

What Power Is This? Pr Jim Sprengle, Third Sunday of Easter, 4/18/2021

- I. **Acts 3:19-20** - ¹⁹“Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, ²⁰that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord...”
- II. **Our world is amazing and full of wonder, so why the hopelessness?**
 - a. I read some statistics from 2018 – before the pandemic – that showed American life expectancy was going down...
 - i. People are dying at an earlier age, not because of heart disease, cancer, or even Covid – although I’m sure that will skew the results of upcoming stats.
 - ii. The last time our life expectancy dropped for several years in a row was back in the early 1900’s when a combination of the Spanish Flu (our first pandemic) and World War I came together.
 - b. It would seem that nothing but good things could come with all the advances in science, medicine, quality of living and safety...
 - i. As a kid I remember looking ahead with a great sense of hope and wonder, thinking about space travel, scientific discoveries and all the new things invented every year.
 - c. If you look at causes of death, even before Covid, the big ones are always heart disease and cancer... but a growing trend are deaths by suicide and overdoses (or “deaths of despair”).
 - i. In fact, I saw a chart somewhere that showed 25% of the world’s overdoses happen here in the U.S.
 - ii. Most of us would agree that a huge part of homelessness comes from addictions that keep people hunting for their next fix instead of a way out of their situation.
 - iii. Also, deaths by suicide are rising in younger age groups – I believe it is the second leading cause of death in 18-35-year-olds.
 - d. Again, if America is so great... the land of opportunity and plenty... the land based on freedom and ingenuity and “can-do” attitudes... why the hopelessness?
- III. **Maybe it’s the pandemic, but it seems that attitudes are getting worse.**
 - a. Many people do not see a bright future for themselves... or their children.
 - i. They were told going to college would help them – while many ended up with lots of student loan debt and still couldn’t find a good job
 - ii. They were told to buy a house – while saving enough money for even a small down payment is very difficult
 - iii. They were told to work hard and get out of poverty, but even working two jobs doesn’t pay the bills for many people.
 - iv. Someone reposted a tweet to a question, “Why is this generation so unhappy?” and one person answered:

1. We cannot afford the life our parents lived.
 2. Our planet is dying.
 3. The standard of leadership has really dropped.
 4. Our society is morally decaying, our kids will have very little to enjoy from communal life.
 5. We know it's not getting better.
 6. Social media.
- v. These words resonate with a growing number of people in our country
- b. Maybe you've heard the saying, *c'est la vie* [sey lah vee] – French for, such is life... accepting life's issues that come at us.... Or, the Spanish version... *que sera sera*, (what will be, will be... and I apologize for getting that song stuck in your head)
- i. But speaking of stuck... it means that you're stuck in a situation that will not change... kind of like saying, "it is what it is", or "what are going to do?"
 - ii. Sometimes this is a healthy outlook, and other times it's a fatalistic attitude... which can lead to despair and hopelessness.

IV. **Peter and John came upon a pretty hopeless situation in our reading.**

- a. A man who was born without the use of his legs was begging at the entrance to the temple.
- i. Finding a good job, having a wife and kids, and probably many other dreams for this man were crushed long before.
 - ii. It seems that he was a regular at this place, probably because it was a high traffic area and those entering might be generous
- b. In the first verses of this chapter, the guy thinks Peter is going to give him some money, but instead, Peter invokes the name of Jesus Christ and heals him!
- i. He starts running around and jumping – totally healed from a lifetime of legs that never worked before!
 - ii. In a split second, everything changed for him... can you imagine?
- c. Then a crowd gathers along with the religious leaders, and they want to know by what power did this miracle happen.
- i. You see for them, Peter and John must be super holy, upright men to heal the beggar –
 - ii. But Peter sets them straight by preaching his second big sermon (the first one was at Pentecost)
- d. Peter's faith in Jesus was all the power he could ever need – as everything about Jesus was absolutely true...
- i. He was the Messiah, prophesied of old...
 - ii. He was rejected by men... was betrayed and tortured... by even some of the very people standing in front of Peter that day...

- iii. Jesus really died... and He really did rise again!
- e. So Peter calls them to repent! turn! and your sins will be obliterated... gone without a trace....wiped away
 - i. And for the second time (after Pentecost), many more people came to faith (Acts 4:2)
 - ii. Jesus is still at work, even after He rose and ascended into heaven

V. **The power of Jesus Christ works through us!**

- a. What Peter said was turning from sin by faith in Jesus brings us forgiveness, “refreshing,” and a rock-solid hope in the return of Christ.
 - i. The word, refreshing, has to do with finally catching your breath – and of course that will happen when we die in Christ (or He returns)...
 - ii. But it also means right now – that the LIVING Savior Jesus Christ gives us the power to catch our breath and live for Him.
- b. God, in all His wisdom and power, decided to use little old you and me to be dispensers... or the means of faith, hope and love.
 - i. The times of refreshing – of helping people catch their breath is NOW
 - ii. Not because you are so holy and good, or because you are rich and better than other people... but because Jesus Christ and His power lives in you.
- c. Unfortunately, many of us are becoming more and more fatalistic in our mindset – dwelling on the negatives and the hopelessness.
 - i. Living for Jesus means we don’t have a fatalistic view – notice the word, “fatal” or death in fatalistic?
 - ii. What’s the opposite of fatal? Life-giving.... Breathing.... Living!
 - iii. Jesus lives and so do we! He is risen! **He is risen indeed, alleluia!**
- d. Sure, we can focus on what matters to a decaying and dying world – what we are missing out on, how to get more... how bad things are getting...
 - i. But never forget that by the power of Jesus we can share the refreshment of the Lord.
 - ii. Yes things are bad! Sin is rampant... all the more reason for us to show others the forgiveness and refreshment and life that Jesus has to offer.
- e. Some people might ask what is so important about the resurrection?
 - i. Well, as despair and hopelessness and death grab people, our God is right there with power and hope and life!
 - ii. The resurrection is the ultimate guarantee that not only does God love us and call us His children, but there is NOTHING that will overcome us.
- f. With that in mind, take the opportunities God gives you to refresh someone...
 - i. Share the love of Christ in deeds and words – our mission statement – Go and Share Jesus

- ii. Lean into others' depression and struggles rather than avoiding
- iii. Encourage friends to join you in connection with church as a place of encouragement
- g. Finally, always live in hope as you face life's trials... because Jesus lives!
He is risen! **He is risen indeed, alleluia!** Amen