

"The Power Trip"

Text: Acts 5:12, 17-32

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from the God who, in connection with Jesus Christ, exercised his divine power to rescue those who from birth possessed only the power for self-destruction. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

It's one of those expressions you used to hear all the time, but for some reason has sort of fallen out of favor or use today –the "power trip." This despite the fact that, if anything, the expression is at least as appropriate and as applicable today as it ever was. The phenomenon demonstrates itself nowhere more clearly than in the days leading up to an election – especially one like the current distasteful mess we are being forced to witness. A "power trip," as the expression is or was typically used, describes a self-absorbed human being who will say or do just about anything in order to exercise control over other human beings.

Power has been described as the ultimate drug, and that description has been used often enough, and by those who ought to know whereof they speak, that we are probably safe to accept that particular description of power as true. And, like any drug, the craving is never really satisfied. For the people of this world, the gaining of power always seems to mandate the acquisition of more. And more. And more. It creates, so we are told, an insatiable appetite for more.

And then an interesting mutation or transformation always seems to occur in those who gain power – they become absolutely convinced of two things: first, of their own value and irreplaceability, and, second, of the rightness or justification for whatever they do, especially for anything they feel they must do to remain in power. Though easily recognized as delusional and twisted by almost everyone else, the thought-process is actually fairly straightforward and logical from the moment an individual gives himself over to an uninhibited self-love and to a delusional sense of self-importance. The "logic" is this: *since I want the best for the people under me and since I am unquestioningly the absolute best thing they've got going* (the delusional part), *that means that I need to be willing to do whatever I need to do to preserve my power – even if it means destroying or ending the lives of a significant number of those over whom I exercise my power.* Makes perfect sense to those mesmerized by power. Never mind the fact that another way to put that idea is that destroying the people over whom I exercise power is actually in their best interest.

There is another expression in this area, and this one is still in use today: *power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.* While mostly true where the Godless are involved, the insertion of God into the equation changes everything.

This morning God's Word is going to give us a view of three different power trips, only one of which was bad. The text that will guide and instruct us this morning is found in the Fifth Chapter of the Book of Acts, beginning there with the Twelfth Verse:

ESV Acts 5:12, 17-32 *Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. ¹⁷ ¶ But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy ¹⁸ they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. ¹⁹ But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, ²⁰ "Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life." ²¹ ¶ And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach. Now when the high priest came, and those who were with him, they called together the council and all the senate of the people of Israel and sent to the prison to have them brought. ²² But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, so they returned and reported, ²³ "We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them we found no one inside." ²⁴ Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them, wondering what this would come to. ²⁵ And someone came and told them, "Look! The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people." ²⁶ Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but not by force, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people. ²⁷ ¶ And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, ²⁸ saying, "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us." ²⁹ But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. ³⁰ The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. ³¹ God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. ³² And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."*

So far the very words of God. May God the Holy Spirit give each of us a wise and receptive heart so that we accept these as the words of God alone, our ultimate power and authority, and utilize and treasure them accordingly. To this end we pray, **"Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth!"** Amen.

The first power trip in our text is painfully obvious. The Jewish religious leaders were obviously addicted, and they demonstrated their willingness to do anything they needed to do to preserve whatever power they thought they had. Nor did they act in ignorance. *Willful* ignorance maybe, but not uninformed ignorance. They had known without question that Jesus was innocent when they begged Pilate to crucify him, as did Pilate. Matthew 27:17-18: ***So when they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?"*** ¹⁸ ***For he knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up.*** Understand the dynamics of what's going on with these Jewish leaders. Power was so important to them that they felt threatened by anyone else's popularity. John 11:47-48: ***So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the Council and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs."*** ⁴⁸ ***If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.***" Note well who came first – ***"our place."*** The Germans have an expression that pretty much sums up man's philosophy in this sort of thing: *Zuerst komme ich, dann komme ich noch einmal, dann kommt mein Hund, dann kommst du. "First comes me, then comes me again, then comes my dog, then comes you."*

Following Jesus' crucifixion, and by God's direction, the Jewish leaders looked the other way for a time as the Holy Spirit worked through the disciples of Jesus to convert thousands in and around Jerusalem. As soon as the threat grew to the point that they felt their power threatened, they acted.

It was all about them; all about their power. The drug was so addictive that they were perfectly willing to prostrate themselves before the hated Roman Governor and to perjure themselves by hiring liars to make their case. Understand them well, for to understand those men back then is to understand both the Godless of today and their irrational hatred of all things Christian. Then, as now, it's never about truth. It's never about reality. It's about present "felt" needs and instant gratification. It's about ***"If I want it, I need it; and if I need it, it must somehow be right."***

We got a particularly telling peek into the irrational complexities of their blind, delusional unbelief in our text. Did you catch it? One of their accusations against Jesus' apostles was that they ***"intend to bring this man's (Jesus') blood upon us."*** Why is that so irrational? Because that's *exactly* the very thing *they called down upon themselves* at Jesus' trial. Matthew 27:24-25: ***So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves."*** ²⁵ ***And all the people answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!"*** The very curse that they had called down upon themselves by their own actions was suddenly the fault of Jesus' followers. Behold the rationale of the Godless – still very much alive and kicking today.

In the verses following our text one of their own, the highly respected Gamaliel, warned his fellow Jewish leaders to leave Jesus' disciples alone. His counsel to them: ***"Men of Israel, take care what you are about to do with these men."*** ³⁶ ***For before these days Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing.*** ³⁷ ***After him Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him. He too perished, and all who followed him were scattered.*** ³⁸ ***So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; ³⁹ but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!"*** (Acts 5:35-39) They agreed, but only for a time. They just couldn't help themselves, so powerful was their addiction. As soon as they felt their power again threatened, one by one they hunted down the men they had agreed to ***"let alone"*** and killed them all. John alone was spared, but only because he was exiled to a place where he would pose no threat. Evidently the allure of power was so potent, they were perfectly willing to ***"oppose God"*** if that is what it took.

That was the first power trip in our text. There were two very different others. The first was only alluded to at the end of our text: ***The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.*** The second power trip was that of Jesus Christ himself. The "trip" that he took was from heaven to earth, and the power that he exercised was dramatically different in that he set aside the full use of his own power (that which was rightfully his) to break Satan's power over

fallen mankind. His mission was 100% for our benefit – we who could not even begin to resist the power of the forces that held us captive.

We dare never mistake Jesus humility for weakness. There was nothing whatsoever about Jesus that was weak; nor was there anything timid or frail about the work or mission he was sent to carry out in our behalf. Jesus left earth to wage all-out war against all the forces of evil, and that epic struggle lasted his entire lifetime. To fail once, in even the most seemingly insignificant way, was to fail utterly.

The empty tomb of Easter Sunday is the proof that he did not fail. It is God's declaration of acceptance of the single most powerful thing that has ever or will ever be done for fallen man: the payment of our sin debt and the breaking of the grip in which the devil held us. His victory is now our victory. As he rose, so also all will rise who die in the Christian faith. ***"Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."***

That was the second power trip in our text. Have you already identified the third? It was the apostles'. More to the point, it was – *is* - our own.

The same apostles who abandoned Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, the same apostles who after his death hid in the upper room ***"for fear of the Jews,"*** these same men were changed, forever. They were filled with *power* when they were filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and their *trip* would take them to the far corners of the world of their day. These men, hand chosen by Jesus himself, suddenly would no longer be intimidated by beatings, imprisonment, or death. These are the men who could and did look their enemies right in the eye and say, ***"No, we're not going to do what you say. We're not going to stop telling the world about their Savior and exactly what he has done for them."*** ***"We must obey God rather than men."***

The result was that their enemies were the ones who suddenly found themselves powerless to stop, or even slow, what God the Holy Spirit was accomplishing through these men. Kill one of them, as they did, and God would just take that one home and send more. They killed James, and God sent in his place Paul, and Silas, and Barnabas, and Timothy, and Apollos, and Priscilla and Aquila. Kill those faithful men and women and God would just take those souls home and send more, and more, and more. Until he has also now sent you and me.

This is now *our* power trip, our trip of power. The same spectacular power that worked through those first kingdom workers to accomplish the miracle of faith and rescue is still ours. Its power *has* never and *can*

never be diminished. Now, as then, man has the terrible ability to reject, but that Word of God is still ***"living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerns the thoughts and intentions of the heart."*** That Word can and will still save souls.

Understand then your power, which comes from God himself (coming to you as often as you allow it through that Word of God) and then simply acknowledge and accept the trip that he has laid out for you. And be about your Father's business. Good things, great things, eternal thing will certainly happen. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Revelation 1:4-8** John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, ⁵ ¶ and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood ⁶ and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. ⁷ Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen. ⁸ ¶ "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

^{ESV} **John 20:19-31** On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." ²⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." ²² And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld." ²⁴ ¶ Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe." ²⁶ ¶ Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." ²⁸ Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." ³⁰ ¶ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

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The Sunday after Easter – April 3, 2016

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 192 (Verses 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"Awake My Heart with Gladness"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The First Lesson: (Revelation 1:4-8) John saw a vision of things to come. Many of these signs or events have already come to pass. At least one remains - the return of our Lord on the Last Day. May God the Holy Spirit keep us focused on that great day, and continually remind us to work tirelessly to share the gospel while there is still time. While that day will be amazing beyond compare for God's children, not so for those who reject Jesus Christ as their Savior. God grant us love for souls.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 100 (Page 35)

The Second Lesson: (John 20:19-31) There is such a thing as healthy doubt, but not in connection with the words and promises of our God. Once we have God's Word on any given subject, we are to cling tenaciously and uncompromisingly to that Word. Our second reading this morning tells of how the disciples for a time allowed their own reason, rather than God's Word, to determine their "truth." While our Lord gave them visible evidence to assuage their doubts, he also here let us know that faith is being sure of what we cannot see. God grant us such faith.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 190 (Verses 1-5) (Red Hymnal)

"Christ the Lord Is Risen Again"

The Sermon – Text: Acts 5:12, 17-32 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"The Power Trip"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn -197 (Red Hymnal)

"Where Wilt Thou Go, Since Night Draws Near"

The Offering followed by the Prayers

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn -192 (Verses 6 & 8) (Red Hymnal)

"Awake My Heart with Gladness"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance - Sunday (62) Ave (46)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Coffee/Fellowship Time
Mon-Thur	-9:00 a.m.	– Pastor Roehl at Meetings in Eau Claire
Friday	-9:00 a.m.	– Organ Installation
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Service w/Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Coffee/Fellowship Time

CLC News – Pastor Matthew Hanel has returned the call to Holy Trinity of West Columbia, SC. Pastor Matthew Ude is considering the call to Ascension of Tacoma. Teacher Sara Pfeiffer has returned the teaching call to Gethsemane of Spokane. Please remember Kayle Ude, the newborn daughter of Pastor Matt and Vanessa Ude, in your prayers. Kayle has been battling a critical brain infection since her birth about 8 weeks ago. She has had several procedures so far, and is facing more.

CLC Board Meetings – The various Boards of the CLC are scheduled to meet in Eau Claire this week, Monday through Wednesday.

This Week's Schedule – Please note that since Pastor Roehl is scheduled to attend meetings in Eau Claire, there are no midweek classes this week.

Safety Sign-up Sheets – The sheets for the remaining classes to be presented by Phil Pfennig are on the mailbox table. Please take a moment to sign the appropriate sheets if you plan to attend.

Delegates – We have one delegate for the Jamestown Conference (May 31-June 2) and one for the CLC Convention in Eau Claire (June 21-24). We are looking for one more volunteer to represent our congregation at each.