

“He Made Power a Healthy Word”

Matthew 28:16-20

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For Baptists, the final verses in Matthew have customarily been referred to as The Great Commission, and indeed it is. This challenge issued by Jesus to his disciples has been the focus of many sermons and launched an array of mission programs.

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” Matthew 28:18-20.

The first sentence of this passage hooked me last week and led to this sermon. “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” That’s a bold claim for anyone to make, even Jesus.

Have you ever had this much authority? I don’t think any of us has, and yet we all have a measure of authority, formal and informal. In what settings or roles do you have authority? How do you use the power you have?

One of the greatest temptations people face is the abuse of power. Even the disciples were not immune. Do you recall the time James and John approached Jesus with a request to sit on his right and left side when the Lord entered his kingdom? Jesus rebuked them for their power-grabbing attitude that reminded him of the rulers of his day. “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” Mark 10: 43-45.

Why is the abuse of power so alluring and prevalent? I suppose leaders see it as a way to make their lives easier or feed their egos. Whatever the reason, it seems to be addictive.

Have you had a bad experience with someone that abused power? I’m sure all of us have. I am confident everyone here today is upset with the leaders in Myanmar that have allowed the lust for power cloud their judgment and neglect the plight of their people after the devastating cyclone on May 2. What a vivid example this is of abusive power. The reclusive generals that control the country see Western aid workers and journalists as likely spies sent to undermine the military’s monopoly on power. As a result, hundreds of thousands of innocent citizens are suffering and many will die for lack of medical attention.

Who would you point to that was a wise steward of power? What did you learn from them? I’ll tell you about one of my positive role models.

“He Made Power a Healthy Word,” was the headline in the newspaper after the funeral for United States Senator John Sherman Cooper in 1991. Senator Cooper was a member of my former church and my friend. He was a fascinating man who wielded a lot of authority in his lifetime.

He served in the United States Senate for twenty years. He was appointed Ambassador to India by President Eisenhower and President Ford appointed him the first Ambassador to East Germany. President Truman and President Reagan appointed him as

a delegate to the United Nations. President Johnson appointed him to the Warren Commission to investigate the assassination of President Kennedy. Yes, he had a lot of power and authority.

At his funeral, I said that he made power a healthy word and a journalist picked that up for his headline. Senator Cooper used his power and authority to help others by breaking down barriers and building bridges of understanding. He was not the best speaker I ever heard. He was, however, one of the best listeners and cared deeply about people and their needs. He had the uncanny ability of seeing what others ignored and connecting needs and resources. He committed his entire life to serving others through public service.

So did Jesus. He also made power, or authority, a healthy word, unlike many of his peers who exploited people and sacrificed truth, justice, compassion and humility in order to hold on to power. How did Jesus use his authority?

He used it to make the world better by helping those others ignored, speaking truth to power, breaking down barriers and building bridges of understanding and goodwill, speaking and teaching the truth about God, life and relationships and by empowering the disciples to do what he did.

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” It is clear that Jesus authorized his disciples to become evangelists, teachers and mentors just as he was.

I am impressed with his willingness to empower his disciples. Sharing leadership is the sign of a good leader. It makes any movement or organization stronger and provides the checks and balances needed to maintain integrity.

Jesus made power a healthy word. **Do you?** Do you use your authority the way Jesus did?

Are you honest, fair, kind, considerate, consistent, reliable, trustworthy, humble and unselfish?

Do you make sure that everyone under your authority has a seat at the table where their voice is heard?

Do you lead by example and live by the Golden Rule?

Do you roll up your sleeves and work alongside those under your authority?

Do you listen well and make adjustments when necessary?

Do you speak the truth in love?

Do you mentor those that will follow in your footsteps?

Do you empower others and encourage them to achieve their potential?

Are you held accountable for your decisions?

I hope so and know you are not alone on this journey if you do. The same one who promised to be with his disciples through the presence of the Holy Spirit will accompany you, too, and teach you how to make power a healthy word. Ask for His guidance as we pray.