



“The Power of Through”

by Rev. Dr. Derek Weber

Director, Preaching Resources

Discipleship Ministries

Luke 24:13-35

Galatians 5:22-23

PREACHING NOTES

The theme of this Heritage Sunday is perseverance and transformation. “The Power of Through” is a recognition of what has been and what we’ve endured, but it is also about how we’ve grown as a denomination and as a people. Pay careful attention to the historical references throughout the service and the sermon by Alfred T. Day III, General Secretary of the General Commission on Archives and History. It is almost overwhelming to contemplate all the events that could have spelled the end of the people called Methodist, had things turned out differently. Yet, somehow, we have come through. And not just through, we have grown; we have been transformed by the trials that have beset us as a denomination collectively and individually.

Going through traumatic events isn’t easy, even if we trust that we are on God’s side. It can often leave us stunned and uncertain. Like the pair in our first text for this special Sunday: [Luke 24:13-35](#).

“On that same day.” That day. You remember that day. That day when everything changed. That day when the possibilities stretched out before like a road to a new reality, a new you. That day. On that same day. Luke seems to be saying that Jesus had an agenda. You’d think rising from the dead would have been all that was on the list for the day. That’s a full day, don’t you think? Rise from the dead, and then take it easy from there. Relax a bit. Take a nap, read a book. But no, rising from the dead was only the first thing on the list that day. That day.

On the Risen Christ’s to do list was meeting some guys on a road. They were heading to Emmaus. Why? No one knows! Maybe it was home. They thought the party was over, the curtain had come down, might as well go home and remember. Maybe that’s what they were doing as they walked, rehearsing their favorite lines, like it was a movie that had captivated them.

Remember the bread and fish day?

Of course, who could forget that?

Yeah, that was a good day.

Who do you say I am, remember that one?

Good old Peter, he's the one with all the answers. I was glad he broke the silence that day.

Yeah, that day, that day was a hard day.

Yeah, not like this one though. No, not like this one. There aren't any harder days than this one.

“Why?” The simple question startled them out of their remembrances. “Why is this such a hard day?” They hardly know how to answer. He must have beamed down from the moon, from another dimension of time and space. How could he not know? They told him. A creed, it sounds like, words the church began to use, not the normal conversational answer to an honest question, but a declaration of faith. Faith that wavered there at the end. But we had hoped. Here's where it got real again. We had hoped. Strange stories we couldn't believe. This day is the worst of all days.

It was his laughter at this that startled them most. “How foolish,” he chuckled. “You had to know.” What did they have to know? “Everything,” he told them, “everything.” They were enraptured in spite of themselves, their grief forgotten, their despair set aside as they listened, to him tell them what they already knew but had forgotten on that terrible day. He talked on and on, every book, every scroll, every story they thought they knew but now sounded new on that day. When they got to Emmaus, they didn't want it to end, so they begged him to stay with them, to eat with them. They opened the door to their lives and he walked in and sat down with them. Then, he took the bread and broke it.

Was it the words? The motion, the gestures? Was it the bread, tearing, breaking, scattering crumbs here and there and everywhere? They felt it more than saw it. Their hearts lit up; they talked about it when they could breathe again. Were not our hearts burning? They ran, who decided? Which one? Who knows, maybe their feet decided, maybe it was their burning hearts, but they ran. All the way back to those who would understand how this day had become that day. That day when everything changed. When the world ended and started again. But now it was different. It was all different. That same day.

They walked in the room, and everything was burning. Hearts were on fire before they got there to light them up. The Lord has risen indeed. Yeah, we know, they said with a grin they couldn't remove. We know because we saw him. He came alongside. He taught us, then fed us. He was right there; then he wasn't; but he is. He still is. Because he left something behind. Call it memory; call it hope; call it the Spirit, a

presence that makes his absence less frightening. We don't know, they said, shaking their heads, but we know. Then they laughed because they knew that made no sense. We don't know, but we know. That same day, hope was made. Hungry hearts were satisfied on that day. You remember that day? That day when the whole world changed? We made it through.

But how, we wonder? How did they make it through? How do we make it through? Stumble after stumble, wrong turn after wrong turn, crisis after crisis, how do we make it through? With help, of course. Help that comes from beyond and from within.

The second text chosen for this week is a text of methodology; it's a how text. How do we make it through? This is how: [Galatians 5:22-23](#): The fruit of the Spirit. Or as some mistranslate - the fruits of the Spirit. We think it must be plural; look at that list. There are nine different words, nine different attributes, or behaviors, or traits. How could that be anything but plural? Fruits of the Spirit, it must be.

Except that Paul wrote fruit. Singular. When you think about it, that actually makes more sense. He was writing about one life. Your life. Actually, he was writing about Christ's life—the life we are trying to emulate, the life we are trying to claim, to receive, to live into to help us through.

See, that's what makes this something more than a reality show, something deeper than a self-help program. It isn't what we are making out of the raw material of our lives; rather, it is what we are being made into by the transformation of the Spirit. It is not what we are doing, but what Christ is doing in us and through us.

Looking at this passage, we might see a checklist of do's and don'ts for being a good person. We might see it as some sort of personal inventory. If we ran across these verses in a magazine, we might expect there to be some sort of quiz to take to find out how we are doing on the fruit scale. Well, the results might tell us, you struggle with love and joy, but seem to have a good handle on peace. Your patience index is kind of low, but you score well on kindness and generosity. You've got faithfulness down pat, are ok with gentleness, depending on the time of day and amount of sleep you've received. But you might as well just punt on the whole self-control vibe; you aren't getting that one at all. And we would nod our heads in wonder, smiling at how a magazine quiz could peg us so well with just a few random sounding questions.

If that were the case, you would have missed the whole point of Paul's writing. This isn't an exercise manual to help you work on your kindness and patience as you would work on your pecs and glutes. Instead, it is a road map; it is an observational guide to

sites you will see, turns you will encounter on your journey with Christ, as you make your way through.

Many of us, let's be honest, have been in the checklist or spiritual exercise camp, chiding parishioners for their sagging generosity and flabby faithfulness like a pastoral drill sergeant. But Evelyn Underhill, an English Christian writer of both fiction and non-fiction, has written a book that offers another way to approach these verses. Her book appears to be either collected letters or a lecture series she gave at some time. It is titled (*oddly*) ***Fruits of the Spirit***. What is odd about the title is that her argument is that there is only one fruit of the life of the Spirit, but that it manifests itself in a variety of dimensions.

Other commentators argue that Paul wrote fruit in the singular because his thesis is that the fruit of the Spirit is love. But this love (as he also argues in the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians) is marked by joy and by peace and by patience and by kindness and by generosity and by ... (well, you get the point). Love is the mark; love is the key by which all our human encounters are shaped or even attempted. Love is the core of the life of Christ and it is the core of the life of the one who seeks to live a Christ-like life. Love is what sees us through.

Underhill suggests that the order of the attributes in Galatians 5:22 and 23 is intentional. She sees them as a progression. First, she writes, we find ourselves loved and then able to love in return. This is our embrace of Christ and the beginning of the transformation. It is what Wesley called sanctification or "going on to perfection." What is being perfected in us is love, not intellect or understanding, not wisdom or social presence, but love. We are being made into beings who can love as Christ loved.

Underhill says that Paul was telling us how this happens in our hearts and hands and minds as we give ourselves over to the Spirit. This love takes root in us and begins to grow (which is why Jesus compared it to a vine - come back next week for more on that!). As it grows, we experience and live first joy and then peace and then all the other attributes in the list. This explains why self-control is last. It is not because it is the hardest (ok, not *just* because it is that hardest), but because true self-control is only when we have completely given ourselves away to Christ through the Spirit. It is a process, in most cases, a lifelong process. As is the case with any long process, there are times when we want to give up, or when we think we aren't getting anywhere. There are times when we think we aren't cut out for the journey or that even God has given up on us. But that is why we continue to move through — through our failures and our failings, but also through our learning and our growing.

We learn, not so much to do better in our striving to be like Christ, but to help us be better. We learn to recognize these aspects of the life of Christ as they are seen in our own lives and in the life of the community of faith. We learn to pray our way through where we are and into the life Christ offers us. We learn to live out loud a life we sometimes think is supposed to happen behind closed doors. We learn to go out on a limb with this faith thing, this life of Christ thing. We learn to take a risk, a leap of faith, to dive deeper, to pray harder, to climb higher, to believe stronger, moving out on a limb, because that is where the best fruit is. We continue to know the power of through.

THE POWER OF

THROUGH IT ALL...

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