



Date: November 13, 2016

Title: "War on Terror, Part Three: Exercising Power"

Scripture: Psalm 37:1-7; Acts 1:7-9

Description: In response to the results of last week's Presidential election, if you are despondent and afraid, Psalm 37 offers guidance of how to deal with it. You have several avenues available to exercise your power.

Americans are deeply divided about what is wrong with our nation; Americans are deeply divided about what needs to be done. A new President has been elected. Approximately half of Americans are celebrating the change that is promised; half of Americans are in tears. I want to speak this morning to both halves. I want to speak about power: first about fear of those in power, then about exercising power.

If you weep and are afraid, read Psalm 37. Read it again. Read it until you can repeat it word for word. When you are afraid, let Psalm 37 show you how to respond.

There are four verbs in the opening of this Psalm. The first is "Do not fret." When I am afraid, it feels like the boogey-man has taken over the entire world. When I'm in pain, it feels like the hurt will last forever. "The grass withers and the flower fades," says scripture.

Years ago, when my children were very young, I grew so weary parenting and of the needs and demands which had engulfed my life. A wise counsellor made this promise: "There will come a day when you will go shopping and you will no longer know what aisle the diapers are on." "No way!" I thought. "Never!" But that is exactly what happened. "For they will fade like grass." (Psalm 37:2)

The deep truth is this: the crisis today is a thunderstorm, with wind and hail and lightning. But it is only a storm; the climate is life. In the history of the world, every night so far has been followed by day.

"Take delight in the LORD" says v. 4. When we're afraid, we tend to become blind to all the goodnesses of life. Don't let that which threatens you blind you to the beauties of life. If you spent last week weeping, look around.

The day after he was released from the hospital, I had breakfast with my dear friend. It had been a rough time in the hospital—the treatment was unpleasant and had lasted two days longer than expected. The doctor was not hopeful. My friend himself told me he didn't think he had much time left. He was very old, and about worn out, and the cancer was spreading.

At breakfast, he dunked his sweet roll into his coffee. "I love the sweet rolls and coffee in this place!" he exclaimed. "And when I finish breakfast, I'm going over to the club to shave and shower. My club has the best showers in town!"

He didn't have much time left, and he rarely felt good towards the end, but he delighted in the tiny goodnesses of life. At the last, when he couldn't even have sweet rolls and coffee and the best shower in town, he still had the memory of those things, and he took delight in the memories.

"When you're hurting or afraid, do this," says the Bible. "Take delight in the LORD." Remember to the last moment that life still has beauty and meaning.

"Trust in the Lord," says the Psalm. (v. 3, 5) You don't have to fix this all at once. You don't have to fix it at all. "Commit your way to the Lord and *he* will act." Trust in the Lord. God is in control. God will make things turn out the way they need to turn out.

But that doesn't mean that we are to do nothing. "Trust in the Lord *and do good.*" If you are afraid the new administration will wreak havoc and harm in the world, then you go out there and do some good in your world. Those who have been elected to office have the power to govern, but we, the people, maintain the power to set the tone.

Jesus did not own a weapon, hold office, or manage a single hedge fund, but he possessed amazing power. You follow in his steps. You can wield tremendous influence. "You shall receive power," Jesus told his small, frightened band. "and your power will spread throughout the world." It's time for you to lead the way.

A young single mother, recently widowed, found herself chatting with a middle-aged man named Norm. "My only son took an overdose of drugs and died," the soft-spoken man said as they leaned against a chain-link fence that surrounded the Little League baseball park. "It tore my wife up completely." Tears brimmed in his kind eyes. "In fact, she couldn't stand it. She took her own life." After a moment's effort to compose himself, he add, "I'm sure they're both with the Lord. They were the churchgoers in the family. I didn't go much. But I kind of felt that God was telling me not to crumple up under my load. A few weeks after my wife's death, I found myself walking down toward this ball park one afternoon. Since then, I've given all my spare time helping these kids learn how to shag flies, hit and throw curve balls, run bases. He grinned a little. "Don't know how much I'm helping them, but they sure do help me."

When you're wrestling with that one-two combo of fear and desolation, look for some way to do good. You can make a difference. Don't underestimate what Jesus meant when he said, "You shall receive power."

Let's talk about what to do with that power. There are four ways that influence is exerted. Think of them as the four corners of a square. These ways operate in every

group: in the U.S. Capital, in this church, in your business or school, around your family Thanksgiving dinner table.

The first way is that of the Spokesperson. This is someone who is good with words, a figurehead who can talk with people, inspire people and gain their trust. When you think of civil rights, you think of Dr. Martin Luther King; when you think of the apartheid struggle, you think of Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela.

The Spokesperson recognizes the unspoken values and agenda of people and gives them a name and a voice. A spokesperson stands as a beacon on a hill, giving identity and cohesion.

You can be a spokesperson. You don't have to be a great orator; you don't have to be the pastor whose name is on the sign out front. You have opportunities to speak up for your faith, for your values. Use those opportunities. Speak up for goodness. "You shall receive power," Jesus told his small but faithful band. And your power will spread throughout the world. It's time for you to lead, maybe your influence should be as a Spokesperson.

The second form of power is that of the Chair. The Chairman of the Board, the Chairperson of the Committee, the organizer of the family—the chairperson ensures that things get done, deadlines are met, obligations are fulfilled. In a business, the project gets completed, the right people get hired and then they get paid on time. In a family, the bills get paid, the cars are insured, and dinner gets on the table.

If the spokesperson's job is about inspiration, the chairperson's job is about stability and trust. In short, this person needs to be a grown-up. You want a chair to be a safe, reliable, competent pair of hands. However much you may admire someone, if they're always losing checks or forgetting appointments or constantly late for meetings, they may offer lots of charisma, but you're not going to want them in charge for long.

Are you dismayed about the results of the election? Then find a place to contribute good to your world and offer to serve. Are you pleased about our new President-elect? Then find a place to contribute to positive change and get on board. Serve as a Chairperson, not as an audience. "You shall receive power", said Jesus. It's time to exercise that power.

The third form of power is that of Facilitator. The chair leads from the front; the facilitator leads from the back. The facilitator is like the coach, constantly going round the team to have a quiet word with each one, working out how to get the best out of them and how to get the right combination to release the energy in the group. This person remembers everybody's birthday, notices when someone is missing from the group, turns conflict into opportunities for growth. The Chair makes you feel everything's under control; the Facilitator makes you feel like you're important, that you have a contribution to make.

You're an introvert and meeting strangers is right up there with a trip to the dentist. A Facilitator calls to say, "How about bringing a box of cookies and serving them to folks who are voting at the church this week?" It turns out to be a highlight of your week. A facilitator sees your strengths you didn't know you had.

Basic truth: you are far more aware of your weaknesses than I am. I am more aware of your strengths than you are. A Facilitator sees those strengths and brings them out.

The fourth kind of power lies with what I call an Epitome. This is the person who represents all that's good about an organization. You don't have to explain your faith stands and what you believe; you just point to that person and say, "That's what I'm talking about."

Two words: "Mother Teresa." She was not exceptionally articulate, she did not hold an official title, but her heart pulsed with the lifeblood of the people she serve and with the values she held. And her influence was world-wide. "You shall receive power." Do not underestimate the power and influence of a person who embodies values and connects them with living.

Be careful. There are dangers in each form of power. A Spokesperson runs the risk of acquiring a huge ego. "All eyes fixed on me" is an intoxicating experience. A Chairperson may become greedy for control. A Facilitator may grow to need everyone to like him and lose himself in the process. The Epitome may feel pressure to appear perfect and become unable to show weakness.

In fact, you want your leader to have weaknesses, because that's when the people have an opportunity to step up and make a difference. This makes us all stronger. Jesus did not say, "Your *leader* shall receive power." He promised, "You shall receive power." You. (A better translation would be "*You-all*", because we all need each other.) "And you-all shall be witness to me.." Step-by-growing step, your influence will spread world-wide.

If you don't like the way things are going down, go out there and do something. If you think the world is headed in the wrong direction, go turn the world around. "You shall receive power," Jesus said, not "you shall receive a crying towel."

If you believe our health care system is broken, call the Good Sam Center in Norcross, a place that provides medical services to people who can't pay full price. Tell them you'd like to help.

If you think our educational system is in disarray, contact your local school. Not the private school where you spend \$10K a year for tuition, but the near-by school where half the kids qualify for free lunch. Call the Guidance Counsellor there and offer an hour or two a week helping a kid learn to read.

You have a greater responsibility than to cast your vote every four years and spend the time in between complaining. Those of us who listen to talk radio and

forward messages to ten friends, how's that working so far? "You shall receive power." Exercise your power. Use your influence. Speak up, take charge, offer support and encouragement, put your values into practice.

"In Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, to the ends of the earth." Change a life, change a community, change America, change the world. It's time to step up. Exercise the power God has given you. Exert your influence. Lead the way. Amen.