

**St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin
September 23, 2018**

The Family Church: Part 3 – The Power of the Family Church

Ephesians 1:14-2:10

The message starts with a video of the Westendorf family as they seek to be a Family Church centered around God's Word. The video ends with Mike saying how difficult daily devotions are but this is where they have "put our stake in the ground" and will not give in.

The Message

"This is where we have put our stake in the ground."

That is a powerful statement. It says that being a Family Church is hard. That it requires commitment and strength.

But perhaps you are like me, watching that video. I am amazed at the spiritual power present in this family, but I don't have that kind of power.

That's why I so appreciate our lesson for today. It reminds me of the tour that I had of the Racine Case IH tractor factory. Just like that was a Power Factory Tour, so this lesson is **God's Power Factory Tour.**



¹⁵ For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, ¹⁶ I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. ¹⁷ I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. ¹⁸ I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, ¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength ²⁰ he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. ²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

2 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. ⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

The Apostle Paul began this letter to the Christians in Ephesus by reminding them of their awesome identity. They are

- God’s dear children,
- Chosen by God
- Holy and blameless, perfect in his sight for Jesus’ sake

That’s who you are as well. Especially as we delve into our calling to be Pastors of Family Churches, keep this identity firmly in mind. Satan wants to destroy our families by destroying us as leaders of God’s family. Remember who you are! God’s child! Chosen by Him! Perfect in his sight.

Then Paul prays. *“I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, ¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe.”*

Especially in Paul’s prison epistles (Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, Philippians), Paul often mentions his own prayers and ask for prayers in these letters that we call the Prison Epistles. I mention this because some of us may be checking out of this Family Church series. “I don’t have kids in my family.” But we can all be involved in the Family Church just like Paul was involved... even when he was in prison. He could pray for them and encourage them.

So let’s all pray... “Lord, open the eyes of our hearts. Open the eyes of the hearts of the pastors in the family churches present today. Open the eyes of moms and dads who are discouraged or filled with fear. Open the eyes of our hearts to see **God’s Power Factory Tour**.

Paul begins the tour on the Jesus’ wing of God’s power factory. And oddly enough, the tour begins behind a rock.

That power is the same as the mighty strength ²⁰ he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead.

God’s power factory tour begins on Easter morning. Behind the rock that sealed Jesus’ tomb.

What kind of power does it take to make something that was dead alive? Even as kids we begin to understand what “dead” is. Our goldfish suddenly starts to “swim” on its side. There is no movement, and finally we have a final farewell as the goldfish is flushed down the toilet. Once something is dead, it is dead. There is no hope.

Friends, what appears to be true of physical life can also appear to be true in relationships and families. Relationships are dead. No hope of life again.

Open the eyes of our hearts, Lord, as we go on this power factory tour.

Was that tomb empty on Easter? If Jesus has risen from the dead, then God has limitless power. If he had the power to raise Jesus, he also has the power to hear our prayers and help us in every need. Don’t stop praying!

And that power is entrusted to the Son of God who died for us!

That power is the same as the mighty strength ²⁰ he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

There is no equal to the power that Jesus has.

I have a hard time believing that. Just this week, the devil took down another pastor that was blessing so many people. Who is winning? Must be the devil.

That’s when I have to go back through this part of the factory tour again. “Far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.”

There is no limit to Jesus’ power. Not because I can see it. But because Jesus has risen from the grave. And if that is true, then this statement is true too. He is at God’s right hand ruling all things. But what is the purpose of his rule?

²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

The purpose for this power is to benefit the Church! That is the Church, capital “C,” the church of all believers. Wherever believers in Jesus are present, that’s where his Church is. Here at St. Paul’s. But also in our Family Churches. Jesus has this power to benefit the Church wherever it is found.

You and I have to go on God’s Power Factory Tour to be reminded of this, because you can’t see that he is using his power in our behalf, especially when he seems to pull unusual implements.

If you didn’t grow up on a farm, it must be confusing to look at all the implements that can be connected to a powerful tractor. There is a moldboard plow, a chisel plow, a disk, a digger, a

drag. These are all implements to dig up the soil. All of them appear to be destructive. But each of them has a purpose to prepare the soil to produce a crop.

Let's be honest, the God of limitless power sometimes uses implements that we don't understand, implements of destruction.

Last week, the first reported fatalities of Hurricane Florence were a mom sitting in her home with her seven-month-old baby boy Adam. God, they were just sitting in their home! They weren't taking risks! Why God! Why!

Closer to home, this week, three families in this one church family were struck with the pain of losing a child even before the child was able to be born! Why God? Why? This makes no sense! Are you really the God whose power has no equal? Are you really the God who uses his power for the good of us, your people, members of your church?

There are many times we won't understand Jesus' use of his power. That's when it is time to go back through God's power factory. Jesus has absolute power for the good of the church. I know this because God used absolute power to raise Jesus from the dead.

I know that he is using that power for the good his church because he was in that tomb because he died for me.

Now how can you possibly believe that is true? How can you see God's love and power when no one else can? That's because there is another wing of God's Power Factory Tour. We just finished the Jesus' Wing. Now, let's go down the _____ (fill in your own name) wing. For me, it is the Peter Wing of God's Power Factory Tour.

This part of the tour also starts behind a rock. Really under a rock. Think of when you have lifted up a rock and there were all kinds of gross creepy crawly things under it. That's us. We are like the worms and maggots. Because we too were dead.

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

We were dead in sins. Just like we can't make a goldfish swim upright again, we can't make ourselves spiritually alive and able to please God. In fact, in our confessions of sin in the services, we regularly admit that we are by nature, just by birth, unclean and hostile to God.

But the tour goes on following the same pattern of the Jesus' Wing of God's Power Factory Tour.

⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.

Do you believe that God came into this world in the person of Jesus? Do you believe that Jesus died for all of your sins? Do you believe that he rose again on Easter morning? All of that is

foolishness! Impossible! Yet God the Holy Spirit has worked that faith in my heart and in yours. The power of God's grace on your heart is evident in your faith.

But not just that you came to faith. You have more power than anyone or anything else.

God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.

Isn't that why Paul was such a fervent pray'er? He was chained and awaiting trial. That is what could be seen with the eyes. But by faith he could see that he was seated next to his Savior and joining Christ in the rule over all things. We are already seated at the right hand of God with Christ.

And we have been given this power for a purpose... just like Jesus was given power to rule all things for the good of the church. We are given this power to do good works, works that draw people to himself, works that glorify God.

But what are those works? "Which God has prepared in advance for us to do."

The implements that God will give us to serve him are largely unknown. I don't know the best decisions for you to make to be the Pastor of your Family Church. I don't know what materials to use, or when you should take the time for family or personal devotions. I don't know what is the perfect balance of discipline and love to draw your child or your co-worker or your friend closer to Christ.

But God does. He promises to prepare good works for you in advance. Trust that he will give you the right implement to pull with the power that he gives you.

Being a parent, a caring Christian friend, a pastor of a family church, can be overwhelming. I don't have the wisdom. I don't have the strength. When those thoughts come into your mind, I would encourage you to join Paul again on God's Power Factory Tour. Amen.

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My Next Steps as Pastor of a Family Church

- **Take the Tour Again:** Reread Ephesians 1:15-2:10 and remember the power that is at work within you.
- **Take Others on the Tour:** Ask your Father in heaven who in your "family church" or your area of influence needs to be reminded that God's power and grace are at work in him/her. Ask your Father for an opportunity to talk to them about it.
- **Choose Your Implement:** If you are committed to staying connected to God's power and grace, then choose the tool(s) that will help you use God's Word daily for yourself and your family. Check the Family Church resource page for ideas.

GroupWork

1. What has been the most memorable part of the Family Church series so far?

2. Read Isaiah 40:21-31. Choose three phrases in this section that you could use to encourage someone who is tired or discouraged in their role as a parent.

3. Read the Lord's Prayer from Luke's gospel together (Luke 11:2-4). How could you apply one or more of these petitions to those under your spiritual care?

4. Read Luke 11:5-13. How do Jesus' words encourage you as you carry out your role as Pastor of a Family Church?

5. "We are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago" (Ephesians 2:10 *New Living Translation*).
 - a. Did you feel like you were God's masterpiece when you were growing up? What did your parents do, or what could have your parents done, to help you claim that truth?

 - b. How does it help you as a Pastor of a Family Churches (dads, moms and all of us who have influence over others) to remember that we are God's masterpiece?

6. Close by listening to Danny Gokey's *Masterpiece*. (Google "Danny Gokey Masterpiece" to find it.) Break up into groups of two or three. Pray for a member of your Family Church (a family member, friend, co-worker, classmate) who needs to be reminded that God is making a masterpiece.