

SERMON, ASCENSION DAY, 2008

Grace, peace and mercy be unto you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

Intro. Acts 1 'you will receive **power**'

Ephesians 1 'the **power** of His mighty strength ... **power** and authority'

Luke 24 'clothed with **power** from on high'

Imagine how different our lives would be without the **power** of electricity. No computers, no movies, no **power** tools or appliances, no electric lights which just scratches the surface of what we would live without, if we didn't have the **power** of electricity. I'm fortunate enough to have lived part of my life to know the comparison of living without and with electricity. As a little boy I remember having a windmill on the farm. Not a wind turbine like you see west of Rochester near Dodge Center and Dexter. But we had a farm windmill that pumped water into the stock tank for the cows. But, it also generated electricity not via battery storage but, via direct wind power into the barn. So we had dim fluctuating lights when we milked and we could sorta listen to music and news and the Mn. Twins on KFIRED radio from Bismark. But, other than that as a little boy I remember living without the **power** of electricity. As I know some of you remember, also. I remember very, very well when Rural Electric Association, REA, strung electrical lines along Hyway 200 bringing real electrical **power** to our farms. It was an exciting, electrifying time to have running water, no more outhouse, no more shower house. We now had electric stoves and refrigerators, milking machines and cream separators and a radio that didn't fade in and out as the wind blew. I grew up in North Dakota, and Sharon likes to remind me we were 50 years behind her family who had electricity on their farm in Mn. Well, la-te-da! Electrical **power**, of course, isn't the only **power** we've come to depend on. Electrical **power** is a metaphor for an even more important **power** = the **power** of God's grace. Physical life does not generate itself apart from the creative **power** of God's grace. Though evolutionists would tell us otherwise. With every heartbeat, with every brain wave, with every breath, with every muscle flexed we experience the generating **power** of God's grace. When in God's time, Psalm 139, God decides His generating of our physical lives will come to an end through death. And just as we need God's gracious **power** to survive physically, so we also need God's gracious **power** to survive spiritually. To all of us who know the struggle, the weakness and the burden of powerlessness, physically, through illness or injury or simply old age. To all of us who know the struggle, the weakness and the burden of powerlessness, mentally, through depression or despair or simply brain overload. To all of us who know the struggle, the weakness and the burden of powerlessness, spiritually, through trials and tragedies and tribulations. The Ascension message of God's Word brings some electrifying and **powerful** GOOD NEWS!

And that is what I want to talk to you about a little bit this Ascension Day evening.

I. Dr. Luke records the teachings that Jesus shared with His disciples during those 40 days between the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and His ascension into heaven. Jesus taught His disciples that the **power** of eternal salvation is centered upon the **power** of Jesus' vicarious atonement as the Savior of the world, as our Savior.

Luke 24 'everything must be fulfilled that is written about Me' Jesus says 'in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms ... the Christ will suffer and rise from the dead ... and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all nations'.

Through Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross and through Jesus' glorious resurrection from the dead, as God incarnate= the Christ, eternal salvation for us **powerless** human beings has been **powerfully** accomplished!

'IT IS FINISHED!'

'HE IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED! ALLELUIA!'

That **powerful**, electrifying message of salvation was now to be spread and shared all over the world. And whoever would spread and share this Good News would be going into uncharted territory and would face stiff opposition. Yet, Jesus doesn't simply give marching orders and then abandon the troops, ascending into heaven. The followers of Jesus would not be left to generate their own **power**, to generate their own strength in order to go to the ends of the earth against the odds with the message of salvation. NO! NO! NO! By His return to the right hand of God the Father, Jesus, God the Son, opened heaven to pour out God the Holy Spirit upon His disciples, His church. Giving them the **power** of God's grace to accomplish God's Great Commission of the centuries, these last days **'TO GO AND MAKE DISCIPLES'**.

II. Today we celebrate the Ascension of our Lord. Today we hear His marching orders once again given to: Trinity, Elgin; Immanuel, Plainview; Immanuel, Potsdam; St. John's, Hammond, to spread and share: 'repentance and forgiveness of sins' for Jesus' sake to all people. But, we also need **power** to do such an overwhelming mission and ministry in our 21st century. Just as Jesus' disciples needed **power** to do such an overwhelming mission and ministry in the 1st century. Even in our instantaneous, push a button, throw a switch world we lack the **power**, the strength to 'go make disciples' of ourselves let alone the whole world. So often I find myself drained by weakness, discouragement, by doubt and by simple selfishness. Relying on my own **power**. Struggling to generate my own ambition with the best of intentions to get things done for the Lord. Like that farm windmill generator on my N. Dak. family farm. Generating fluctuating **power** and on my own I simply run out of **power**. I burn out. I short circuit. My 'self' generated ambition even with the best of intentions runs down to spiritual apathy and even antagonism towards those I'm suppose to be ministering to. Is there anyone out there who can identify with what I'm saying? Or am I the only one whose 'self' generating **power** eventually short circuits, runs down, wears out, dies?

III. Yet! By the all **powerful** grace of God, the Father, through the all **powerful** grace of God the Son, Jesus, the generating **power** of God the Holy Spirit comes upon us again and again and again. Just as we so **powerfully** confess in our Lutheran Catechism:

'I believe I cannot by my own reason or strength (or power) believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord or come to Him (or serve Him or accomplish His Great Commission) BUT the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel ... and keeps me in the true faith'. In other words, God empowers you and me. It's as simple and childlike as we sing:

'I am weak BUT He is strong! Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me! The Bible tells me so!' I can't willfully believe in Jesus Christ on my own power. Anymore than I can willfully generate the power of physical muscle reflexes. I can't willfully generate faith in my heart. Anymore than I can willfully control the power of my next physical heart beat. And I, a North Dakota farm boy, certainly does not have the willpower or ability to spread and share the message of repentance and forgiveness for Jesus' sake into all the world or even here at Immanuel, Plainview for that matter. Except that the power, of repentance and forgiveness of sins, has been generated within me from an outside power source. Like the REA, Rural Electric Association bringing electricity to my N. Dak. family farm. Which dramatically and drastically, powerfully changed our lives to this very day.

Can we though? Dare we, place such full confidence in the power of God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, the Triune God, simply because the Bible tells me so? Isn't that a bit naïve and weak for such sophisticated people like us, as the world around us with it's 'self help gurus' or our sinful human nature with it's 'all about me' attitude or Satan with his lie 'you can be your own god' would have us think and believe. Well, not according to our Ascension Day epistle, **Ephesians 1: 19 'I pray' it says 'the eyes of your heart may be enlightened ... with His = with God's incomparably great power for us who believe'**. That power to believe, that power to open our empty hands of faith, that power to enlighten our hearts and souls to see and receive and share Jesus' repentance and remission of sins is all by the power of God's grace to us as a gift. And a gift, a true gift is simply given to you because someone powerfully loves you. And 'yes, Jesus loves you ... the Bible tells you so ... I am weak BUT He is strong!' To the world, to our sinful self, to Satan that powerful childlike faith seems to be naïve and childish but Jesus IS all the power we need. And Jesus IS the power we have been given!

IV. The prayer of our epistle lesson **'I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may keep on giving you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better'**. That prayer is answered again and again and again in our lives through God's gifts of Word and Sacraments and our Christian care and concern for one another. That's the powerful reality I tried to feebly illustrate and print on our Ascension Day service folder. And which we confess in our Lutheran Confessions and by the grace of God powerfully share in our lives. Lets read, Smallcald Article 4, together: **'We now return to the Gospel, which does not give us counsel and aid against sin in only one way. God is superabundantly generous in His grace: First, through the spoken Word, by which the forgiveness of sins is preached in the whole world. This is the particular office of the Gospel. Second, through Baptism. Third, through the Holy Sacrament of the Altar. Fourth, through the power of the Keys. Also through the mutual conversation and consolation of brethren, 'Where two or three are gathered'.'** Those gifts of Gospel = God's grace in Word and Sacrament and our 'conversation and consolation' towards one another are like God's REA, Rural Electrical Association, so to speak, which so radically and so powerfully changed our lives back on the farm. God's grace radically and powerfully changes our lives and others lives every day, eternally.

Conclusion: Our Lord's ascension to the right hand of the Father does not mean Jesus is farther removed from us and our needs. Quite the contrary, rather Jesus' ascension and sending His Holy Spirit means our daily lives are empowered not from within ourselves BUT are empowered with the very strength of God Himself through His Word and Sacraments and our love and encouragement of one another as friends in Christ. God's love for us and our love for one another as friends in Christ is a powerful force that changes us and the whole world. To all of us who know the struggle, the weakness and the burden of powerlessness, physically, through illness or injury or simply old age. To all of us who know the struggle, the weakness and the burden of powerlessness, mentally, through depression, despair, disease or simply brain overload. To all of us who know the struggle, the weakness and the burden of powerlessness, spiritually, through trials, tragedies and tribulations. To all of us whose inner power generators are in overdrive and burned out, over heated at their very best fluctuating like the dim lights and radio of my N. Dak. boyhood farm. Simply receive the direct current of God's electrifying Word: His Law = it's not all about our self reliance, self confidence, self determination, self assurance, self assertiveness, self righteousness. His Gospel = it's all about God's empowering love for us inspite of ourselves. It's all about God's continually generating love in Word and Sacrament and our 'conversation and consolation' of one another who are so weak and burned out. 'I am weak BUT He is strong. Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me! The Bible tells me so and we tell one another and the whole world again and again and again.

That is the powerful and electrifying GOOD NEWS of Ascension Day I wanted to talk to you a little bit about this Ascension Day evening! Amen

And now may the peace of God which passes all our understanding keep your hearts and minds through faith in our crucified, risen, ascended and sending Savior, Jesus Christ, our power source. Amen

