

“Star Power”

Epiphany 5, Year B

Isaiah 40:21–31, Psalm 147:1–11, 20c, 1 Corinthians 9:16–23, Mark 1:29–39

February 5, 2012

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen. The texts for this morning’s message are the lessons for this day.

Star power – it’s everywhere these days. People are drawn to the stars like those pesky bees in the fall are drawn to any kind of drink that’s sweet (kinda makes you glad it’s winter?) Nah, I didn’t think so. But whether you’re cuddled under a comforter this February watching “American Idol,” can’t wait for the new season of “Dancing with the Stars,” or if you’re a true astronomer who braved the cold January nights to see the Quadrantid asteroid shower a few weeks ago – star power is all the rage.

So it has always been – especially when we consider the original “Star Maker” our God Creator. God’s power is evident in all the lessons for this day – power that called all things into being, came to save creation when marred by sin, power to heal, and power to change us and make our lives a mirror of God’s love and mercy and vessels for God’s power to work through in our world.

The Psalm for today tells us **“God determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name.”** (Ps. 147:4). Isaiah, perhaps gazing into the vast Palestinian sky pondering the greatness of God and wrote these words with Divine inspiration from our Old Testament lesson,

Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood since the earth was founded? God sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. God stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in. God brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing... Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? God who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name! Because of God’s great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing!

That’s “Star Power” – star power from the Star Maker! The Word that brought all things into being is also described by Isaiah in a prophecy of the Word-made-flesh, Jesus, as compassionate and aware of our hurts and needs.

³ He heals the brokenhearted
and binds up their wounds.

⁴ He, Who, determines the number of the stars
and calls them each by name.

But Isaiah’s mighty God, so Absolutely Other, does not disregard the lowly, the insignificant, the obscure or the unimportant. Be assured, he writes, that your way is not hidden from God, for his might is matched by his tenderness. Unlike us, God never grows weary or tired; God’s empathy and understanding of our human frailties knows no boundaries.

You, me, Isaiah we might get weary and weak, tired and faint - even vigorous youth will sometime struggle, stumble, and fall, "but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength" is God's promise to us through Isaiah. Mid-winter is a time when many people wonder if their strength will ever be renewed. New Year's resolutions have been shattered by the time Ground Hog's day rolls around. Real gym goers can finally get back into their routine after all the wanna-bes have slacked off. That new year – new life – new me...well, it was a nice thought!

Peter's mother-in-law seems to be happy, after her healing by Jesus, to get back into the normal "swing-of-things" – except that her situation is "out-of-the-ordinary." Mothers lived with their sons and their son's wife. Could be that she had only daughters and had thus ended up with her son-in-law. We don't know the whole story. It is quite possible that Peter had his wife, his own mother, and his mother-in-law all in his household (which might explain why he was always fishing?). Regardless, her return to health causes quite a stir in Capernaum – people come from all over to have Jesus tend to their maladies – would have been delighted if He's stayed around to be the best doctor they'd ever had – the one who ALWAYS had a cure, but there were more people to reach, more towns in need of the Good News of the Kingdom. He coulda been their STAR!

After the Resurrection Jesus could have stayed in Jerusalem –made it the headquarters for a Kingdom here on Earth with the dazzling lights of the heavenly host as Jesus appeared and disappeared at will. Think of how hard it would be to book a visit to Jerusalem – but that was not God's plan. The Holy Spirit would come with wind and fire – infilling the imperfect vessels, those called, gathered and enlightened with God's gifts – people like you and me throughout the millennia to spread the Good News – to shine like stars with the love of Jesus going to go into other towns to share the Good News that Jesus is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life"– the One through Whom all might be saved – the only Way to the Father.

It's hard to go into "new towns" and not be changed by the journey or by the people and their circumstances once you get there. Paul, patterning his life after the life and ministry of Jesus said, "I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some." In recent years I have often said that we members of Jehovah need only step outside our church doors to find that people from all over the world have come to us – people in need of the Gospel. One would think that with this happening all over the modern world churches in Europe and the United States would be filled with people changed by the Gospel and charged up to bring the Good News to others.

Instead we see mainline churches in the US in drastic decline, Christianity in Europe is basically dead (3% of the population attends Christian worship services each week). Writing about this Michael Rinehart, a bishop of the Texas-Louisiana Synod of the ELCA said, "The turnaround of mainline churches will happen when we in those churches care as much about those outside the church as we do those inside. To embrace (those in need surrounding us) we will have to let go of survival.

He posits that the problem is that those inside the church "trump outsiders every time" as we cater in all decisions to "what will please the card-carrying, bill-paying membership." He continues, "time and again church leaders receive heat from insiders upset about this or that

because they are trying to re-create a childhood church experience or simply have a rigid idea of church...Insiders are inherently change averse. People don't like change..."

Only the Holy Spirit can change hearts to make change in change resistant people in any era. The disciples first met in the Temple until adversity and persecution scattered them to the ends of the earth. The church, in any age has not adapted to new realities until concern for those in need of the Gospel trumps appeasing those already in the church. As Reinhart states, "(the world) needs a church that so loves the world that she would die for it."

That hardly sounds like a "star making" career path – changing for the sake of others, adapting to the needs of those outside our circle to draw them in, being open to their needs and circumstances, their likes and dislikes concerning music, décor, traditions that we might be more powerful in our witness to Christ. This past week I talked to Doug McClure from The Alley who said they decided not to repeat their "Trick or Trunk" event last fall because the Ethiopian Christians in the Mekane Yesus were offended walking through the parking lot to their cars because they consider Halloween a glorification of things satanic. That's a simple change *within* the body of Christ – honoring one another's concerns, but it does raise the question, "how willing are we to change to be more effective in ministry here at Jehovah?"

God who called the heavens and earth into being – stretched the stars out in the sky – God's power is at work among us, granting us renewed strength today and in the days to come – strength to change and eyes of love to see the world in need and do anything, even lay down our lives, so that they, too, might be saved. May we shine with God's star power and reflect God's love so that many will hear and shine for eternity! AMEN