

Trinity 1 - Power (Romans 5.1-8, Matthew 9.35-10.23)

I've been feeling a bit restless lately...I suspect I'm not the only one...and, not for the first time, I've found myself craving a bit of adventure. Being cooped up at home and living the same routine every day has made me really miss the thrill of packing a bag and setting off to some unknown place full of all sorts of possibilities. That's why when I looked at today's Gospel reading earlier this week, I found myself actually feeling a bit envious of the disciples that Jesus was sending out on their mission of preaching the good news. His instructions to them to travel light and just trust that their needs will be provided for sounds pretty scary for most of us who are used to planning ahead and saving for a rainy day. But there's a certain kind of thrill that you can only get from throwing caution to the wind and stepping into the unknown, and I wonder if the disciples felt that.

When I was trying to imagine this experience of theirs, I remembered a trip I took a few years ago: much like now, I'd been stuck in one place for a long time, working hard on my studies and at my job, and I decided to treat myself with an adventure. I signed on for a two week trip aboard the world's second largest tall ship. What made it so thrilling wasn't the sailing part, it was that she was the Russian training ship Kruzenstern, and we'd be sailing from Russia to France. I'd never been to Russia, I didn't speak a word of Russian, and I packed only a small bag with some clothes and a couple of books. I was relying on some sketchy joining instructions from the ship translated into bad English and a handful of rubles to get me safely onboard, and there were several moments on the way there when I wondered if I would ever make it, including a rather tense stand-off with a port security guard who couldn't read my joining letter and wasn't going to let me

through. I have never felt so helpless: unable to speak the language, uncertain what else I could do, wondering if I would be left stranded on the dock with no way home. It's not a great feeling...but sometimes it's how you know you're on a really great adventure.

Part of the thrill in this case was the constant tension between having power and being completely powerless. In some sense I had all the control in determining where and when I was going and deciding my next action, but then suddenly everything spins out of my control when I come across a roadblock. Then, the sense of having power and being in control turns out to be just an illusion, as I realise that I'm at the mercy of someone else's power to help me...at the port I was only saved from camping on the dock by a second more sympathetic guard who took pity on me and let me through to the ship. So, here we have the disciples being sent out on a mission with the same dynamics of power and control: on the one hand, they have been given Jesus' own authority to

"Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons."

But on the other hand, they must rely on strangers to provide for their needs of food and a place to rest. They are at one and the same time given power and asked to give up power, in control and asked to hand over control to others. It can make for a great adventure, but it is a pretty uncomfortable situation when you're in it.

Of course, it can be pretty hard to relate right now to the disciples' experience of traveling far and wide to spread the good news, though I think we do a pretty good job around here of proving that doing the work of the Kingdom doesn't mean you have to travel far at all. But what we can relate to, especially right now, is this dynamic of power and control. Jesus had a lot to say about power, and much of it is hard to hear, because much of it goes against human nature. We hate feeling powerless, we hate feeling out of control...but Jesus says if you want to save

your life, you have to lose it for his sake. He says the one who exalts himself will be humbled. These are tough words to hear because we spend our lives being told by the world that we have to take control of our future and find the power within ourselves to better ourselves. It's a constant tension, and, as Christians, we can't be complacent about it, because the temptation to take power and to take control for ourselves is always there.

Now, I want to be careful here that you don't mistake what I mean when I say we should resist the temptation to power and control. I'm not saying, and neither does Scripture, that we should just throw up our hands and let what happens happen...that we should give up control by allowing ourselves to be driven by whatever storms come our way and go wherever we are taken by them. What I am saying is that true humility comes from constantly reminding ourselves and acknowledging that the source of our power is not ourselves, but God's Spirit in us. If we can do that, then we will not make the mistake of tying our sense of worth to how much power we feel we have or don't have. We are not worth something to God because we have achieved anything or taken control of our lives. There's nothing wrong with achievement, there's nothing wrong with feeling proud of ourselves for accomplishing something difficult, but it has nothing to do with what we're worth to God. Achievements come and go, success comes and goes...it doesn't matter whether we are the most powerful leader in the world or the most helpless infant who just came into the world, our value to God never changes because our worth comes simply from being God's unique creation.

And there's a kind of freedom in that. We don't have to keep measuring ourselves against the world's standards of success and value. We don't have to keep playing the game of building ourselves up and making ourselves look good at all costs. We can let others take centre stage and encourage them and build them up, knowing that we ourselves are not diminished by their growth. And those times when we are given power, when we're given the opportunity to make our

voice heard over everyone else's, we have a responsibility to use it as the disciples were told to and as Jesus himself did: to heal, to build up, to lift up those in need and speak for the silent. It's not always easy, it's not always comfortable, but when we do this, when we use the power God gives us to do the work God asks us to do, we see results that are much greater than we could ever achieve on our own. We see the encouraging signs of the Kingdom that we've all been noticing in our communities during this crisis: neighbours helping neighbours, support for those who are struggling, connections being made and strengthened. We should be encouraged by that, we should keep going. We have recently moved through Pentecost, when we were reminded of the Spirit that is at work in us, and now, like the disciples we have been sent out on a mission to preach the good news in word and deed. It may not be the adrenaline-fuelled thrill of traveling to new and exciting places, but it is an adventure nonetheless...and it's one that presents us with new possibilities every day. So let's recommit ourselves today to doing the work God has given us to do, and get ready to step out into the week eager to see what adventure lies ahead. Amen.