

+ John 21:1-14 + Discover Power Along the Seashore! + Third Sunday of Easter + 18 April 2010 +

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

When the mob took Jesus away in the Garden of Gethsemane his disciples felt powerless. When they heard the mob cry out, **“Crucify him!”**, they felt powerless. When they heard Jesus was dead, that his body was placed in a tomb, they felt powerless. On that first Easter Sunday morning and that night, their fear, their guilt, their helplessness left them powerless until Jesus appeared among them. How odd for a group of men who just days before had argued over who was the greatest!

In the lesson before us from John 21, you can't help, but notice how powerless the disciples really were, even when they did what they loved most—fish. You almost feel bad for Peter and Thomas and Nathanael and James and John and the other disciples. They worked so hard all through the night getting their boat out to the “good spot” on the lake, casting their nets out with skill, yet when dawn began to light the sky, their nets remained empty. Again they were powerless, even in their own backyard. You wonder what went through their minds. Did they just shrug it off as a poor night of fishing or did it make them stop and think how powerless they really were?

There are times in our lives when you and I feel like that too—powerless and wondering how you will ever deal with what's going on in your life. No matter how tough, how resilient, how strong you might appear on the outside, there have been times in your life when you felt powerless. A loved one gets sick unexpectedly, maybe even dies, and you can do nothing about it. Layoffs and pay cuts happen at work and you don't know if you're next. Life gets crazy. The kids get sick or have trouble with school, plus all the activities that demand their time and yours. Your job demands extra time from you, leaving you with little time to spend with your spouse. Soon little misunderstandings blow up into big arguments as stress and tension mount. You look for relief somewhere else, but that only ends up consuming more of your time. Pretty soon a vicious cycle gets started as communication breaks down and people get hurt. Whatever the situation, there are times in your life that just leave you feeling powerless.

So often in our lives the Lord uses times like that to remind you and me that we are helpless, but those times are symptoms of a bigger problem. We don't realize how powerless we really are, even in our strongest times, but listen to what St. Paul has to say. **“There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.”** (Romans 3:10-12) This is pretty strong language coming from someone who once thought he could stand before God on his own power. Before the holy God, by nature you and I are incapable of doing anything good. By nature, we are only able to do evil, only able to go through life on a vicious cycle of temptation, desire, sin, guilt, and more temptation. Our sinful natures leave us powerless before the holy God.

Seeing how powerless we are by nature might even tempt us to think that Jesus is powerless too. As you examine your own life, does Jesus ever seem too powerless to deal with your problem, your stress, your conflict, your worry, your life, your guilt? Does he seem too helpless to be there for you? Even the disciples thought that about Jesus. They thought death had overtaken him, the grave contained him, and sin had greater power...until the living, loving Jesus appeared in his grace and displayed his glory.

“Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.” It was only the third time Jesus had appeared to them since his resurrection. It was early morning and they were at least 100 yards out. You can't blame them for not immediately recognizing Jesus. He called out to them, “Hey friends! Catch any fish?” **“No...”**, they responded. Then Jesus did something that made the disciples forget themselves and remember him. **“Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.”** Without question, the disciples heaved their large net over the right side of the boat. Surely it couldn't hurt. Instantly **“they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.”**

Now this had happened before—three years before, that is. Back then, Peter, Andrew, James, and John had experienced almost the same miracle. After a night of fishless fishing, the Lord had told them to cast their nets out in the deep waters in the late afternoon. As soon as they tossed the nets out, the nets filled with fish and started to break. In fact, the number of fish was so great the boats began to sink. Simon Peter fell on his knees with a helpless plea, **“Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!”** (Luke 5:8), but the Lord did not leave Simon and his fellow fishermen. Instead, he called them to be his disciples. Now three years later, it was happening all over again.

John remembered and told Peter, ***“It is the Lord!”*** Immediately Simon Peter tied his outer garment around himself and dove into the lake. ***“The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish...”*** When they landed, Jesus had them bring over some of the fish they had caught. So Simon Peter climbed on board and helped the disciples drag the net ashore. Amazingly there were 153 large fish in the net, ***“but even with so many the net was not torn.”*** Truly a miracle! Along the sea shore, Christ had proven to his disciples that he was not powerless. He had proven that not only was he in control of all creation, but also that he had definitely conquered sin and death. St. John tells us, ***“None of the disciples dared ask him, ‘Who are you?’ They knew it was the Lord.”***

Among his people today, Jesus proves he is not powerless. His Law condemns our hearts with our powerlessness because of sin, yet in his grace, his Gospel heals and saves. The good news of Christ's sacrifice once for all shatters our stone dead hearts and replaces them with living hearts filled with his love. Through simple water and that powerful Word in Holy Baptism, Jesus took a hardened sinner and transformed you into his beloved child as his Holy Spirit created faith in your heart. Through a bite of bread and a swallow of wine together with Christ's body and blood really present in Holy Communion, Jesus actually provides you forgiveness of sins, strength for your life, and assurance of salvation. Through those means, Christ proves he is not powerless as people come to hear God's Word and receive his forgiveness here at church, as they listen to you share that good news with them and even believe it. In those powerful means, Christ proves he has overcome sin and death. Among us then, Christ proves he is not powerless, even though it may not be as obvious as a net full of 153 large fish.

Just as Christ proves through Word and Sacrament that he is not powerless, Christ also provides power for the powerless, as he did for his disciples. When the disciples arrived on shore, they found ***“a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.”*** Jesus had prepared breakfast for them. Think about that. The risen and exalted Lord stooped down and made breakfast for his disciples. He even personally handed out the bread and the fish, cooked to perfection. In that little instance, the Lord of glory showed himself to be the God of grace as he provided even that little need for his disciples. It was a reminder to them that Jesus would provide for their every need, as he was about to send them out with his Gospel.

Christ provides power for us with his providence too. As the Gospel is proclaimed, as we share the good news of sins forgiven through Jesus Christ, it is amazing to see how the Lord provides for every need, big or small. After all, he has provided for our greatest need as he provided power through his cross and empty tomb when we were powerless in our sin. Surely he will provide for the needs of us as Christians, as families, as a congregation. Time and again in his grace Jesus proves he will provide what we need and more when we need it, even when we don't expect it.

Besides physical gifts, Christ also provides power for the powerless with his promises. In the verse right before our text, St. John tells us, ***“These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”*** (John 20:31) That is a promise of power from our gracious God. He promises to make you certain that Jesus is indeed your Savior and that through faith in him you have life eternal in his name. Through that promise, you receive all the blessings that come from Christ's life, death, and resurrection, even when sudden changes in your life or the busyness of life leave you feeling powerless. That does not mean you will get everything you have ever wanted or even that life will be easy because you are a Christian. Even so, through his Word and Sacraments, Jesus gives you his strength to follow him and live for him and share him. He gives you his righteousness so you can enter his heaven. He gives you his life so you can live with him for eternity. Christ, who guaranteed his promises with blood and an empty tomb, will give you power when you are powerless and help when you are helpless.

None of us ever wants to be powerless or helpless, but isn't it better for us to be powerless in God's sight, so Christ can be your power and your help? He appeared in power to assure his disciples when they were powerless. He appears in power through Word and Sacrament to assure you when you are powerless. Therefore, ***“worthy is the Lamb, who was slain (who set aside his power for a time for us!), to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!”*** (Revelation 5:12) Amen.