

Upside Down and Inside Out
Fifth Sunday after Epiphany
Youth Sunday/Season of Reconciliation
February 8, 2015
G.I.F.T Class and Gordon Wiersma

Texts: Isaiah 40:21-31;
 1 Corinthians 9:16-23;
 Mark 1:29-39

Gordon at the Communion table ~ Youth at the back of the sanctuary with boxes

GORDON: Today we'd like to spell out some ideas for you, about the way we – "we" as in all of us and our culture - often think about things in our lives and world. And then compare some of those ideas to what we have heard from Scripture today. So first we'd like you to think about power...

SAM A. with "E"/#4 box moves down the aisle toward the communion table

...what is it that makes some powerful? How do we think about, see, define power in our lives?

Well, it can be just about physical strength – someone who is the strongest, the biggest, the most – I suppose it can be used for good or bad, but we certainly think about power in terms of brute force:

"E" box is slammed on the communion table!

MADLYN with "W"/#3 box moves to communion table

And there's always money – we connect wealth with power. We usually think about that in terms of people with LOTS of money, having LOTS of power – but whatever your situation, I think we connect wealth with power.

"W" box is slammed on the communion table!

DENIS with "O"/#2 box moves to the communion table

And what about violence? – that has a place in the conversation. Violence is a very direct way of exerting power in our world: sometimes in crime, sometimes in war...there is violence all around us in our world.

“O” box is slammed on the communion table!

CAROLINE with “R”/#5 box moves to communion table

And we thought that with violence, the violence of discrimination needs to be talked about too: men keeping power over women, one race dominating another, people discriminated against for their identity – and way too often there is physical violence that is a part of the discrimination too.

“R” box is slammed on the communion table!

SAM G with “P”/#1 box moves to the communion table

And what about the power of government – of politics – of leaders – of laws? Those are places that people often make a grab for power, and often those are people we treat as important. It can be used for good or bad, but political leaders have a lot of power in their hands.

“P” box is slammed on the communion table!

ASHLEY & ARIANA with “!”/#6 box move to communion table

Power – does that spell things out fairly for our world? Power of strength and wealth and violence and politics– we all know about those ideas of power.

“!” box is slammed on the communion table!

POWER! POWER! ALL boxes slammed on the communion table!

That reality of power is all around us – but what about with God? How do we understand power when it comes to God? Well when you look at the Scripture passages, it can sound like God is just trying to be one step bigger than all that we’ve just described – listen to Isaiah 40:

SAM G: ‘God sits above the circle of the earth and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers!’

DENIS: ‘God makes the rules of the earth to be as nothing!’

MADELYN: ‘To whom then will you compare me – who is my equal? says the Holy One’

SAM A: ‘God is great in strength and mighty in power! – God does not faint or grow weary!’

GORDON: It could sound like the same sort of power we've already talked about:

"POWER!" ALL boxes slammed on the communion table!

GORDON: But then we started to hear some other voices in the scripture too. We hear in Isaiah about how this God of power uses the great power God has:

CAROLINE: 'The Lord gives power to the faint' *turn over letter*

ASHLEY: 'God strengthens the powerless' *turn over letter*

ARIANA: 'Those who wait for the Lord will renew their strength'

GORDON: And then in Corinthians we hear Paul describe what it is like to be a Christian:

SAM G: 'The gospel is no grounds for boasting' *turn over letter*

DENIS: 'I have made myself a servant of all' *turn over letter*

MADELYN: 'To the weak I have become weak, to win the weak' *turn over letter*

CAROLINE: 'I do all things to share in the blessings of the gospel' *turn over letter*

GORDON: So as you can see, it looks like the whole idea of power can be turned upside down! What's if there is a different kind of power? – a different way to use power? – a different way of seeing power in God and in us as followers of God through the gospel, through Jesus Christ?

What it really comes down to is a basic question:

Boxes are flipped over 1 at a time in random order to reveal:

"OVER or FOR?"

That's the question: "OVER or FOR?" Is power something to have, to get, to use OVER others?

or is power something we are given to use FOR others?

When you listen around us for how power is played out in our world, I'm sure that our youth and all of us are influenced by the typical ideas of what makes someone important or powerful:

ARIANA: A lot of attention is paid to who is famous, popular, important – celebrities who are sometimes famous just for being a celebrity!

ASHLEY: Our world often measures greatness by who is in charge – who is in control!

flip box

GORDON: But as we talked about the people that our youth respect - who they want to pattern their lives after – some different ideas emerged about what to pay attention to:

CAROLINE: a friend who is always kind and uses her free time to help others in Nicaragua; *flip box*

SAM A: family and friends who give support and encouragement in all that you do; *flip box*

MADELYN: the example of parents who provide so much care for their parents, making sacrifices for the good of others; *flip box*

DENIS: making a home for me and my sister and having a loving family to be a part of; *flip box*

SAM G: seeing what it means to have work that is meaningful and that helps others, and using your time to be a part of making good things happen. *flip box*

GORDON: I think what this is about is that when you turn the idea of power upside down, that you start to look for and see greatness – what makes someone important – in a different way. It's in the relationships that are closest to them that these youth see people using their lives in ways that are FOR others rather than OVER others. And with that way of looking at things, there is plenty to notice around us too: Pope Francis has made quite an impression on our Youth – someone who might be seen as having a lot of power over a lot of people, but as the Pope he talks about inclusion and equality and justice, about understanding and forgiveness and love. We noticed Doctors Without Borders too – people who use the power of their knowledge and resources to care for people who are desperately in need of care.

So I think you can realize that with different ideas of power; *1 person TURNS box to “?”*

with power used in so many ways that are destructive: power OVER; *1 person TURNS box to “?”*

with power used in so many that can build up others: power FOR; *1 person TURNS box to “?”*

with greatness shown to us in ways that are flashy and big and focus on who is in charge... *1 person TURNS box to “?”*

with greatness seen very differently in the people we respect and admire... *1 TURNS box to “?”*

...so really it all comes down to a pretty big question?????? How are you going to use your power?

But isn't it fair then that we ask God that question first? How does the God who Isaiah proclaims – who we proclaim - as the Creator and Rule of all, use God's power? Listen to this story:

SAM G: As soon as Jesus and his disciples left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once.

DENIS: Jesus came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

MADLYN: That evening, at sundown, they brought to Jesus all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door.

SAM: And Jesus cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

CAROLINE: In the morning, while it was still very dark, Jesus got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.

ASHLEY: And Simon and his companions hunted for Jesus. When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you!"

ARIANA: Jesus answered, “Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do.” And Jesus went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

GORDON: We hear God say: ‘To whom then will you compare me – who is my equal?

And we hear ‘God strengthens the powerless’.

We hear ‘God is great in strength and mighty in power!;

And we hear ‘Those who wait for the Lord will renew their strength’.

How can we understand that? – through the story of Jesus.

God who is the Creator of all, the Lord OVER all, uses God’s power in Jesus Christ FOR us. Jesus comes into the world and among people to bring good news of God’s love – Jesus comes to heal and to make whole – ‘this is what I came to do’ Jesus says – God’s power used for others.

Seeing God in the story of Jesus Christ, God with us, turns the ideas of power and greatness upside down, AND just as importantly it gives us a way to answer our question: “How are you going to use your power?” Because we realize that everyone DOES have power. Perhaps not physical strength or wealth or importance or celebrity or status – maybe so for us in some of those ways, but mostly not; but what God shows us is the power each one has to use your life for others. We’ve all been blessed with gifts and talents, with resources, with life itself – and that gives us power – power to use our lives for others.

Earlier in this season of reconciliation as we honored the Dr. Martin Luther Jr., and were reminded of what he once said “Everyone can be great...” which may sound like kind of a cliché or just seeking importance or fame...but Dr. King said “Anyone can be great because...” well let’s see if these 9th graders can figure it out...

unscramble the boxes until it spells “SERVE!”

“Anyone can be great because anyone can SERVE!”

That idea brings together all the questions about power and greatness with a clear answer: to serve others. That's what we see from God and it is the path we are called to follow in Jesus Christ. Paul says "the gospel isn't grounds for boasting" – our faith is not about putting ourselves over or better than others – our faith is that the God of power comes to save, to heal, to call us with the Good News of Jesus Christ: giving us the power to the same for others – sharing the gifts we have to serve others in a broken world.

"Anyone can be great because anyone can SERVE!" *all pick up boxes...*

Now that's real POWER! *all slam the boxes down on the table*

Amen!