

**Intangible Power:
November 20, 2022**

[VIDEO - The Queen]...

Last year...
I had the opportunity...
To attend the ELCA Large Church Conference...
Held in Tucson Arizona.
In the beginning of summer.
And we were in the desert.
It was hot.

But the speaker was outstanding. **[2 Steve Cuss]**
His name is Steve Cuss...
This guy is a pastor...
Serving a church downtown Denver...
He was originally from Australia...
So he had a very cool..
Down under accent.

Anyway... the reason he was the speaker...
Is because he wrote this book...
Managing Leadership Anxiety...

He was very good.
And the topic was very timely...
Since most churches...
Were trying to figure out...
How to survive and thrive...
After being shut down...
During covid.

And talking with the other pastors...
From all across the country...
I can tell you...
There was a lot of anxiety...
Among church leaders.

Just a quick side note...
I didn't feel that same level of anxiety.
The support of our church...
During the two year hiatus...
Was tremendous.

Also the response from staff...
And a vast number of volunteers...
Putting in hours and hours of work...
Each week... to hold things together...
Was amazing to witness.

And of course...
God is good.

Ever present strength...
In a time of trouble.

But enough of that.
Let's get back to Steve Cuss...

I could regurgitate...
Some pearls of wisdom...
That he shared with us...
During that conference.

But one of most striking things...
That he said... during that time...
Was that... if the Queen...
And at that time...
He meant Queen Elizabeth II...

If she called him...
And said... Steve...
I need you come...
To Buckingham Palace...
Because I have a job for you...
And I need you here right now.

He said... he would drop everything.
He would leave his job.
He would leave his wife... and kids.
He would completely abandon...
Everything else... in an instant...
In an instant... without any hesitation...
And go to serve the queen.

Now... he said... there is absolutely no reason...
The queen would call him...
He had no special skills...
Wasn't a secret agent...
Or a world diplomat...

But he would go... all the same.

He also said... that he didn't expect us...
As Americans to understand...
Why he would do that...

So. Let me ask you.
Why would he do that?

There is no tangible reason.
Steve Cuss would be so loyal...
And willing to serve...
The queen of England.

It doesn't make sense...
Other than... this loyalty lives inside of him.

You can't see it. But it is there.

Why do we put your hand over our heart... **[3 Pledge]**
When we say the pledge of allegiance?

What does that mean?
Respect. Commitment. Loyalty.

Why do we close our eyes... **[4 Prayer]**
And fold our hands...
When we pray?

What does that mean?
Respect. Humility. Submission.

Why can't I sing the words...
From the hymn Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing... **[5 Prone]**
The words that say...
Prone to wander Lord I feel it...
Prone to leave the God I love...

Why can't I sing... those words...
Without getting tears in my eyes...
And losing the ability to speak... let alone sing...

What does that mean?
It means those words are real to me.
It means there is power...
And redemption...
And grace there...

That goes beyond anything I can see...
Or feel... or really... even understand.

What I'm trying to say is...
There is power... in the intangible.

And that's the issue of the gospel lesson today. **[6 Crucified]**
All the main characters...
Who are witnessing...
The crucifixion of Jesus...

Can't see... the power...
Of what is happening...
Right in front of them.

They can't understand...
That Jesus is the King...
The King of Heaven and Earth...
The King above all Kings.
The King to whom...
Every knee will bow.

But they can't see the Kingdom...
With their own eyes.

Instead... all they see Jesus...
Is a man who is who is bloodied...
A man who has been severely beaten...
A man who is about to die.

And they can't see him...
Because it looks like...
In this physical tangible world...
He is nothing.

So the leaders... the church leaders... mind you...
Standing at the foot of the cross...
Deride Jesus...
And tell him...
If you are the Messiah of God...
The Chosen One of God...

If you are everything you have said you are...
Then prove it... show us...
Who you are.

And the soldiers...
Standing around...
Mock Jesus...
Poke him with sticks...
Offer him sour wine...
And taunt him...

They said...
If you are the KING OF THE JEWS...
Then save yourself.

Surely a king...
Ought to be able...
To do something...

Then... the last...
And in some ways...
The most degrading derision...

Came from one of the criminals...
A guy hanging on a cross...
Right next to Jesus...
With nails driven through his own hands...
Paying the price... for whatever crime...
He had committed...

And justifiably so...
He was guilty...
He had committed the crime.

The man... yelled at Jesus... and said...
If you're the Messiah...
Save us... do something...

Prove to us...
In this physical world...
Right here and now...
That you are worthy of our praise.
That you are who you claim to be...
That you are... something other than...
This broken beaten weak joke of a man.

Do something for me.
Come on Jesus... do something... for ME!

We do the same thing. **[7 Tangible]**

It's human nature to find...
The value in the tangible...
Things we can touch.
Things that affect our lives...

Things we can eat or drink...
Just look at how the Food Network...
Has dominated so much of our culture now...

Everyone wants to be a foodie...
Everyone thinks they have a refined pallet.

We love it...
Because it's tangible.
The physical is important.

And stuff and power and prestige...
Are valued... above and beyond...
Values... and faith... and hope.

BUT there is more to this life...
There is an unseen world.
There is an invisible Kingdom...
That lives right now...
In our hearts... and our minds...
Where no one can corrupt...
Where nothing can steal...
Where no power can break in...
And take away.

We have the Kingdom right now...
AND... it has been promised to be fulfilled in us...
In the life to come.

This Kingdom... is here...
And it's on it's way.

But for us... who believe in Christ... now...
And have him living in our hearts...
And for those who aren't quite sure yet... **[8 King]**

We have ALL been invited by him...
To be a part of the Kingdom...
To let him be the King of our Lives...
To acknowledge...
That Jesus is the ultimate power... in our lives...

The One who is worthy...
Of influencing the way we think...
The words that we say...
The things we do...

We... have been invited to...
Drop everything else...
In order to follow our King.

Just like Steve Cuss...
Would drop everything...
To love and serve the queen of England...
Which by the way...
Is just another temporary Kingdom...

But just like that...
We have been called...
To drop everything...
And love and serve the King of Heaven...
Who is eternal.
Whose kingdom is eternal.

And just so know.
There is not necessarily...
A tangible benefit...
To following him.

There are some.
We have the community to comfort us.
Which is good... most of the time.

But honestly... the community...
Doesn't always comfort us...
Sometimes... it frustrates us...
Sometimes... it abandons us...
When we need it the most.

AND life isn't going to suddenly...
Get easy... or happy... or prosperous...
When we follow Christ...
It's not going to boost up...
Our 401k... or our 403b.

Nope. Followers of Christ...
Will be rich and poor...
And affected by the Dow Jones...
Just like everyone else.

And following Christ...
Is not going to give us...
Positions of prestige or power.
So that we can win friends...
And influence people.

I mean... if we really choose to love and serve him... **[9 Cross]**
It means...
Personal sacrifice.
Taking up your cross.
Giving up your right... to be superior to other people.

It means making choices...
That may not benefit you...
In this material world.

As a matter of fact...
If we follow Christ...
Chances are...
We are going to lose...
Some things in this world.

And that's ok.
Because when Jesus becomes our priority...
Over and above...
The things of this world.

The things of this world...
Will grow strangely dim.
And less important.
And sometimes even... silly.

And so... the apostle Paul wrote...

Be not conformed to this world,
But be transformed
By the renewing of your minds,
So that you may discern
What is the will of God—
What is good and acceptable and perfect.

And Jesus himself said...
In the world you face persecution.
But take courage;
I have conquered the world!

It's a funny thing.
We live in the world that focuses on...

And values all the tangibles...

But WE have allegiances...
And power...
And grace...
From the intangible...

But that doesn't mean...
God is not here.

And that doesn't mean...
We can't see God at work... **[10 See God]**

Like when we look at the mountains... and the oceans...
And all the incredible diverse beauty of Creation...
We can see the work...
Of the Unseen God...
And it causes our hearts to soar...
In praise to God for his mighty works.

We see God.

And when in all humility...
We feel the pain of life..
And are overwhelmed...
By suffering and loss...

And in that moment... we hear the old old story...
Of a man who suffered and died...
Just like us...
Except... that...
When he was broken...
In body and soul and mind...
When he was dead and buried...

God raised him...
UP again... and gave him new life.

And we know in our hearts... it's true.
And we know in our hearts... that that's our story too.

That we have been given new life...
We have been given strength...
To face the darkest days...
We have been surrounded by love...
So that we can get back up...
And take the next step...
And face the next day...

In our hearts...
We feel the power and the presence...
Of an Unseen Man who lived...
2000 years ago...

And in that GRACE...

We see God.

And when we feel strong...
Like there is a force working...
Inside of us...
That is so much more...
Than we could ever be on our own...

When the Unseen Spirit...
Who moves like the wind...
Comes and sets us on fire...
Filled with strength and love...
For this broken and hurting world...

And by our love... at work...
Our faith in action.
And when we witness...
God's Will unfolding...
In our lives...

We see God.

So listen. Jesus said...
The Kingdom of God...
Is in our midst.

Not everyone can see it.
Not everyone believes it's real.
Not everyone even wants a King.

But for those of us who do.

There is an INTANGIBLE POWER of God.
That is at work in the world.

There is an INTANGIBLE POWER at work...
In you. In me.
In all who believe.
In all who are seeking...
In all who are living and breathing...

The Kingdom of God is here.
For all who have eyes to see...
And ears to hear...

The Kingdom of God is here...
The Kingdom is now.
The Kingdom is constantly...
Breaking into this world.

And in that Kingdom...

By definition...
We have a King.

Oh....
He's not like other kings.
He's not all caught up...
In the tangibles...
Of this world.

He's not interested in...
Dominating and conquering.

He does not want go to war...
To accumulate power.

He wants us.
Our King wants us...
To know him.
And love him.
And follow him.

Not because we will gain the world.

But because he died for the world...
And thereby we gain the Kingdom.

Jesus.
Is our hope...
Is our life.
Is our King.

Thanks be to God.
Amen!