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***The Power of Jesus***  
***Colossians 1:3-14***

*In our prayers for you we always thank God, the<sup>[b]</sup> Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>4</sup>for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, <sup>5</sup>because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. You have heard of this hope before in the word of the truth, the gospel <sup>6</sup>that has come to you. Just as it is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world, so it has been bearing fruit among yourselves from the day you heard it and truly comprehended the grace of God. <sup>7</sup>This you learned from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on our<sup>[c]</sup> behalf, <sup>8</sup>and he has made known to us your love in the Spirit.*

*<sup>9</sup>For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be **filled with the knowledge** of God's<sup>[d]</sup> will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, <sup>10</sup>so that you may **walk worthy** of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you **bear fruit** in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. <sup>11</sup>May you be made **strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power**, so that you may have all endurance and patience, joyfully <sup>12</sup>giving thanks to the Father,<sup>[e]</sup> who has enabled<sup>[f]</sup> you<sup>[g]</sup> to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. <sup>13</sup>He has **rescued us from the power of darkness** and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, <sup>14</sup>in whom we have redemption,<sup>[h]</sup> the forgiveness of sins.*

Today's scripture should be **familiar** to you,  
Because we heard these as a first reading a few weeks ago,  
So you can do well on the pop quiz later!

Sometimes it's good to **hear verses** again.  
Especially when we think about **power**.  
The power of **Jesus**, the power of the **church**, and our own **individual** power.

This sermon came about because of the men's **COGS group** here at FPC,  
I believe that stands for **Church Old Guys**,  
although they are not necessarily old. But they are very **wise**.

One of them, our own **Joe Ritacco**, shared an email about power from his friend **Rabbi Marc Kline**, of Long Branch, where he asked this question:

**Why are houses of worship diminishing? Why is formal religion dying?  
Well, too many institutions exist to control people—to wield power over them.**

He spoke about how religion is best when it is used to **EMPOWER** people, **not wield power** over them.

I couldn't agree more.

And I think we find our **MODEL** for that in Jesus—  
someone who **always empowered** those around him.

Just look at how he dealt with his disciples,

**teaching and empowering them to carry the good news** out into the world.

And they did just that!

He **didn't wield** the power he had as the Son of God,  
Instead, he used that power to **love, serve, help, and give**  
and to **empower others to do the same**.

But we have to admit--**Jesus is NOT the kind of powerful leader we expect.  
He certainly wasn't who they expected then, either.**

When we think of **power--we think of HUMAN power**.

Because we are surrounded by people who fight for power,  
and want to flaunt it.

Jesus has power, but doesn't fight for it, or flaunt it.

**And Jesus certainly doesn't use his power to hurt or coerce anyone.**

He does NOT use intimidation, violence, or corruption to get his way.

He is not a bully, he is not a dictator, he is not a power broker.

Talk about being **counter-cultural!**

Jesus is not like the leaders in our world.

And He is not like we are, either.

**The truth is, we ALL have some kind of power, like I told the kids.**

And today as we think about the power of Jesus,

It's good to ask ourselves:

*What power do we have?*

*How do we use it?*

*Whose interests are we serving?  
And to whom are we accountable?*

I think about the responsibility I have as a Pastor, Mom and Wife.  
**Those are positions of power,**  
With important **interests** to serve, and a need for **accountability**.

So, I am a member of clergy groups, I work with all of you,  
I have a Spiritual director,  
To have some of that **pastoral accountability**.  
I have **friends and family** who hold me accountable to my other roles.

**What about YOU?**  
**What kind of power do you have?**  
*How do you use it?*  
*Whom are you serving?*  
*And to whom are you accountable?*

Because we all have power, we all need to think about these things.  
Power without understanding, or accountability—  
well, we know how that ends up, don't we?  
**The saying is so true: Absolute power corrupts absolutely!**

In our WORLD, power means—  
**get as much as you can, and use it for personal gain.**  
**Wield it over others.**

**But as Christians, we live by a different standard.**  
We follow the **example of Jesus Christ**.  
And Jesus has a **very UNIQUE kind of power**.  
Colossians talks about how our strength comes from **His glorious power—**

**So, WHAT IS His power?**  
Well, Jesus tells us Himself, that He came **to serve, not to be served**.  
Which is pretty much the **opposite of worldly power, isn't it?**  
This is what we see when Jesus **washes his disciples' feet,**  
and tells them to love each other like that.

This is what we see when he **welcomes the outcasts** to heal them,  
 Or invites **women** to join him in ministry.  
 Or welcomes the little **children**.  
 We see Jesus constantly displaying this special power—  
 Of loving, serving, healing, teaching, feeding, welcoming.....  
 And never expecting others to wait on Him!

***But we see something else amazing, too.***

It's almost mind-boggling—it's so hard for us to understand.  
 We see the power of **GRACE!**

***Now. Talk about countercultural.***

We hardly see any grace in our society today.  
 People are judged so harshly the very second they post on social media  
 or say something publicly in any arena.  
 There is no tolerance for mistakes, or regrets, or just differences.  
 No grace.  
 Just judgment.

***And yet, in*** Jesus' last moments on the cross  
 When we think of Him as being power-less,  
 He actually shows a great **power** that many leaders would abhor!

After all, ***He is innocent***, but he does not fight his crucifixion.  
 He knows this is his mission,  
 to show God's love in this powerful, sacrificial way.  
 In fact, throughout the entire Passion of his suffering,  
 Jesus doesn't defend himself against all the false accusations!  
 He goes to the cross, surrounded by mockery and derision,  
 And hangs between two common criminals.

***Now, how is that power?***

On the cross, Jesus promises a criminal, who begs for mercy,  
***"Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."***  
 One of Jesus' last acts on earth is so powerful:  
***Because Jesus shows power, by offering GRACE.***

This offer of grace on the cross is well, **scandalous**.  
 Don't we want to make sure that criminals get their punishment?  
 And people who are 'bad' go somewhere other than to heaven?  
 And yet, here is Jesus---promising eternal life to a criminal!

***This is him showing power—through Grace.***

It's so hard for us to understand,  
 It's hard for us to receive,  
 And hard for us to give away.

***But this is Jesus' power!***

***Talk about a DIFFERENT kind of power----***

Jesus' power is about humility, service, and vulnerability.

Think about that for a minute.

Do you ever think about **YOUR power** as that of humility, service,  
 And vulnerability?

And yet Jesus models that—for us.

He taught **humility, service, and vulnerability** to his followers.

Which means we should base our power on that!

Jesus **empowered his followers** to live a special way.

The way of grace.

The way of love.

It's almost unbelievable when you really think about it.

***If we look at the whole of His life, death, and resurrection,***

all of it points to the kind of power

that we so desperately need in our lives, and in our world today--

***The power of LOVE.***

***When Paul is writing his letter to the Colossians,***

He wants to make sure they understand who Jesus is—fully human and divine.

And, that his **power is all about love**.

***This is why he writes:***

*May you be made strong with all the strength that comes **from his glorious power**, so that you may have all endurance and patience, joyfully <sup>12</sup> giving thanks to the Father,<sup>[e]</sup> ... He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son....*

Jesus' power is **NOT self-serving**.

It is always in service to others.

Jesus' power is **NEVER** coercive, demeaning, or hurtful.

That's what makes it **a glorious power** in the words of Paul—

A power where we can draw strength!

Talk about different.

**This is in total contrast** to the power of the world,

The power of those who want to BE God instead of following God.

**So what does this kind of power do for us?**

Well, it doesn't always make our lives easier!

In fact, over the years, **the church has suffered because of their allegiance**,

not to any empire or emperor, but to the power of Jesus.

Christians have been **persecuted** for submitting to Jesus' power,

And choosing to show that **power of love**.

**Jesus' power doesn't make life easy,**

**but it bring endurance, patience, and JOY—**

just as Paul says here in Colossians!

The question is, **do we want the life and power that Jesus offers?**

Or do we want to the worldly option?

Christians have **been seduced by the power of the world** throughout history.

In Nazi Germany there was a power struggle

between those who condemned the evil of the Nazis,

And those who wanted to co-opt the church for that regime.

In the 1930s the Nazi government in Germany established **a State Office of Religious Affairs**, and encouraged church leaders to join them at their Nazi functions and rallies. And many did.

Power is seductive like that.

And many were led astray seeing these Christians supporting that evil!

The Third Reich even formed an official

**“German Christian Church”** to support Hitler.

But those who knew the true power of Christ, the true power of love,

Formed **The Confessing Church**,

with Pastors and Christians like Dietrich Bonhoeffer,

who spoke out against the atrocities of Hitler.

And doing so eventually led to his death.

The letter to the Colossian church is a reminder

that **we need the power of Jesus to support us in our FIGHT**

**against the powers** of darkness in our world.

Without that power of love, we can't fight it!

**So what does the POWER OF LOVE look like?**

It looks like hope, and strength.

Like salvation, grace, and forgiveness.

And it looks like **LIGHT**--in a world of darkness.

**Jesus' power is light----**

**That saves us from the darkness of this world.**

Paul says this:

*He has **rescued us from the power of darkness** and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son....*

**As Christians, we are people of LIGHT.**

It is the light of Christ that allows us

And to **LIVE OUT the path** of Jesus Christ.

If we are to **love, serve, help, give**—we **need the power of Jesus.**

To help us live as he lived!

And we **need to let go of the power of the world.**

We need to always empower others.

Because Rabbi Kline is right—***religion will die*** if it's all about wielding power over others, or trying to control people.

**Church** is not about that.

**Faith** is not about that.

It's about ***servicing and loving others---not controlling them.***

And Jesus shows us the way to avoid this.

***By empowering people.***

We can live so that we are ***always helping others to know Jesus, and live in love and service.***

That's what ***Holy Spirit does***—empower us!

That's my ***job as a Pastor***—to help empower everyone in the church to be the hands and feet of Jesus.

That's our ***job as the church***—to help empower people to live His love.

That's our ***job as believers***—to help others live in love.

This means we ***don't control,***

We ***don't use fear or coercion,***

We live out ***love, and service, and grace.***

A grace that is so desperately needed in our world today!

***Friends, hear the Good News of the Gospel:***

The power of Jesus is the power of ***Empowerment...***

***It is the power of love, service, light, and grace.***

May we all choose to live in the strength of ***that*** glorious power.

And for this, all God's people can say together, Amen.