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Aug

Power

Lessons in Leadership

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, YEAR A

This worship explores the complex theme of power by highlighting unconventional biblical leaders who bravely used their influence to defy oppression and champion truth.

Recognizing that power itself is simply a tool, the service will challenge us to examine how we wield our own influence and confess where we fall short. Through focused prayers, hymns, and storytelling, we will come together to seek the wisdom and humility to use our power faithfully for God's purposes.

REFERENCES

Exodus 1:8-2:10

Psalm 124

Romans 12:1-8

Matthew 16:13-20

COLORS

Green

Worship Planning Notes

Focus text: Exodus 1:8-2:10, Matthew 16:13-20

Midwives. A post-partum mother. A pre-teen girl. Pharaoh's daughter. A carpenter's son. A group of fishermen. Not quite the people we expect to lead a leadership seminar. But in today's texts, these are precisely the people who use the power available to them to act for life and goodness in the face of oppression. Some acted on faith. Others acted in compassion but without knowledge of how God

would use their actions. Shiphrah, Puah, Moses's mother, and Miriam (unnamed in this particular passage) all chose to defy the orders of a death-dealing Pharaoh, while Jesus teaches and empowers Peter and the other disciples to recognize and tell the truth in a society that attacks truth-tellers. If you can allow me to oversimplify two quite complex stories, in each case, in a society where one man or political entity sought to hoard all power, these leaders recognized the power they still had and acted.

To be honest, I think planning a worship service around the theme of power is difficult. We have a hard time deciding in our society today whether power is good or bad. On the one hand, we want to empower people to live and act in ways that create a just and flourishing community for all. On the other hand, we talk about "the powers that be" in less than flattering terms, and we lament the actions of the powerful that harm the powerless. How in the world are we supposed to plan worship around the theme of power when we're not quite sure if power is a good or a vice?

There's a proverb that says, "the dose makes the poison," and I think that's precisely the case with power. Too much, and it becomes a poison to ourselves and others. But if we eschew it altogether, we find ourselves tossed about by people who would gladly use their power to control others. The key is moderation, recognizing that power itself is not bad. How we use it makes all the difference.

So, use this opportunity in worship to help your congregation clarify the difference between power and how it's used. Take time to pray for wisdom and humility to use our power well. Confess the misuses of power we allow in our lives and communities. Sing hymns that call us to faithful use of our power, such as "Lord Whose Love in Humble Service" (United Methodist Hymnal 581), "A Charge to Keep Have I" (United Methodist Hymnal 413), or "God of Love and God of Power" (United Methodist Hymnal 578). Find space, too, to lift up the unusual yet powerful examples of leaders in our texts today. Consider telling the story of Exodus 1:8-22 from the perspective of Shiphrah and Puah. Are there other girls who follow in Miriam's footsteps to protect the innocent when they, too, are still quite young? What of mothers who do everything they can to make a way when there seems to be no way so that their kids can have hope for a future? Who are the truth tellers when the lies of the too powerful seem too loud to drown out? Find ways to connect leaders now and throughout history with the leaders in our texts today, illustrating how the gospel empowers us to use our power for God's purposes in communities where leaders seek to hold up their own power to the detriment of everyone else.

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