

Rev. Susan Scott
University Public Worship
Stanford University
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Grace to you and peace from God our creator, our Savior Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

At the hospital, we have a very clear hierarchy, especially among the physicians. There are the interns (or first year residents), other residents, fellows and at the top: the attending physicians.

One day when a patient had died who had come to the hospital after an accident. An investigator from the coroner's office was in the room with me and the nurse because we always have to phone the Coroner's office when a death is related to an accident of any kind. One of the attending physicians slid open the door and stuck his head in. Who is she? What's she doing here?" I've never heard of this and I've been here 30 years.

We tried to explain that she was an investigator. That wasn't acceptable for him. He kept pushing the issue refusing to accept that it was okay for the investigator to be in the room

That wasn't the first time a doctor has done something like that and it won't be the last. People are a little afraid of this particular doctor because they don't know what he might do and when he might use his power to retaliate against them if they've said something he doesn't like.

He's a person who will use his power to lord it over others. You probably know other people like that. They are only interested in pointing out how they know more than others or how they are better than others. They are usually interested in using their power to gain more power for themselves.

Six years ago I was able to make a trip that I had only dreamed about prior to that. I went on vacation and for part of my trip I went to Villnius, Lithuania. I went there to see something called "the hill of crosses." It's not very big, but for hundreds of years people have put crosses there on that hill. During the years when Lithuania was part of the Soviet Union, the government used its power to bulldoze the crosses, burn them or melt every so many years. But even during that time, the people resisted the power of that government and continued to bring crosses, particularly at night and they would place them on the hill. Then in the late 80's, Gorbachev said, "Let them have their hill." Some believe the people's persistence and their perseverance to continue to place crosses helped to keep their faith alive during a time when faith was discouraged.

When we read in the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, we read about the life of Jesus – one who had power and one who used his power. But

Jesus didn't use his power to "lord it over others." Jesus didn't use his power to put others down. Jesus didn't use his power to make himself wealthy or to increase his power over others. Jesus used his power restore, to bring together and to heal.

The man with the demons in today's reading is presented as less than human – He's been chained up. He's broken the chains. He has no clothes. He lives in the tombs. He's driven into the wilderness. He lost his individuality. He lost his name. He lost his identity. It is as though there is a war going on inside him. As we heard at the end of the story, he is again a human being. He wears clothes. He sits at Jesus' feet. He able to return to his home. Jesus used his power to heal and restore. Jesus used his power to renew a life.

The man had no self and with Jesus' help he finds himself and can be restored to his family and his home and to his right mind. He was changed. He is given a new life.

You'd think people would have been excited and eager to rejoice with him – not so. They ask Jesus to leave. They were afraid. They wanted to keep the status quo. They wanted to keep things the same. They didn't necessarily want change.

Jesus encouraged change.

That's why Jesus went to Gerasene – in the first place; to a strange land. That's why we have this story. Jesus wanted the disciples and all people of God and so US to know that we are to also reach out to the stranger. The stranger who is very different from us.

Jesus also wants us to be open in our own lives to possibly going in a direction we didn't anticipate.

It may mean speaking up. It may mean listening more. It always means being open to the new that God is doing.

It means following Jesus lead to include all people. It means following Jesus' lead to love all people – sometimes even an arrogant physician.

(As an aside, I will tell you, that I made it my personal rule to always say hello to this physician whether he said anything to me or not. And lo and behold, one day when I said, "Hello" to him, he said hello back to me.)

Following Jesus' example means to use our power to heal and restore – our individual personal power, our power as a community, our power as a nation. Following Jesus' example means to use your power to change life.

There's a Christian congregation I know whose mission statement is: "Changed lives changing lives through Christ's love."

That mission statement tells me they are open to God's love changing them and they in turn as people open to God's love want to agents of change in the world.

That doesn't mean it's always easy for them to follow their mission statement. But there are ways that they are helped to live their lives changing lives through Christ's love. And those ways can also be helpful to us.

They are strengthened when they gather together and share together. They are comforted that they have one they can call upon in prayer. They are encouraged by the stories from scripture and the history of those who have gone before and been faithful to the faith. They are nourished when you gather around God's Word which becomes for them – food for your journey.

Jesus used his power to heal and restore.

The Hebrew scriptures are also full of stories of God using God's power – Today's reading is interesting in that Elijah is ready to give up and God. God promises to pass by, but God isn't in the wind, the earthquake, or the fire. God comes to Elijah in the "sound of sheer silence." God appears to him there not in power, but in silence and reassures Elijah that he is not alone.

Neither are we. In our day to day actions and decisions, how do we use our power? Power when we spend money, power in our actions, power in the use of our time, power in our words.

Recently a woman at my church told the story of when she was eight years old. Her grandfather had been a sheriff and he was very fond of telling and retelling stories from his work. As an eight year old, she realized that his stories were also told differently. So one day after her grandfather had told a particularly tall tale, the eight year old girl turned to her grandfather and asked, "If it's a true story, why is it different every time you tell it?" Now her grandfather could have been fatherly and caring and said something like, "because your grandfather likes to tell stories." But instead he said to her, "You are stupid; education is wasted on you." Fortunately for the little eight year, her mother overheard everything and let both of them know he was wrong to say such a thing.

May we each look to how Jesus used his power and use our power to also bring healing and restoration and may we each know that God will be with us through our community, through our family, but also in the sound of sheer silence. Amen.

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