

THE POWER THAT MAKES YOU SURE

Call to Worship

The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them. Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him. (Ps 34:7-8)

Worship in song by Geoff Bullock

1. Lord I come to You, let my heart be changed, renewed
Flowing from the grace that I found in You.
And Lord I've come to know, the weaknesses I see in me
Will be stripped away by the power of Your love

Hold me close, let Your love surround me.
Bring me near, draw me to Your side,
And as I wait, I'll rise up like the eagle
And I will soar with You, Your Spirit leads me on in the power of Your love.
2. Lord unveil my eyes, let me see you face to face
The knowledge of Your love as You live in me
Lord renew my mind, as Your will unfolds in my life
In living every day in the power of Your love.
[© 1992 Word Music\(US\), Maranatha! Music](#)
Used by permission. CCL 509237.

Reading from the Psalms

- Psalm 18:1-6

Prayer of confession

Lord of creation, we thank you for our rich and beautiful land, so vast and wild. We confess that we have damaged this fragile gift to us and damaged ourselves by turning from your ways.

We have more possessions but reduced values;
more busyness and less joy;
more regulations and less consideration;
more spiritualities but fewer convictions of truth;
more cynicism and less hope;
more money but less equality;
more houses and less stable families.

Our banks have been accused of exploitation;
Our churches have been guilty of abuse;
Our legal system has been accused of greed.
Our history has hurt our indigenous people.
Moral leadership has given way to legal expediency.
And our politician's credibility is scorned.

THE POWER THAT MAKES YOU SURE

We are deeply sorry for what we have allowed. We, your church, pray for your mercy on our land. Teach us your ways and lead us by your truth that we might be a holy people, a people of hope and integrity who honour you. Amen

Assurance of forgiveness

If anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence - Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also the sins of the whole world. (1 Jn 2:1-2)

Prayer of thanksgiving

Thank you, Father, for the joy of being forgiven and the freedom which comes from forgiving others. Thank you for every person whose forgiveness has set us free from shame. They have been a sign to us of your continuing love.

Thank you for the church community in which your love is made real to us, where we are instructed by your word, supported by your promises, sustained by your hope, encouraged by your character and empowered by your Spirit;

And all because we have been forgiven by your grace.

Holy Communion

Psychologists tell us that when children grow up, young girls want to become princesses and young boys what to become heroes. Heroes can be hard to find in our age. So desperate are we to have heroes that our media grasps at likely candidates, promotes them and, sadly, by doing so, can turn them into monsters.

In our search for heroes, many turn to fiction. All of us are familiar with films in which the hero sacrifices himself so that his friends can live. It is stirring stuff.

At Holy Communion, we celebrate a hero, ...and we celebrate an amazing story.

It has been said that there is really only one story that has ever been written. In other words, there is only one master story of which all other stories are a derivative. The master story goes like this: It is the story of something good which becomes threatened by evil - until a hero rescues it back.

Some people, like C.S. Lewis, have suggested that the reason all stories are variants of this one theme is because all stories reflect the one epic, divine story in which Jesus is the hero, and we are the ones who are rescued from evil.

As such, Jesus' story becomes our story. We were the ones God thought were worth dying for. We were the ones the hero died in order to save. Jesus died on a cross to pay the price for our sins which would otherwise make us ineligible for eternal life with a holy God. It is our story.

In order help us remember the significance of this amazing act of self-sacrifice, Jesus instituted a simple ceremony for Christians. We read about it in 1 Corinthians 11

THE POWER THAT MAKES YOU SURE

The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.

Let us share bread and wine together and remember the one who rescues us back to God by dying for us.

The Bible Reading

- John 14:13-21

The Message: **KNOW THE POWER THAT MAKES YOU SURE**

Do you sometimes battle to believe that you are really a Christian? Do you sometimes wish for some concrete evidence that would satisfy a doubting heart that you belong absolutely, unquestionably, incontrovertibly, unassailably to God?

The one thing that the Apostle Paul pointed to consistently as the thing that verified his ministry, that he could point to when he doubted, was the transforming power within him of the Holy Spirit.

"Hey!" he'd say to his doubting, anxious heart, "You want evidence that I truly belong to God? - then check out the things the Holy Spirit has done within and through me". In other words, Paul was able to point to concrete evidence of the transforming power of the Holy Spirit in his life whenever his heart caused him to doubt. Paul expects you to do the same. He expects you to be able to point to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit in your life that can make you sure about your faith.

One of the obscenities of the church today is that it does not know or understand the Holy Spirit; it does not know or understand this awesome provision Jesus made for us, his church, in his absence.

Who is the Holy Spirit?

It has been said that in the Old Testament, God revealed himself as God the Father, God for us. In the New Testament, God revealed himself as God the Son, God with us. Finally, in the age that followed, God revealed himself as God the Spirit, God within us.

The Holy Spirit is a person, the empowering presence of God. This part of God called the Holy Spirit perfectly represents God the Father and God the Son, and facilitates and empowers their ministry. The exciting thing about the Holy Spirit today is that whilst we may not have Jesus with us in person, we do have the empowering presence of God's Holy Spirit within us. The gift of the Holy Spirit was Jesus' provision for his disciples and the church in his absence.

The outpouring of the Spirit meant that God had fulfilled his promise to dwell once again in and among his people. This empowering presence of God's Spirit represents the Father's will, instructs us in the teachings of Jesus, brings glory to Jesus, convicts people of their

THE POWER THAT MAKES YOU SURE

singfulness, and indwells people so that they grow the character of God (the fruits of the Spirit listed in Gal 5:22)

When the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples during the Jewish religious feast of Pentecost, it was (as the Apostle Peter realised) the fulfilment of a prophecy from the Old Testament prophet Joel (Acts 2:17). He had prophesied the words of God saying: *"I will pour out my Spirit to all people"* (Joel 2:28). Prior to Pentecost, God's empowering Spirit had only been given to a few people for a limited time to enable them to perform specific tasks. However, the prophet Joel prophesied a time when the Holy Spirit would be poured out on all of God's people. This first happened to the disciples of Jesus, after Jesus had left them on the day of Pentecost.

The Holy Spirit's presence within the disciples changed them in two ways:

1. It gradually transformed their character to such an extent that they were able to point to the change within them as evidence that they were Christians.
2. They were given different supernatural gifts to empower their ministry

We will look at these two aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit and how the transforming power of God *within* us can make us sure whenever our hearts condemn us.

A person who is full of the Holy Spirit is demonstratively different from someone who isn't. The New Testament makes it clear that the presence of the Holy Spirit in someone's life was something people could see. In fact, if the evidence of the Holy Spirit's presence was not there, people like Paul asked about it. He expected Christians to have the Holy Spirit and know they had it (Acts 19:1-7).

Paul pointed to it to verify his ministry. Paul taught that true Apostles like himself display the ability to demonstrate the power of the Holy Spirit. (2 Cor 12:12). Paul pointed to it as something that made a difference. He believed that the Holy Spirit was a 'down payment' of the future kingdom of God given by God to all believers. He saw it as a tangible witness to the fact that God had chosen to indwell his people. The Apostle Paul said that God has *"set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come"* (2 Cor 1:22). He speaks of the Holy Spirit as being *"a seal"* setting in place our spiritual destiny with God (Eph 1:13).

It was therefore unthinkable to Paul that his ministry would not evidence the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was the given to empower a people who would be harassed and buffeted by an alien world that was antagonistic to the kingdom of God.

Bikers wear a uniform, wode warriors wore their wode. What signifies and validates Christians? It is none other than the tangible evidence of God's Holy Spirit within them.

Please don't get falsely super-spiritual and say it is Christ that makes us distinctive. That is a false dichotomy. Do not set Christ up in competition with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is Christ's witness to us today.

Paul speaks of the church receiving *"the Spirit of sonship"* (Rom 8:15). Knowing you have the Spirit of God within you means knowing you are a son or a daughter of God. Christians have a different spirit to others in the world. Christians have been given a Spirit that gives them insight into the workings of God. Paul says: *"We*

THE POWER THAT MAKES YOU SURE

have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us” (1 Cor 2:12)

Paul therefore describes our human bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit. He says, *“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?” (1 Cor 6:19)*

Something demonstrably changed as a result of being filled with God's Holy Spirit. When the disciples decided to appoint deacons to help with the pastoral care of widows, they stipulated they should be those *“known to be full of the Spirit” (Act 6:3)*. In other words, they had to demonstrate the power of God's Spirit in their lives and to demonstrate the character of God's Spirit in their lives, i.e. demonstrate the *“fruit of the Spirit” (Gal 5:22)*. Allowing the Spirit of God to control your life meant that your nature changed. As Paul put it, we *“no longer live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit” (Rom 8:4)*. In the next verse, he goes on to say that our very desires change as a result of the Holy Spirit being allowed to indwell us and transform us (Rom 8:5).

So tangible was the change the Holy Spirit made to the character of a disciple (and the empowerment of a disciple) that it was the habit of the first apostles to check with Christians that they had been filled with the Holy Spirit, e.g. the Samaritans (Acts 8:15); Ananias with Paul (Acts 9:17); the Christians in Ephesus (Acts 19:2).

And so convinced was Paul of the difference the Spirit of God made in the lives of a believer that he said, without the Spirit, you *“do not belong to Christ” (Rom 8:9)*. It is the Spirit of God indwelling us that shows that we are saved from our past life. Paul says, *“God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit” (2 Thess 2:13)*. Being saved does not just mean accepting that Jesus died on a cross for you, it also means allowing the Holy Spirit to indwell you, transform you and empower you.

The Holy Spirit *in* us demonstrates that we belong to Christ. It should be tangible, recognisable and transforming. The Spirit of God should be seen in us by others and seen in us by ourselves. So much so that whenever we doubt we are Christians, John says all that we need to do is to look at what the Holy Spirit is doing inside of you: *“We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us his Spirit” (1 Jn 4:13)*. He is talking about the transforming power of the Holy Spirit that is able to empower us for ministry and to grow the character of God within us.

The power comes from demonstrating the Spiritual gifts such as those listed in 1 Cor 12:7-11. The character of God comes from the allowing the Holy Spirit to grow within us the fruit of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5:22-23 which are: love; joy; peace; patience; kindness; goodness; faithfulness; gentleness; self control.

Paul therefore says, for goodness sake, *“live by the Spirit” (Gal 5:16)*; and *“keep in step with the Spirit” (Gal 5:25)*.

Love is the greatest of these Spiritual fruit (1 Cor 13:13). However, Paul makes it clear that love is not love unless it commits to acts of love. The great thing about acts of love is that they show us that we belong to Christ whenever our hearts condemn us.

THE POWER THAT MAKES YOU SURE

This is not earning salvation by doing 'good deeds'. Salvation comes only through faith in Christ. But you cannot have given your life to Christ and not engage in acts of love. Therefore, acts of love can show our doubting hearts that we really do belong to Christ. The apostle John writes:

Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.

Dear Friend, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his command and do what pleases him. (1 Jn 3:18-22)¹

Do you see the sequence?

1. Christ becomes your Lord
2. You do the things Jesus wants you to do
3. These acts are evidence that you have been changed by God's Spirit
4. This gives you confidence before God
5. So you ask of God significant things that delight God's heart and reflect his holiness.

Conclusion

Elisha asked for a double portion of the Spirit that was on his mentor Elijah. What have you got that would make people say, "I want what he's got and I love it so much I want twice what he's got?"

What is evidence on your life of the Holy Spirit transforming your character so you are more like Christ?

Paul speaks of us needing to be continually filled with the Holy Spirit. He says in Ephesians 5:18, "*be being filled with the Holy Spirit*".

Will you allow the Holy Spirit to transform you to such an extent that you can point to the changes as evidence of you being a Christian?

Prayers for others

Pray with passion for those things God has placed on your heart, remembering the persecuted church, world events, the sick and our leaders.

Benediction

You are the light of the world. Let your light so shine before all people that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. (Mt 5:14a,16)

This service was prepared for HopeNet SA by Nick Hawkes

¹ A similar sentiment is expressed in 1 Jn 3:14, "We know we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers".

KID'S CHURCH or KID'S TALK or SUNDAY SCHOOL

Little things make a big difference

Matthew 13:31-34

Put a drop of food dye into a clear glass bowl of water.

Get some seeds of plants (e.g. a mustard seed) and then, if the season is right, pull up a large mustard weed (which can grow over 1.5 metres tall) ... or a wheat seed and wheat plant, or a poppy seed and a poppy plant – whatever you can.

Make the point that small things can make big difference. Small things can grow into big things.

Get out an atlas to show the children when you tell these two stories:

Nagaland is a small state in North Eastern India inhabited by two million people. It is a wild, forested, and undeveloped region inhabited by Nagas, a Tibeto-Burman tribe, who formerly practiced headhunting. However, today, more than 80% of the population is Christian. Why? Because Dr. Edward W. Clark came as a missionary to Nagaland with his wife Mary in 1869. After three years, he had led only 15 Naga people to faith in Christ. It began small. But then the kingdom of God grew. Dr. Clark's work resulted in over 1,300 churches being started. He built the first school, wrote the first school textbook, wrote the Naga dictionary and trained people to lead the church.

William Wilberforce (1759 – 1833) was a sickly and poor student who lived in Yorkshire, England. Luckily for him he came from a wealthy family who were able to send him to Cambridge University. However, he wasted much of his time there on chasing pleasures and avoiding study. Fortunately, when Wilberforce was 25, he became a Christian. He thought he might train to be a church minister but was persuaded he could do more good by being a politician. Wilberforce's passion was to end the cruel practice of slavery in the British Empire. Every year for 18 years, Wilberforce introduced a bill to the British parliament to abolish slavery. Every year he failed. But he continued to persuade more and more people. Eventually, as a result of his work, slavery was abolished in the British Empire in August 1833, one month after his death. The Kingdom of God (God's ways) began small a grew. All it took was for someone to introduce God's ways of living in a small way – and continue to be faithful.

It was Jesus who taught us that God's kingdom can start small in any situation and grow. It can start small and grow in you. It can start small and grow in your family. It can start small and grow in your school, in your city and in your nation. Our job is to allow God's small beginnings to grow.

Read or paraphrase the words of Jesus in Matthew 13:31-34 and discuss it.

Close in prayer.