

Scripture Readings:

Philippians 4:4-9

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

John 14:1-14

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.”

Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”

Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”

Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

Sermon:

The Power of Christ

Have you ever had one of those mornings where you just couldn't get out of bed? Maybe even this past week? Have you ever felt like you just couldn't complete the task in front of you? Maybe yesterday, or this morning! Or face the crisis at hand? This quarantine season, perhaps.

Or have you ever wondered how it is that some people seem to move through life, meeting and then surmounting one obstacle after another, confidently, with what seems like a never-ending supply of strength, while others seem to falter and flounder at the slightest turn of events?

What is it that motivates us to hang in there when the going gets tough? Where do we find the strength, courage, and resilience to pick ourselves up and keep going?

The Bible has a lot to say about this - in fact so many of the "heroes" of the Bible are just that, BECAUSE they have overcome challenges and surmounted seemingly impossible obstacles.

In the Gospel of John this morning, we find Jesus' disciples troubled, confused, and anxious. And Jesus' encouragement to them, is basically, that what they need to know...they already know.

Is it really that simple, that we already have all the strength and power that we need? Christ would say, well.... yes - in him we do have all we need. And I imagine that he'd also understand that living out of that is not so simple. We need help!

And for decades now personal empowerment has been society and culture's response. As the religion section in bookstores has decreased, the Self Help section has only increased!

Popular titles these days include some of the classics:

How to win friends and influence people
The 7 habits of highly effective people
I'm OK, You're OK

As well as:

Get out of Your Own Way
The Art of Authenticity
What to Do When You Don't Know What To Do
Nothing Changes until You Do
Best Self: Be You - Only Better

The self-help industry – books, videos, resources, training sessions – was estimated at \$10 billion dollars in 2019. One author has noted that “never has an age been so certain that it deserves not just freedom from distress, but positive well-being.” (*The New Statesman's* Barbara Gunnell in *The Self Help Industry Helps Itself to Billions of Dollars*, Lindsay Meyers at BrainBlogger, May23, 2014)

But what if... what if “self help” is not the best help for us? The longer I'm a Christian, and the deeper I go into the Bible and the basics of the faith, the more I become convinced that the “best help” we can know is the power of Jesus Christ.

For Christians, whatever personal power we have to draw on, is fueled by the Holy Spirit. We know that God's image is in every person and that we are our best selves when we live out of that identity. We claim and proclaim that Christ is alive, that he is with us and will never leave us – no matter what.

However, sometimes, it may seem like Christ is **not** with us, that he is indeed as far as the heavens above: When things aren't going our way; or when it feels like our world is caving in around us. Where is Christ in my divorce? Or in the death of my unborn child? Or in the Alzheimer's of my spouse? Where is Christ in this pandemic?

We can feel lost – and alone – confused. Not unlike the disciples in today's gospel asking Jesus, "We don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" and "show us the Father and that will be enough for us."
I can just hear the desperation in their voices as they seek direction and guidance.

And Jesus' response?

"I am the way, and the truth and the life,"
"Don't you know me even after I have been with you such a long time?"
"Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."

What they were seeking was right in front of them all along. **Hiding in plain sight** as we say in our house. Like Dorothy and the ruby slippers in Oz – on her feet the whole time.

In the midst of hard times, it **is** hard to see Christ with us, to feel his presence. But we can KNOW that he is indeed with us, and even in us, supplying us with what we need to rise and face the day. Which makes us people with great power, and with great potential for power. Imagine what our lives would be like if we could learn to live on, and rely on Christ's power instead of our own.

We all know the children's story, *The Little Engine that Could* in which the little choo choo train has to make it up the steep steep incline. The little engine chants as it slowly climbs, "I think I can, I think I can." Perhaps our chant should be "I know I can, I know I can."

If I had to summarize today's Gospel with one word, it would be ENCOURAGEMENT. This lesson is full of encouragement as Jesus assures his disciples, and us, that he is the way to the Father. And not only that, but, they, and we, already know God and have been with Him through Christ's being with them.

When I finished college, I thought I wanted to be a high school English teacher, and took another year of classes to get my teaching certificate. Then came the student teaching, and oh my gosh, was I having a rough time of it. I was struggling at every turn. I felt tremendous pressure from my supervising teacher, my advisor, my parents, the students.

Things with my roommate were difficult. And then I got sick – very sick, and missed an entire week of school putting me even farther behind. I didn't even know if I wanted to be a teacher, and here I was giving more than I had to make it through this program. I was miserable and can remember crying with fear every night.

The only thing I looked forward to was something I passed as I drove between my apartment and the school out in the suburbs. There was a big church that had one of those signs where you can put a saying on it. And this is what it said:

The power behind us is greater than the struggle which lies ahead.

Boy did I need that daily reminder of the power of Christ. So how do we tap into this power? How can we see and feel Christ in us and with us as we face the struggles of life?

I think one answer to this question is found in our reading from Philippians this morning. Listen again:

Rejoice! Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about these things.

It's so easy to see what's wrong – to focus on what's NOT going right – the challenge and the struggle and what's frustrating and annoying, and painful.

If only we could keep our minds and hearts focused on what is true, and noble, and right, and pure, and lovely.... And you know, it's not impossible.

And I'm not suggesting "the power of positive thinking" as the remedy to our struggles. I am suggesting that we follow Christ – that we somehow bring Christ into view even amidst the stresses and strains of the day.

Jesus tells us, "I am the way and the truth and the life." And Paul (elsewhere in Philippians) tells us "Your attitude should be the kind that was shown to us by Jesus."

Following Jesus, focusing on Jesus won't prevent bad things from happening to you, but I guarantee you, that you will have greater peace about you as you face challenges, and a strength you never knew you had. Ultimately, it is whether or not you are focused on Christ that will make or break you, not the thing that is happening to you or around you.

Our Gospel today ends with these words (Jesus is speaking), "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. They will do even greater things than these."

Jesus does not say, "anyone who has faith CAN do what I've been doing" but "WILL do what I have been doing."

Great things **will** be done by us, by the mere fact that we have faith in Him.

What Good News! What Great News! Faith in Christ, following Christ, is the best help you'll ever get. May it be so!

Amen.