

## Power: Yours, Mine, Ours

As we move into a time of reflection, we recognize the gift it is to be freely gathered here for worship as both newer and longer-time friends. We are on the live stream and on this land that has been loved by First Nations and others throughout time and where we are now weaving our way of community. I invite you to join your hearts with mine in a moment prayer – closing your eyes if that helps to ground you in this moment.

God of all, we invite your Spirit to speak in a new way today. Make your love palpable to us in the sounds, silence, and company we share during this hour of worship. Spark in us holy curiosity as wonder about the power we carry – our individual power and our collective power as a congregation. Help us to attune ourselves to openings through which your love seeks to work by way of our power. We ask this as disciples of Jesus. Amen.

To have power is to have the capacity to influence or have an effect. In your experience (and as I asked the children), what does it look like for someone to exercise power for good? I invite you to close your eyes again for a moment as you ask yourself: Who is someone I have known exercise positive power (that is, have great influence or effect on my life or the life of others)? Holding that person in your mind's eye, ask yourself this: What does that person's power look like?

Opening our eyes to one another now, let's hear a few ways that power for good manifests itself. No need to name the person or relationship. But please fill in the blank! Power for good looks like: *[teaching, encouragement, helping a friend, being open with your heart to others, humility, listening, truth telling, speaking out with authenticity when you may be the minority, protesting yesterday, encouragement, love – in many ways.]*

In the gospel reading for today, an editor suggests that the purpose for Jesus' parable was to convey "... *the necessity of praying always and not losing heart.*" I would assert that the parable also illustrates the positive power (the power for good) that can be exercised and develop through praying always and not losing heart.

A moment ago, I invited us to bring to mind persons who have exercised positive power (influenced people or affected circumstances for the good). We are also well acquainted with the distortion of power we experience in our efforts to control – to control circumstances, to control outcomes, and even to control other people. An attempt to control holds no real power because it is fueled by fear, greed, self-sufficiency, or laziness instead of by innate capacity (which we might also call our given spiritual gifts).

Jesus' parable for today clearly illustrates the stark difference between an attempt to control (white knuckled) and an effort to exercise power. What we are told of the judge's character is that he did respect God or people and outright disregarded the widowed woman in her quest for justice. The judge was more or less in control of the woman's level of safety. But he was in that position not by his own capacity but rather according to the position granted him and the sheer inertia or laziness he embodied.

On the other hand, we witness as the widowed woman in Jesus' parable... *"kept coming to the judge and saying, 'Give me legal protection from my opponent.'*" If any of us had been thinking of this woman at the start of this reflection, we may have said, "power looks like persistence," or "power looks like tenacity," or "power looks like self-worth."

Jesus also used this parable to remind his disciples (then and now) that the God in whom he trusted is a love that brings forth justice. And, importantly, it is we who need to enact God's justice.

We heard, *"God will give them swift justice. But when the Promised One comes, will faith be found anywhere on earth?"* In other words, God's power (God's capacity for love and justice) is abundantly available to be shared by all. There is no place that is outside the reach of God's love and justice. There is no person who is outside the reach of God's love and justice. But will God find faith anywhere on Earth? Does God find faith in you, in me, in our congregation?

Our three contemporary voices for today offer us nuggets of wisdom related to our individual and collective journeys toward healthily exercising of our God-give powers.

Let's first turn to a voice who invites us to consider the beneficial nature & purpose of power. In his essay, "It's Time to Talk About Power," Andy Crouch declares the following about the beneficial nature and purpose of power – he writes: *"[P]ower is a gift – the gift of a Giver who is the supreme model of power used to bless and serve. Power is not given to benefit those who hold it. It is given for the flourishing of individuals, peoples, and the cosmos itself."*

Hear this one phrase again: *"Power is a gift given for the flourishing of..."* – all. **I wonder: to whose benefit might you practice more of your power? For whose flourishing might you practice more of your power?**

Now, let's turn to another voice, who invites us to consider the positive impact that comes through offering our power.

In his book, *Prayers for a Privileged People*, Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann (now a blessed memory) appreciates the positive impact that can come through sharing our power: *“Teach us the power of sharing so that what we have and who we are might become good news to the poor, healing to the brokenhearted, and release to the captives.”*

Hear again one short phrase: *“[May] what we have and who we are become good news...”* **I wonder: Which of your powers might you offer with more frequent openhearted generosity – such that what you have and who you are becomes good news?**

And, finally, let’s turn to another voice, who invites us to consider how collaboration (that is, shared power) can strengthen community. In her book, *Somehow: Thoughts on Love*, popular author Anne Lamott describes how a community can use power collaboratively as a way of strengthening cohesion: *“Community means we’re collaborating. It means that you help my children and my old people and I help yours. It means we are in this together.”*

Hear again one phrase: *“Community means... you help [me and mine] and I help yours.”* **I wonder: With whom or in what context do you need to work to create a fuller balance between give and take in the sharing of power?**

Let’s hear a blessing to bring this moment in our worship service to a close. I invite you to close your eyes. This is a touchstone thought for me, from the beginning of our worship service. It comes from Marianne Williamson. I invite you to hear her speaking directly to you.

*“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.*

*Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.*

*It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us.*

*We ask ourselves, 'Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?'*

*Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God.*

*Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do.*

*We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us.*

*It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone.*

*And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.*

*As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."*

Fellow disciples of Jesus, may we each and together powerfully shine with the capacities we have been given, because Love and justice are counting on us. Amen.

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St. Croix United Church (Bayport, MN)  
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Luke 18:1-8,  
Excerpts from: "It's Time to Talk About Power" (Andy Crouch),  
*Prayers for a Privileged People* (Walter Brueggemann), *Somehow: Thoughts on Love* (Anne Lamott)