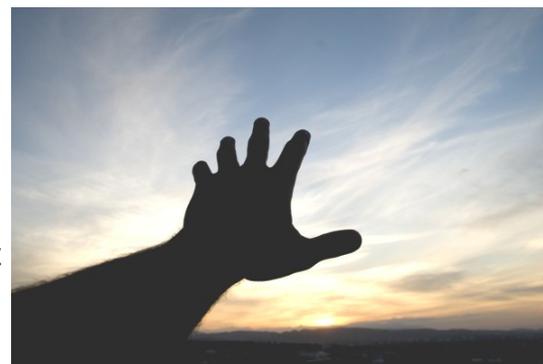
I fear we doubt this power, too. I fear we forget our baptism. Maybe we need a daily ritual like Martin Luther – a reminder – I am baptized...that is, I am a child of God, I am loved, changed, forgiven. God's power is in me.

Where do we find the power? Where do you find the power to hang in there, to love in spite of all sorts of hate, to keep believing that God is working his purposes out?

Let us resolve this year – to claim the power of God in our lives – to remember our baptisms. Let us commit ourselves to power living – to unleash the power of the Holy Spirit in our daily life and release that power in our words and actions, towards others and ourselves. This year let us not be content to keep the Spirit under wraps, caged up, hidden away, uncelebrated, unnoticed, unmentioned.

Let us practice power – living. Let us resolve to call on the power of God, celebrate it, notice it, mention it, to ourselves and to others, every day.

What would that look like for you? Power-Living? For me it doesn't mean accessing some super-natural "spiritual gift" that everyone recognizes as exceptional – it's much more simple, subtle than that.



It means, every day, connecting with God – intentionally seeking out God's Word – *reading, praying, listening*. There is no chance that this familiarity with sacred ground will make it seem mundane. In fact, just the opposite is true. The more we seek to encounter God in our daily lives, the more we become open to recognizing that God's presence surrounds us and sustains us wherever we may be.



Power living also means daily embodiment. It is only partly inward – it must also be focused outward...in how we live and interact and serve. God's Spirit free in our souls wants to effect the world, help those in need, lift up the broken-hearted, stand with those who are persecuted, speak out for what is right, it doesn't just think peace – God's Spirit makes peace.

When we remind ourselves early and often that we are baptized, that we are God's people, that we carry the very Spirit of God, we will be enabled, empowered to ...

<i>think more clearly.</i>	<i>feel more deeply.</i>
<i>speak more truthfully.</i>	<i>love more extravagantly.</i>
<i>serve more creatively.</i>	<i>give more lavishly.</i>
<i>live more fully.</i>	

Even when we are power living in such a way, there will be things this year we cannot control – yet we can respond as baptized disciples. When things happen which dismay or appall, we can look to God for meaning, remembering that our Lord's purposes cannot ultimately be thwarted. What God desires is those who love him, worship him, trust him.

God's very Spirit pulses on these things, pulses in us – in you.

