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Hutterthal Mennonite Church

Jesus' Power Pulls Us Through

30 May 2021

VBS Preparation and Exploration

Our first scripture reading this morning is Philippians 4:10-13. Consider the theme for the first day of bible school as you listen to this passage: **Jesus' Power Helps Us Do Hard Things.**

In each day of VBS, an accompanying story from scripture carries the key verse and theme. The accompanying story is the call of Ananias in Acts 9 (Acts 9:1-19) to help Saul, who had been persecuting followers of Jesus all over Judea. At this point, Saul has just been visited by the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus, leaving him blind, unable to carry out his purposes for travelling to Damascus as well as humbled and asking for help from Ananias, whom Jesus had told him about. But why would Ananias want to help Saul, who had been integral in the martyrdom of several followers of the way up to that point? How can Ananias believe that Saul is not going to trap him and persecute him as well? Jesus' power helps Ananias do the hard thing at this moment. When Ananias goes to Saul and prays for him, Saul recovers his sight and becomes a follower of Jesus too. Later, Saul who has become Paul will also be persecuted and put in prison, where he will write the words that Egan has just read. Paul was convinced that he could do all that God had called him to through the strength and power of Jesus.

God calls us to do hard things, but God does not leave us alone to try. God gives us the power of the Spirit as we talked about last week at Pentecost so that we can move forward in our mission to share Jesus with everyone.

Our next scripture reading is Psalm 31:23-24. Be thinking about the 2nd day's theme, which is that **Jesus' Power Gives Us Hope.**

The accompanying story to this theme comes from Acts 27, in which Paul is on his way to Rome to appeal the accusations of his persecutors to Caesar himself. As he is traveling by ship across the Mediterranean Sea, Paul warns the crew of the ship that is delivering him to Rome that the ship will be destroyed in a soon-coming storm. No one person will be lost but all of the items on the ship and the ship itself will be destroyed. Even so, the captain and crew of the ship do not believe Paul and do all that they can to save the ship and, they think, themselves. Even in all of their striving and trying, the ship is still lost on the shores of an island, where the crew is left until another ship can assist them. Paul's hope in Jesus sustained him even through the terrifying and nerve-wracking storm. Jesus' power gave him the hope to speak to the rest of the people on the ship, who later came to see how Paul's predictions had come true.

We have talked a lot about deep hope and hope that sustains us through very difficult circumstances in the last year or so. We as a church can witness to the power of our hope in Jesus as our leader, savior, and Lord.

Our third scripture reading comes from scripture reading comes from Isaiah 40:27-31. As you listen to this passage, consider this theme: **Jesus' Power Helps Us to Be Bold.**

The accompanying story to this theme comes from Acts 3 & 4(Acts 3:1 - 4:31), in which Peter and John teach and preach the message of Jesus in the temple area of Jerusalem. Not only do they proclaim and witness to the risen Jesus, the Spirit empowers their words with miracles as a cripple man is given the ability to walk by the power of the Spirit. Jesus' words really start

coming true in the early church as the disciples begin to do even greater things than Jesus had done in his ministry not too many months previously.

Our next scripture is Romans 8:1-11. As you listen to this passage, consider the 4th day's theme:

Jesus' Power Lets Us Live Forever.

The accompanying story comes from Matthew 26-28 (Matthew 26:17 - 28:10), in which Jesus is betrayed, arrested, tried unjustly by both Judean and Roman authorities, crucified, buried, and raised to new life in God's power. Jesus' death is the crowning and enthroning of him as king over all of creation on a Roman cross. On the third day, Jesus is raised from death, overcoming sin and brokenness and evil by the power of God. We do not have to fear death any longer because Jesus has conquered death and destruction by allowing it to do its worst to him and still overcoming its power in resurrection.

We follow in Jesus's sacrificial and humbling way, knowing that our hope for life beyond death is secured in his work on the cross and resurrection. We depend on the grace that is Jesus' power to hold us and keep us as God's children forever. God has made the way through Jesus for all people to return to deep and transformational relationship with their creator, with themselves, with other people, and with creation.

Our final scripture reading is John 15:1-17. As you listen, consider this theme for the last day of

VBS: Jesus' Power Helps Us Be Good Friends.

The accompanying story comes from Acts chapters 2 & 4 (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35), in which the early church, through the power of the Spirit, is united in their mission in Jerusalem to tell everyone about the good news of Jesus, the wonderful deeds of the power of God. Central to

Jesus's command to love one another, the early church provided for each other by selling what each person had and giving to each person as needs were presented. Jesus' power inspired the people of this first church to be good friends and neighbors. They worshipped and prayed together, ate meals together, and witnessed to how Jesus was changing and saving them even as they witnessed to his and, by his power, their amazing story. We continue the story of the early church by being good friends and neighbors.

As straight-forward and understandable as the central theme is and these 5 daily themes are for kids at VBS, we adults know the wisdom that they speak, especially after celebrating Pentecost and the power of the spirit last week. The Holy Spirit has empowered us to do hard things, especially when we can think of all of the reasons that we do not need to or should not do them. God's calling on our lives as followers of Jesus will mean doing what we would rather not because the way of life and resurrection is not easy. But as we have heard this morning, the power of the Spirit secures our hope in God's love and gives us boldness to be the hands and feet of Jesus even when doing so is difficult. Finally, by doing hard things and asking difficult questions in the hope and boldness of our relationship with God, we become or transform into better neighbors and friends; better humans; more authentic bearers of God's image; even powerful witnesses to how God's kingdom or God's shalom-vision for setting the world right in justice and peace is coming into reality all around us and in us.

As you listened this morning to these scriptures, how have you connected with what the children will be exploring at VBS? How can you witness to how Jesus' power has pulled you through or maybe continues to pull you through today? Hold those connections throughout the week, and let them be a reminder to you to pray for God's inspiration and provision for all of the

participants in VBS. Then as you come back to church next week, remember your connections and thoughts as you listen again to what the kids have to share with us on VBS Sunday.