

Epworth Chapel on the Green  
April 20, 2014  
Easter Sunday  
Rev. Brook Thelander

Acts 10:34-43  
Psalm 118:24-34  
Colossians 3:1-4  
John 20:1-18

Today is the day we proclaim the power of the Resurrection, and something remarkable that the Bible claims about that power.

I think that perhaps one of the great needs and desires of people is *power*. Most people, regardless of their background, have good intentions for the kind of lives they want to lead. We know the kind of people we want to be. We want good things. We just seem to lack the *power* to accomplish them.

Years ago a man named Charlie Shedd did a series of talks around the title “The Ten Commandments for Raising Perfect Children.” And then he had his first child, and he changed the title to “Ten Hints for Parents.” Then he and his wife had another child and he changed it still again to “A Few Tentative Suggestions for Fellow Strugglers.” After their third child was born, he quit giving the lecture altogether.

Life has a way of showing us that no matter how noble our intentions, we often lack the power to live them out fully and completely.

In the first century, there was a small group of folks who were followers of Jesus. Then he was crucified, and they thought it was all over. Then something happened.

Something happened where this small group of people became gripped with the conviction that everything had changed. Something had occurred, and they had received *power*. They were convinced that Jesus was raised. But it didn't stop at that. They were also convinced that the power that raised Jesus from the dead was the ultimate expression of power over every enemy that human beings will ever face. And they believed that this same power that was demonstrated on Easter was now available for people like us. That same power, they believed, is available now for people like you and in all of our brokenness and disappointment and sin.

The apostle Paul said it this way: “How unbelievably great is his power to help those who trust him and call on Him” (Eph. 1:19-20).

I want to talk about that power in the lives of ordinary people like you and me, for it is this power – and this power alone – that is the hope of the human race.

My starting place is with a story, a story from the Old Testament about a man named David.

In the beginning of David's story, remarkable things happen to him. A prophet named Samuel sought out David's family, and picked David as one who

had found favor with God. He actually anointed David. Great things were on the horizon for his young life.

And for a time, things were great. David became popular in the court of King Saul as the king's favorite musician. David becomes best friends with Saul's son, Jonathan, and he ends up marrying the king's daughter. He became a warrior, wildly successful in battle. He became such a hero that people actually sang songs about his greatness. Everything he touched seemed to turn to gold.

Then a funny thing happened. Things began to fall apart, and one by one all of the great things in his life were stripped away. King Saul became jealous of him, and actually tried to spear him to death. David had to run for his life. He lost his job, his income, his security. Then King Saul actually gave David's wife to be married to someone else.

David runs to see the prophet Samuel, but when Saul learns of it, he sends soldiers and David has to make another escape. He'll never see his old mentor again.

David tries to seek help from his best friend, Jonathan, but Jonathan can't lift a sword against his own father, so he's no help.

So David flees Israel. He flees to a city called Gath. For those of you astute students, you remember that Gath was the home of a guy who had been a great enemy of David. He was a great big guy, remember? David had fought him with a

slingshot. Gath was the home of the Philistine warrior Goliath. And here David is, so desperate that he has fled his home and land and is seeking refuge with his old enemies the Philistines. To try to get them to take him in, he pretends to be insane. But the Philistines won't have any of it, and so they kick him out. He ends up living in a cave.

This is David, who once lived in a palace. Who had wealth, power, fame, friends, and security. He had a future. He was the golden boy. And now all of that is gone. He is running for his life. And he is living in a cave.

The cave. The cave is where you end up when all of your props and supports, all your trophies and awards, and all your "stuff" gets stripped away. The cave is the place where you end up when you had planned to end up somewhere else, the place your hopes turn to dust and it becomes clear that things are not going to work out the way you had planned. The cave is the place where dreams go to die.

A cave is a place of disappointment, of regret, of failure, and fear. And the funny thing is, nobody ever plans on ending up in a cave. We pride ourselves on our ability to do "cave avoidance," but sooner or later, all of us will log some time in a cave. Maybe you are there right now. It's part of the brokenness of our world.

One hard thing about a cave is that you begin to wonder if God has lost track of you. Does he know you're here? Does he care? Will you be in here forever?

These are the questions we ask. And David spent **ten years** like this. Ten long years! Everything was great for so long. But then he logs ten years in a cave in the wilderness.

It actually gets worse from this point, but in the interest of keeping the story short I won't bore you with those details. But in his darkest hour, something happens to David, and in one of the most remarkable verses in the Bible we read these words: **“David found strength in the Lord his God.”** (I Sam. 30:6)

Just like that. David found strength, not in his own wisdom, his own resilience, his determination, or ability. David found strength in the Lord his God. Everything had changed.

Now his circumstances were no different than they had ever been. Everything on the outside still looks exactly the same. But David has passed from death to life. It looked like the bottom had fallen out of his life, and it turns out that David had fallen into the arms of God.

David would go on to lead a remarkable life. He would return to Israel. He would become king. The people would look back on his days with so much longing that when they thought about a Messiah who might come one day to save them, they would talk about such a one as the son of David. If only there could be a king like that.

But it all happened after more than ten years in a cave...

It turns out that God understands all about caves. Caves are why God sent Jesus. When Jesus initially came, things went great (just like they did for David). For a little while everything Jesus touched turned to gold. People loved his teaching. People flocked to see him and to be near him. People who were in debt, or distressed, or discouraged, and those who were sick came to him and he healed them. The crowds surged.

Until one day he came into Jerusalem. People were so excited about who He could be, about how their lives might change, that they lined the road with palm branches and shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of David.”

But then folks turned on Jesus, and he lost everything – including his friends. And like David, Jesus had people who wanted him dead. And this time they did it. They put him under arrest and sent him to a mockery of a trial and convicted him on the basis of nothing. They ripped and beat his body, and put a crown of thorns on his head. They nailed the most perfect man who ever lived to a cross.

And then they thought, “that’s it.” They thought it was over. They took him down from the cross and put his body in a place where they thought it would never be heard from again – *in a cave*. Then they went on with life.

*But God does His best work in caves.*

The cave is where God resurrects dead stuff. These followers of Jesus were so distressed and dejected when he died, all seemed lost. But something happened to them. You have to decide for yourself what to make of what happened to them, but something happened to them. *They were convinced that Jesus was alive.*

Now that does not mean that their problems went away, any more than they would for you and me. In many ways their problems were just beginning. They would travel the world, they would give their lives sacrificially for this Jesus. But what's remarkable is that they did it with *joy*. They just believed that they were getting in on a deal of a lifetime. There was now this unstoppable force of life within them. It changed them. And it changed the world.

As we come to the Lord's Table this morning, listen to this prayer of one who wanted out of his cave. Perhaps it can be your prayer as well:

*Lord, I don't want to do life in my own strength anymore. I would like another kind of life that I cannot make myself live, that I cannot enter into on my own. I would like for this Jesus, who was resurrected two thousand years ago, to be the One who forgives my sins and gives me a fresh start. Then I would like every day that follows to be one where He is my friend and companion and leader and guide. Amen.*

So come with faith. Leave your cave behind. Receive the grace he offers you. Your life will never be the same.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.