

Mighty God

Readings: Isaiah 11:1–10, John 1:19-27

Pray: Open our ears, O Lord, to hear your word and know your voice. Speak to our hearts and strengthen our wills, that we may serve you today/now and always. Amen

Just before Christmas in Southern California a number of years back an assistant pastor told the story of how his wife, her sister and the sister's three year old were driving home from a shopping trip. It was a cold, blustery night but the sisters were enjoying a good chat in the front seat. Suddenly they heard the horrible sound of the back door being opened, a whistle of wind and a sickening muffled sound. They turned and saw the child tumbling along the motorway.

Panic! They slammed on the brakes and ran full speed back to the child. As they arrived at her motionless body, they noticed something weird. The traffic had stopped in a line behind her body. Not one single car had hit the wee girl. The car that should have hit her was a couple of metres behind where she lay.

The wee girl was still alive and was rushed to the hospital. There just happened to be one nearby. The girl was unconscious but still breathing. At the hospital the girl was pronounced unconscious and grazed but with no broken bones.

As the mother bent over her unconscious child she was filled with gratitude for the miracle of her daughter's life. The wee girl opened her eyes saying "Mommy, you know I wasn't afraid." Startled, her mother asked "What do you mean?"

"Well," she replied, "while I was lying on the road waiting for you to get back to me, I wasn't afraid because I looked up, and I saw Jesus holding back the traffic with his arms spread out."

As far as I can tell that is a true story. What amazing power God has to operate in ways we cannot begin to comprehend.

As powerful as that story is though, it would be a mistake to think that God's power is only available for miracles like that; miracles of intervention for one person or one family. The title 'Mighty God' as it refers to Jesus, is about much more than individual rescues or interventions, wonderful demonstrations of God's power though they are.

I want to consider what God's power is like, beginning with what it is not like, then look at how that power has been delegated and finally what that means for us today. First I want to simply say that the title Mighty God is rightly bestowed on Jesus. Jesus and God his Father are one. The apostle John makes that clear at the outset of his Gospel:

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. John 1:1

He goes on to explain their mutual creation of all things. Much later in John's book Thomas blurts his exclamation of who Jesus really is. "My Lord and my God!" he exclaims.

Isaiah 9:6 declares the roles Jesus' has already and will fully enact in the future. They are: Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace. SAY THEM WITH ME Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace

Jean told us, when the prophecy of a child who would usher in times of justice and peace was given, that world was in times of turmoil – just as we are today. That prophecy she reminded us could not be of any human being; not any future king such as Hezekiah, nor could it refer to any prophet, not even John the Baptist – though Jesus said that none greater than John the Baptist had ever existed. No, the prophecy had to refer to the coming Messiah – Jesus Christ himself.

So let's consider the second title and characteristic of Jesus today: that of 'Mighty God'.

As we consider God's might or power, it's important to note what our Mighty God is not. I think there is a fear of power today (I don't mean electricity though it is wise to use that kind of power cautiously.) Many of us have seen power wielded unfairly; even abusively in all kinds of places. Bullying, sexual abuse, manipulation are far too common; sometimes even in the church. Some in the church have taken advantage authority by becoming spiritually abusive. BOOKS

The Lord is all powerful but he is never abusive. He uses power for good and never for evil. And he offers us his power to use in the same way.

So let's take a look at Isaiah Chapter 11 where the prophecy continues as it describes various aspects of the kind of person the promised One is.

From David's family will come one on whom the Spirit of God rests. It is God's Spirit who empowers and directs the power that Jesus wields. The Holy Spirit gives power that contains wisdom and understanding. The Spirit brings counsel and notice how that is paired with 'might'. Wise counsel is very powerful indeed. The Spirit brings knowledge and fear of the Lord. All of those qualities are intrinsic in Jesus nature. Jesus is one with the Holy Spirit and he is one with the Lord.

And yet, in the letter to the Philippians Paul could honestly describe Jesus' attitude like this:

Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross. Phil 2:6 - 8

Isaiah rightly notes that the promised One chooses to fear and to obey the Lord. Power operated in submission is very potent indeed. Jesus' obedience to the will and character of God, meant that he never judged on appearances not made hasty

decisions based on inadequate information. Rather Jesus came to bring justice to the poor and to make fair decisions for the exploited. (I'm using the New Living Translation for these comments.)

Bringing justice in the way Jesus does is earthshattering in its power. The earth will shake and the wicked will be destroyed. When power is utilised in the spirit of love wickedness is destroyed; not always immediately but ultimately the wicked cannot stand before one who speaks and acts in love for others. The power of the cross is found in apparent weakness, not in overt displays of supremacy.

Paul again, this time writing to the church at Corinth:

The message of the cross is foolish to those who are headed for destruction!

But we who are being saved know it is the very power of God. 1 Cor 1:18

So the power of the cross, the power Jesus' wields throughout his life on earth comes from the Spirit; from Jesus' nature as a person of the Godhead. It is also an action; a daily choice that he chooses to put on.

He will wear righteousness like a belt,
And truth like an undergarment.

Bet you didn't know Jesus wore special undies! Ha ha

When power is wielded unfairly or selfishly, the result is always abuse. In verse 6 we see what the results of Jesus' powerful reign will bring; complete harmony for the whole of creation. There will be no more violence and the earth will be filled with people who know the Lord; people who know the Lord! Verse 10 says the nations will rally to the promised One, and where he lives will be glorious. That verse is speaking of our earth; this bruised and broken planet we call home. His banner of salvation reaches over the whole world! There is hope for us after all.

These verses are a wonderful picture of what power for good can do. There will be justice for everyone. The ever-growing gap that exists in our world between the rich and the poor will be non-existent. There will be no poor. Psalm 22:6 will be fulfilled:

The poor will eat and be satisfied. All who seek the Lord will praise him.
Their hearts will rejoice with everlasting joy.

In Jesus' life on earth his power was always transformative. In Mark 1:21 – 28 he cast out an evil spirit; a spirit who acknowledged his power. In Mark 4:35 – 41 he calmed the storm. Walter Bruggeman points out how these two forces of chaos and death have no choice but to obey Jesus. Everything Jesus did was to bring all of creation closer to what God has intended us to be.

There are wonderful days coming but what we do in the meantime? While Jesus has come; he has not ushered in his Kingdom in its fullness yet. So what are we to do until then?

There are many claimants for power in this world just as there were in Jesus' day. Then it was Rome along with many gods and goddesses. Today I could argue it is

capitalism, the cult of the individual etc. There are still many gods grasping for power in our lives and in this world.

Jesus didn't compete with those gods. He said "My kingdom is not of this world." John 18:36 He simply lived differently; being led and empowered by the Holy Spirit in submission and justice. Then he empowered others to live differently. He commissioned his disciples to cure the sick and gave them complete power over the enemy. Luke 10:9 - 20

Jesus first gave that same Holy Spirit to his church in Acts 1:8. And he breathes that same Holy Spirit upon us; and on all of his people today. Receiving the Holy Spirit gives us the authority to walk in the same kind of power that Jesus has. It is our job to tell others, by our lives and by our words which explain why we live the way we do, that Jesus is the Mighty God. He has the power to transform lives today.

Throughout history our mighty God works in ways we would never have thought of: Lock someone up and the result is John Bunyan who wrote Pilgrim's Progress, leading millions to a deeper relationship with God.

Raise a child in total poverty and Abraham Lincoln grows up as a powerful president to bring freedom to a nation.

Another will struggle with deafness but Ludwig van Beethoven's music has blessed millions.

A baby born in a black society filled with racial discrimination grows up to as Martin Luther King Jr bringing comparative freedom to black Americans.

Another is called a slow learner and written off as impossible to educate – Albert Einstein's thinking gave us new ways of looking at time, space, matter, energy and gravity.

Please notice that the power they wielded was never for themselves alone. God's power is always for the benefit of others. On the face of it none of those people should have been able to do the things they did. In one sense we don't appear to be anyone or anything special either. Yet the power of God is among us. Who knows what God's power can accomplish in and through us.

In what ways is our Mighty God asking you to work with him in transforming your little corner of the world?

Let's pause and ask him two questions:

What are you saying to us Lord?

What do you want me to do about it?

The Lord be with you.

Further Reflective Questions:

Where do you see Jesus' power in operation today?

How do you see that power working out?

What places do you long to see more of his power evident?

How can you co-operate with the Lord in making that happen?