**The Power of Christ**

**First Baptist Church Albemarle**

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I love the ocean. Unfortunately, I hate the sand. That doesn’t mix very well when it comes to spending time on the beach. However, the ocean has always been a place filled with mystery for me. I wonder what lies beneath the waters away from the shore. I respect the untamable power the water holds. I am mystified by its vastness and how far and wide it stretches. I enjoy listening to the ocean crashing onto the shore when the winds are blowing because it is a reminder of its great power. Also, every time I see the ocean, I am reminded how it can also make me feel because I get seasick fairly easily.

I remember a time when my brother took Amy and I on a shark fishing adventure off the coast of Florida. It wasn’t nearly as exciting as it might sound. We were not fishing for a great white shark but rather just small sand sharks barely away from the beach. As we got on a fairly large boat with many others and started out to the fishing hole, I immediately knew this was a bad idea. My stomach started to feel different and I started to turn different shades of green after just a few short minutes into the ride. I don’t remember much about that “adventure” other than it was one of the most miserable times of my life. My only thought was to not add to the chum that was already thrown overboard to attract the small sharks.

The Jews were not, by and large, a seafaring people either. Their neighbors to the north and the south, Phoenicia and Egypt, were maritime nations, trading widely across the Mediterranean. Israel, on the other hand, concentrated on the land, which after all was what was promised to them. In the Jewish writings, the sea was a place of darkness and evil. Think about the stories we find of the sea in the Old Testament. God opened up the Red Sea in order for the Israelites to walk across it but the Egyptians who were in hot pursuit were killed when the water returned. In another story of the Old Testament, we read about Jonah and how God used the sea to stop the disobedient prophet.

It is worth exploring the story of Jonah a little further…God told Jonah to go and preach in Nineveh. Jonah didn’t want to go, so he got on a boat that was headed in the opposite direction. A great storm blew up, and the boat was in danger of capsizing, but Jonah was asleep and didn’t know what was happening. Others on the boat woke Jonah up and pleaded with him to pray to his God to save them. Realizing what was happening, Jonah tells the sailors to throw him overboard and the sea became calm. Jonah was then swallowed up by a big fish, which threw him up onto dry land, after which he reluctantly went to Nineveh and carried out his commission.

This dramatic story was well known to Matthew and his friends. You might imagine why they were so afraid. Was Jesus asleep like Jonah not realizing he had not done what his father wanted him to do? The fear is real and understandable. So the disciples quickly awoke a sleeping Jesus and pleaded with him for help. Rather than calling upon his father for help, Jesus simply rebukes the wind and the waves and they quieted down at once. The disciples were amazed for they knew that Jesus was their rabbi who also was a prophet. They knew that Jesus was different than any other rabbi but they were not fully convinced of his divinity as the Son of God. They knew he had the power to heal and his teachings turned their worldview upside down. But for him to have authority over the natural elements of the world…they were amazed and they asked one another “What kind of man is this?”

The power Jesus exhibited forces us to ask a similar question as the disciples: “Can we fully place our trust and faith in Jesus?” The simple answer is a resounding YES. However, the follow through isn’t that easy. Do we fully live as if he has complete authority over our lives and our world? Do we regard Jesus as our Lord and Savior and Master of everything? Do our actions and attitudes reflect complete faith?

For everyone in this sanctuary, I would assume our faith falls short of being able to answer these questions with a resounding YES. Instead, we hold on to certain areas of our lives because we either think we know more than God or we are too ashamed of our failures to let God in. We will let God have control of our church life but not our business life. We will let God have authority over our family relationships but we refuse to let go of that one sin that continues to cause us heartache and shame. We know that God is bigger than any of our issues but we continue to worry about the little things. We know God is sovereign and in control of all things but yet we live in fear of what might happen. We know that God is the Great Provider but we continue to hoard our possessions when we have more than enough. Friends, if we know in our hearts that Jesus is truly the Son of God and he is our Great Messiah, than our actions and attitudes must reflect our belief. Just as Jesus asked his disciples, he asks us today, “We of little faith, why are we so afraid?”

When we allow the power of Christ to work in and through us, there is nothing more attractive to those who are living without hope. The disciples didn’t quite understand. They didn’t understand the full extent of who Jesus was until he appeared to them post-resurrection. Yet, we have the fortune of knowing the full story. We know that Jesus died, rose from the dead three days later and is now at the right hand of the Father. We know the ending that is promised to us. Allowing the power of Jesus to flow through us should be easy.

In Acts 2, we read about the Holy Spirit descending on the disciples who were still hiding together. When the Spirit gave them courage to speak, they began to speak in different languages so that all may understand what they witnessed in Christ. The power of the Spirit was so attractive that it gave birth to the first church with more than three thousand coming to faith.

We have the same Holy Spirit who lives in us and works through us. The Holy Spirit working through us is as attractive to a dark world as it was in 1st century. When we allow the power of Jesus to work in and through us, others notice and wonder, “What kind of man or woman is this?” That gives us the open door to share what God has done in our lives, that others might believe and place their faith and trust in Him.

Our friends are watching how we deal with pain and hurt. They are watching how we treat our material blessings. Our neighbors are watching how we show love to one another. The world is watching how we serve the people in our community. Let us draw others to the power of Jesus for it is not our job to change people. It is our job to live in faith and let our words and actions point people to Jesus, who is the source of change. May we live faithful and trust-filled lives that others might be attracted to the One who gives us the abundant life. May we live in the power of Jesus.