

In the name of God, our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier.

I was inspired by the beginning of today's collect,

“stir up your power O Lord”

to look for God's power.

I started my search with a question;

how might I see, hear or read about God's power in action?

First, I want you to know that I definitely believe in God's, Jesus' and the Holy Spirit's power! Because I have seen it at work in my life, the lives of loved ones and strangers. I've read about it in countless books, devotions, and have seen it in movies and TV throughout my life.

God's power exists all around and within us and is active in every moment of life! We witness God's power through

Jesus' life and ministry that expressed radical transformative ideas about life, such as; the last shall be first and the first shall be last,

in the beatitudes where we find another reversal of order;

the poor in spirit will have God's Kingdom,

the meek will have the earth,

those who mourn will be comforted.

Jesus also stirred up his power through healing and feeding many lives.

This past week, right here, in the northern part of Bergen County, NJ

@ St Andrew's: We witnessed God's power being recognized and honored through the Harrington Park Good Citizen Award.

@ St Luke's: We witnessed God's power of comfort through our honoring and being present at a parishioner's wake and funeral.

@ Holy Communion we witness God's through feeding the hungry.

In this third week of Advent,
we are called to see God's power and rejoice!
Jesus' life gives us many reasons to be joyful even through times of grief,
pain and suffering.
Being joyful during our hard times is a very challenging part of our call as
Jesus' disciples.
How can we be joyful while our hearts and minds are drenched with
sadness, fear and worry?

It is such a great challenge that I think it is okay for us to shout:

BAH HUMBUG!

This is too much to bear, Jesus!

Jesus knows all about our challenge;
his passion and death revealed his firsthand experience of what we face
and as he hung on the cross, he said, **"My God, My God, why have you
abandoned me?"**

It is very hard for us to live in the tension of Jesus' joyful resurrection and
the reality of our suffering.

But here, today, in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus gives us a way to persevere.
John the Baptist was wondering if Jesus was truly the long-awaited
Messiah, and Jesus said,

"look at the signs around you!"

We don't know when Jesus' will return.

For now, we rejoice in his initial breakthrough as a baby, and continually
remind ourselves that when Jesus does return, he will bring about a
permanent transformation for the whole world.

But, for now, let us obey Jesus by being on the lookout for the moments when we see changed hearts and minds toward God's way of living with joy.

I found one such moment, on December 3rd, about two weeks ago.

I attended the *Faith and Film* event at Holy Communion where we watched and discussed the film [*Zhwah-yuh*] *Joyeux Noel or Merry Christmas* in English.

It was a film based on a true story about a moment of peaceful unity during the first World War in 1914 where the military units of British, Scottish, French and German soldiers paused on Christmas eve to share stories, food, drink and to play soccer.

The Chaplain celebrated Mass on Christmas day which brought the soldiers even closer together.

The commanding officers of the four units decided to continue the truce to help each other bury the dead soldiers. At the end of Christmas day, the soldiers returned to their respective bunkers until the German officer asked for a truce to tell the others that an air strike was to take place soon and they should move to their bunker.

The British, French and Scots were hesitant at first but decided to move. After the air strike the Scots said the Germans should join them in their bunker because there would be a retaliatory air strike on the German bunker.

The Germans moved to the Scots, British and French bunkers until the air strike was over and then the Germans returned to their bunker.

These men's lives were transformed by their shared practice, faith and belief in God's incarnation in Jesus.

Even the German officer who was of Jewish faith was transformed.

God's Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

I found another story of God's power in the Advent book, *A Light Upon My Path*, that we are using for our Advent bible series.

One of the authors, Phil Beyer, served as a prison Chaplain and shared his experience;

"The light of the inmate's childhood innocence was darkened by homelessness, gangs, drugs, and now prison. They were mistrustful of me, their teacher, the do-gooder white dude three time their age. As fifteen faces stared at me from around the table in the prison chapel, I agonized, "how do I reach them?"

"Coloring books" was God's answer to me in my desperate prayers while driving home. **"Wait, What?"**

Phil decided to obey God and brought brand new coloring books and crayons at his next visit.

All of the young men took a book and box of crayons except one person, Taylor. They began to color and Taylor look at Phil and asked, "What are you doing here old man?" Phil replied, honestly, I'm winging it, following God's lead. As the young men colored in their books, they began to share their work and their stories. One young man said that the book and crayons was his first gift. He never celebrated his birthday or Christmas.

As Phil was leaving, Taylor grabbed the remaining coloring book and crayons and said, "see ya next week."

God's power is at work even in the most unlikely places and most impossible situations.

The Advent season is a four-week course in waiting because no one, except God, knows when we will be fully restored – when **God's Kingdom will be fully on earth as it is in heaven.**

Our waiting is an activity of seeing the brokenness in ourselves and the world while witnessing God breaking through in small increments and remembering some of God's promises that we hear in today's readings; Isaiah tells us that "the wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom."¹

God's restoration includes all of creation, no one or nothing is excluded. We find God's transforming and restorative power throughout Isaiah's poetic text and we may use it to help us remember that God will restore what is broken and destroyed.

James calls us to be patient as he says;

"Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord...Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near."²

He instructs us be like the farmer who watches for signs of weather and crop growth while he goes about all his other farm chores.³

Which translates for us as our witnessing of the small increments of God's power at work in our lives.

It is so good to read in Matthew's Gospel that John the Baptist had some doubt about who Jesus was as he asked the question about Jesus identity, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?"⁴

¹ - Isaiah 35:1-10: v1

² James 5:7-10: vv. 7-8

³ Connections Commentary, p. 44-45

⁴ Matthew 11:2-11: vv. 3-5

And Jesus responded, "Go and tell John what you hear and see, the blind receives their sight...the poor have good news brought to them."

Jesus is telling us that God is at work restoring the world,
right in front of our eyes,
to the way it was created to be.

**God's Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven –
Whole, abundant and full of radiant joy.⁵**

Today, we are called to remember that God's promise is happening now, bit by bit. Sometimes we notice it, most of the time we don't because we have other things to do and places to go, each taking up our time, energy and attention and distracting us from seeing God's handiwork.

If we stop, for just a few moments every day to build a habit of noticing, of being present in the moment, we will see God's transformative power in nature, in people and in our circumstances.

If we choose to continue as we've always done,
we run the risk of continuing to feel despair, disengaged, uncertain and worried.

The **prescription** that God is giving to us during this Advent season is to slowdown, even stop doing the things that are giving us worry and despair. Instead, go for a walk, pray and listen in silence as best as we are able. And in that quiet time, ask God to show you his handy work.

Ask Jesus to open your eyes and ears to see and hear what he is up to.
Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in reordering your life so that you have time to be still to listen and wait with God.

⁵ Feasting on the Word, Theological Perspective

Something that I did to slow down to see God in my life was to take one picture, each day, that look like God.

Then each week I posted the pictures with a description of how I thought God was speaking to me.

It slowed me down and revealed God's handy work within and around my ordinary life.

God has amazing power to do that for you too.

Maybe that is something you can explore.

- Or maybe start a practice this week by setting aside time each day to read today's scripture passages and ask God to reveal his power to you.

- Or maybe participate in God's healing by reaching out to someone who is isolated or ill.

- Or maybe, name the signs of joy you see, and share them with someone else.

Actively waiting by slowing down, praying and watching for God's action in our life enables us to become a part of God's powerful transformative restoration, in our hearts, minds, our families, at church, at work and in our communities at large.

Our world is in great need of the awareness of God's power at work.

We are called to embody and share it.

As we wait for Christ's coming, both in the manger and for his final restoration, let us get ready by seeing God's power at work in our lives and the world today.

And remember what Isaiah said,

"Be strong, do not fear!

Here is your God.”⁶

The desert will bloom, the broken will be healed, and joy will come again.

Let us wait, work, and watch together, for the Lord is here.

Amen.

CITATIONS

- Connections: A Lectionary Commentary for Preaching and Worship, Year A, Vol. 1, pp. 35-36, 38, 42-32, 44-45, 46-48.
- Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year A, Vol. 1, Theological, Pastoral, Exegetical, and Homiletical Perspectives for Isaiah 35:1-10, James 5:7-10, Matthew 11:2-11.
- Holy Bible, NRSV: Isaiah 35:1-10; James 5:7-10; Matthew 11:2-11.
- Psalm 146:4-9, Canticle 15 (The Song of Mary, “Magnificat,” BCP p. 91).

⁶ Isaiah 35:3-4