

Unleashing God's Power Into the World

I want to introduce this topic with a quote from I Timothy 2:1

“I urge supplication, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all who are in high positions so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all Godliness and honesty.”

That sets the stage for our unleashing God's power into the world.

Our call and golden opportunity is to make that difference in the world. While we can and should do significant things as individuals, we can do so much more together. Helen Keller once said: “We cannot do much alone, but we can do so very much together”.

From its outset the Church has made huge differences in the lives of literally thousands of struggling people in all parts of the world. We have for many years as a national church, now the ELCA, provided food and medical care to countless people in darkest Africa, the strife ridden Middle East and the forever unstable Central America. Every Christian congregation that reaches out beyond its walls unleashes God's power into the world.

Having visited some of these places, I want to share a story of an event that moved me to tears. It was in Arusha, Tanzania where our church has established and maintained a hospital and medical school for many decades. While visiting this campus a skinny little bent over man had his sick wife in a wheelbarrow traveling two days to get medical assistance which you and I through our global church have provided.

In that moment you could feel a wave of God's power being unleashed in that special location in the world. The reality of God's presence was ominous. That was something you and I could not do alone, but together we could and did do it.

That is what Church is and must be—the conduit to convey God's power, healing, love and grace into the lives of God's people everywhere. This happens when the Church is serious about its own spiritual discernment.

Since we are dealing with the Church in the world, those global dimensions of the Church, I will share another story. It was worship in a Maasai tribe village in the far outback bush of Tanzania. The village chief had become a Christian under the influence of our Lutheran missionaries. Historically, the Maasai people are quite resistant to missionary efforts. However, this chief and all 9 of his wives of all ages, along with the entire village had become followers of the Christian faith.

With them we gathered for worship under a huge acacia tree surrounded by mud and grass huts. We sat on planks for benches. A roughly made cross was nailed to the trunk of the tree. That was Church. Never have I experienced God's presence so powerfully as in that worship service.

Hearing those beautiful people, with their beaded pieces on arms and neck, sing the familiar liturgy and hymns in Swahili sent chills up my spine. The deep joy of their faith gushed forth in waves that overtook all of us visitors. It was Pentecost all over again!

This is what has been made possible through the praying and sharing of many Lutheran congregations in the U. S., Germany, Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. It is not just money that makes the difference. No missionary efforts are ever begun or carried out without serious and passionate prayer.

The Global Missions arm of our own church is very likely the most spiritually discerning segment of the entire ELCA.

On another note, there is a most helpful image of nurturing the world spiritually that one of our Swedish Lutheran Theologians, Krister Stendahl, has given us. As Church and as Christians who choose not to be a part of the Church, we are all called to be the leaven in the loaf—the loaf being the world; our being the leaven. As yeast causes dough to rise and become tasty, so we are called to bring goodness, generosity, peace, justice, mercy, and joy into the world and thereby leaven the loaf. These are gifts that we who are spiritually discerning have to share with the world around us and around the globe.

The Biblical image for this spiritual energy is light that holds power over darkness. We are called bring light and love into a darkened and needy world. In so doing by the very way we pray, live and share, we unleash God's power into the world.

Following Timothy's admonition we are able to make a significant difference in the world's complexion by not only dealing with the medical and caloric needs of the suffering people, but also by committing ourselves to pray for the leaders of the world who hold in their hands the lives and well-being of millions of people. All too often sheer unabated greed and lust for power have wreaked havoc in countless places all around the globe.

In the face of these travesties our tendency is either to dismiss the problems as not being our own, or perhaps supporting the obvious use of military force to overthrow diabolic dictatorial leaders who so abuse their own people. Too often we feel hopeless and helpless and thus turn our backs because we cannot come up with a satisfactory solution.

That is for certain a grievous mistake we make that allows horror stories to continue. Truly, there is rampant evil in the world, but we must be equally aware that there is also potential spiritual power to overcome it. We are the ones called to unleash that power into the world.

As people of faith who reap the blessings of power and plenty for the most part, we have at our constant disposal the only power capable of changing the direction of these horrific travesties. Only God-Power can begin to match the evil powers that we know are present and operative.

There has always been the question in the minds of many people as to why God would allow such horror to exist. People have given up on God over this seemingly unanswerable question. The question goes unanswered simply because it is the wrong question. The question should be directed to us for it is we who live on this earth and bear responsibility for its sustainability and the well-being of its inhabitants.

That question is "Why are we not attempting to unleash God's power into the world when it is so clear how to do it?" It is by prayer—prayer for those in power to have their lives and their agendas changed. We cannot make it happen, at least not alone, but God can and hopefully will if we ask with conviction and faith.

Thankfully, prayer is not only for little things. It is an unmitigated, unequalled power tool that can be the key to healing a nation, changing the circumstances that affect thousands of people.

You are probably raising your eyebrows and touching the brake pedal. Hang with me. Here is a suggestion. Just as we like to support with the gift of money our favorite causes, pick a single global situation that causes you pain and commit your prayer life to unleash God's power to bring healing to that situation in whatever way Divine wisdom chooses. Let the Holy Spirit lead you to that cause then talk with God about it in earnest and don't give up! Let it become your obsession, your mission, your mantra.

The neat thing about God is that it doesn't take an onslaught of many prayers of many people compounded to make that difference. More likely it takes the relentless and passionate prayers of only one person—you—or perhaps only one passionate congregation— (OSLC) to make the difference.

Sometimes that is how the mystery of God works. Don't discount it. Rejoice in the excitement of seeing it actually work. Prayer truly changes things. Let us be diligent in our prayers of supplication in behalf of the world and its people. Let us be actively and prayerfully engaged in Unleashing God's Power into the World.

Ask God to get those Holy Hands dirty and get to work making the difference that only God's Holy Spirit can make. God is accustomed to dirt and filth. Remember the cross. It was dirty and bloody. Then remember the empty tomb. Victory! That was the same God we are talking about now at work. If then, why not now?

We end as we began—remembering Timothy's admonition to pray for kings and all who are in high places, so that we may lead quiet and peaceable lives.