



Sermon delivered by  
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Quail Hollow Presbyterian Church  
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## "Faithful Hearsay" (Ephesians 1: 15-23)

What makes some of us nervous about our foes in North Korea is that they have power, and evidently they are willing to use that power. As a child of the Cold War era, I have vivid memories of being unnerved by the military power of the Soviet Union. Fifty-five years ago last month many of us were living through the Cuban Missile Crisis, and it was a crisis. The fear of a nuclear war in 1962 was wide-spread, but fortunately, gratefully there was no war. Power placed in the wrong hands can do great damage, and it doesn't need to be nuclear power, either. In recent weeks, we have been reminded of the power and the damage caused by sexual harassment. Power placed in the wrong hands *has done* great damage, which is why St. Paul was pleased by what was coming out of the church in Ephesus.

The people who made up the church in Ephesus were using the power of the gospel not to tear down, not to harass, but to build up and to make known God's will. Paul was impressed at how the immeasurable power of almighty God was being used for goodness and blessing, and was being used not to hurt people but to bring people together in peace and harmony. That kind of power was not to be feared like Cold War power; rather, the power of God is all about glad tidings and good news. It is the power not of destruction but of new birth, new creation, and the full expression of that power *is* Jesus Christ. Paul understood God's power, which is why Paul understood what the Lord meant when He said to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Isn't that interesting? Of all things, God's power is perfected in weakness, not in a nuclear bomb, not in a missile, not in an AK-47, but in weakness.

In the ways of the world, weakness is the Achilles heel of those who seek to be number one in the world. In the ways of the world, strength and might and power are what count, not turning the other cheek, not going the extra mile. Which is why we Christians wrestle at times with being people of faith. In God's Kingdom, it isn't human power that makes the difference. In God's Kingdom, it is *God's* power that makes *all* the difference, and it is God's power that

caught Paul's ear when it came to those Christians in Ephesus. The Christians in Ephesus were using God's power to make a difference, a difference some thought could never be made. But, the church in Ephesus was getting it right. Through their faith in Jesus Christ, their hearts had been opened to the *hope* to which Jesus had called them, and what do you suppose that hope was and still is, today?

The hope those Ephesians had set their sights on is the hope of peace on earth. Those Ephesians were living their lives in ways that spoke directly to the purpose and plan of Christ's resurrection, and word was spreading. Others were learning of what was happening in Ephesus while others surely scoffed at how those Ephesians were wasting their time and talent and treasure. The mission and witness of the church in Ephesus was aimed at one goal: *peace on earth*. Peace among and between nations, peace among and between friends and strangers, even enemies; the kind of peace many of us dream about and wonder about and hunger for, and which at times some of us can even taste, as we will next Sunday. Hear this, and hear this very clearly: Peace on earth is the hope to which the risen Christ calls His church, calls this church, and that is why Paul wrote to the Christians in Ephesus telling them, *I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and of your love towards all the saints*. What Paul was experiencing is what I call "faithful hearsay." "Faithful hearsay" is what happens when Christians, when you and I hear what we never expected to hear. "Faithful hearsay" elicits a respond like, *You're kidding!* Or, *You don't say!* Or, *You have to be mistaken!*

The hurdle, the challenge when it comes to "faithful hearsay" is whether or not we believe what we are hearing is possible much less true. "Faithful hearsay" reminds us that nowhere in scripture does God ask for our opinion. This may surprise or even trouble some of us, but nowhere in the Bible does our opinion count. Nothing about the Kingdom of God is held in the balance because of what we think might or might not be possible. Peace on earth is not up for a group vote. Peace on earth is and remains God's primary desire for the life of the world, that from among all the planets in all the galaxies this one planet is the one place where peace is to be found among all people, and where resurrection power is used not to tear down, not to destroy, but to bring people together in what the Bible calls *shalom*, the Hebrew word for peace, not a private peace but the kind of peace you share with others.

Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus reminds us that God has made power available to the church, the same kind of power that raised Jesus from the dead. In other words, real power! The Greek word for *power* is where we get the word "dynamite." Last week, they imploded the Georgia Dome in Atlanta, and they filmed it coming down from the inside out.

What brought down the Georgia Dome was not wishful thinking, but dynamite, and lots of it. According to St. Paul, God uses the same kind of power through the church, through the likes of you and me, and all those walls that divide and separate come down piece-by-piece and brick-by-brick. Again, that's the power that raised Jesus from the dead, which means such power gives life, restores life so new life may flourish. That's the kind of power we are asked to believe in, not wishful thinking-power, but the power God gives to the church to make peace on earth possible, the kind of peace that is visible and tangible and believable and very, very livable.

Last Tuesday night, I saw and I felt that power in this room. I caught a glimpse of peace on earth through the faces of the people who showed up. I heard that peace and that power in the voices of the huge community choir that Randy directed and who sang to the glory of God. Last Tuesday night, five congregations gathered here for one purpose: to speak two words to the living God of Jesus Christ, and those two words are: *Thank you*. Last Tuesday night, there was a lot of power in this room, not political power, not Presbyterian power, not financial power, but *faith-power*, the kind of power scripture says can move mountains, and not just move mountains, but toss mountains into the sea, into Lake Wylie and Lake Norman. That's the power I was seeing with my eyes and hearing with my ears, the kind of power Jesus uses to forgive and to bless and to unite. That's the power God gives to Christ's church, and without that power you and I remain just another charitable organization.

But the Lord has **empowered** us to be and to do so much more. We have been given the *same* power God used to raise Jesus from the dead, an incomparable power, an immeasurable power, the kind of power the world may not believe in, doubts could even exist, but a power we know and we believe does exist, and for which we give thanks. Jesus says to us today as He once said to Paul, *My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness, in weakness*. Therein lies the unique difference between world power and resurrection power. God's power is made perfect in weakness, the kind of weakness the world scoffs at, despises, but which according to "faithful hearsay" is changing the life of the world, one shoebox at a time.

What pleased Paul and what inspired him to commend the Ephesian church is that they were "getting it." They were making a difference in their corner of the world, and people, all sorts of people, all kinds of people, were being loved into community, the kind of community Christ spoke of and taught and which He makes available for all people to be part of; the kind of living angels sang about when the Prince of Peace was born. Peace on earth is God's desire,

God's intent. In Jesus Christ is found the power for peace on earth to be known and lived and shared. That is the hope to which we have been called on *our* corner. That is why we want to be the church, the powerful church of Jesus Christ every day in 2018. And that is why we want your Giving Card so no one is left in doubt as to what God has called us to do. Like those Ephesians so many years ago, we want to be found getting it right, so very right. We want to do our part so no one is left out, so the children understand why at Christmas we sing about peace on earth, and why that peace begins in the birth of a Child, Whose Name is above all other names, not only in this age, for the age that is closer to us now than it was even on Thanksgiving Day.

**Let us pray:** Thank You, dear God, for the power You have given us through Your risen Son, Jesus. By Your power, may word spread of what You are doing in and through Quail Hollow's mission and witness, and may our transformed lives bear witness to what You are doing in all the world and all through faith in Jesus Christ. Amen.