Title: The Power of Love NOT The Love of Power
Texts: 2 Samuel 11: 1-15; Ephesians 3: 14-21; John 6: 1-21
Rev. Sharon

Imagine that that you are elected into a leadership position.
Yesterday you are one of the crowd, free to have your opinions and say whatever you like.
But today, today you now have authority and power.

And power is a game changer. It changes you and it changes the way people view you.

People around you begin to view you through a magnifying Lens of Power. Suddenly your simple comments sound like commands, your casual opinions are thought to be a new strategy, a flippant comment can ruin someone's week, and a casual compliment can boost their esteem for months.

People around you begin to defer to you, to curry favor. They may be intimidated. They don't speak up.

And for you, with even just a little bit of power, you experience changes in your perception, feelings, and attitude. Some of this, as we know, feels good: you feel more confident, less self-conscious, more decisive, and more action oriented. And you feel an ego boost because in the eyes of others, you have higher status.

But there's a price to pay for these good feelings. Like any mind-altering substance or behavior, the effects of power can be taken too far.

The psychology of power makes people more confident, but it can also decreases your interest in feedback, and because some won't speak up around you – you receive less feedback, or just the feedback you want to hear.

(Diamond Leadership website – the psychology of power)

It is no wonder that Abraham Lincoln said:
"Nearly all [people] can stand adversity, but if you want to test a [person's] character, give them power." (Inclusive language)

King David in the Hebrew Bible, is not so much there to serve as a role model, but as an archetype of a Sovereign.

An Archetype is an instinctual and universal pattern of thought developed in our human consciousness. They occur across cultures and traditions – in myths, stories and dreams. Most of us tend to identify with a few dominant archetypes. Archetype acts as a mirror for us. Showing us our strengths but also our shadow sides. Shadows contain all the things about ourselves that have become repressed and we are too ashamed to allow into the light.

There is also the Golden Shadow – the positive qualities about ourselves, we don't allow out, something we are too afraid to claim.

(Christine Valters Paintner)

The story goes that David was one day an innocent young shepherd, and the next was chosen to be King.

And he rose into leadership, into a culture that was hungry for hierarchal leadership. It was part of the air they breathed. Even if David became a leader with all the right intentions, the culture shaped him…

This was a people who had been formed under the pyramids of Egypt.

Pyramids are not just a symbol of one ancient nation, they are now a psychological imprint on human society and institution.

The Empire has seductions:

- The power of a leader is one who sits at the top of the Pyramid
  And has the authority to set the course of the institution.

Towers, pyramids, temples, cathedrals – these massive, labour-intensive structures are our **ornaments of human achievement**. Which in turn further empowers the cultures view of themselves and their leaders.

In a book re-pitching the Tent – by Richard Giles – Episcopal Priest – Dean Emeritus of Philadephia Cathedral –

Describes a dramatic change in Christianity (in the wake of Constantine's reign of the Roman Empire).

From meeting in people's homes, often secretly, Christians were now given freedom, and money and authority. From being a quiet under-resourced, scared for their lives, group of timid, followers of Christ, the Christian community now walked the corridors of power.

- And so they added greater dignity to their buildings – The Eastern half favoured the Basilica structure and built vertical, The Western half favoured arcades and emphasised the horizontal structure. The West was moving in a hierarchical form of relating and leadership.
- They formed compartments for those higher up the pyramid – the Bishop and Priests – detached from the assembly of worshipers. Chancel screens, altar rails and choir stalls – was part of the Anglican practice to emphasize hierarchical separation.
- The church moved from house to palace.

So, if yesterday you were a parishioner and today you are Priest, you moved psychologically and physically further in and further up.

_____

This cultural power I would suggest, became disordered inside and outside of the church culture.

As human beings we need order as it gives us a stable starting point. But we have tended to move toward the comfort of hierarchy so naturally. Often without paying attention to the shadow side of power.

And because this cultural disordered power of the church no longer exists in our society.
We can hold onto it inside the church.

- We have seen Pope Francis calling for the Catholic Church to: invert the pyramid – putting trust and power back in the hands of parishioners.

- Sexual misconduct reports (one of the symptoms of disordered power) have come out of many denominations and faith traditions (including our own) and ministries that operate alongside the church.

- In our own Anglican Church of Canada we have a policy called: Screening of Faith.

  It is a process for us to look at each ministry,
  name who is vulnerable in that ministry and
  look at the leadership role in the ministry to assess the risk for potential harm in each ministry and
  reduce the risk by changing how ministry is carried out,
  limiting time alone with a leader and vulnerable persons and
  training leaders in the ministry about misconduct (particularly sexual misconduct) and the vices of power.

  "It is most important, critical in fact that we insure that those we place in positions of power and trust be selected, trained and supported so that their ministries may be life-giving. It is in this way that our Christian values are consistent with the legal concept of "duty of care." Duty of care arises out of legal doctrines dealing with negligence. Everyone has a general obligation to conduct themselves in a manner which does not cause damage to other people or their property. The duty of care is most obvious where a relationship of dependence exists." Screening in Faith Policy Document 2024

Friends, we are called to walk as Jesus walked.
And though there are many images of Jesus as Christ, with Immense Power.
Today's reading is a glimpse of a Jesus who walked in the Power of Love.

If power is defined as:

"someone's capacity to alter another person's condition or state of mind by providing or withholding resources such as food, money, knowledge, affection, or administering punishment such as physical harm, job termination, or even social ostracism."

Professor of Psychology, Dacher Keltner, at the University of California at Berkeley.

Today's reading shows Jesus holding power while being grounded in love. As he lavishly provides resources for hungry people.

And he managed the perceptions of the crowd who were also hungry to crown him as their King.

I wonder what it looks like for us to do the same?

There is a temptation for us to function in society as victims, blaming the culture for no longer treating the church with respect. And it is hard for us to ranked low on the Totem Pole, when we were used to being in charge.

We have gone from being Peacocks to feather dusters…

But perhaps, there is an invitation here, for us to unlearn functioning with disordered power.

This means that inside the church we let go a view of:
- leadership, where named leaders are the only ones who initiate actions, turning good ideas into programs
- Where leaders are rare. The qualities required for leadership—creativity, intellectual prowess, initiative, strategic consciousness—are scarce.
- And where certainty that is sacred. When leaders—lay, staff, and clergy—express uncertainty, organizations are at risk of losing their way.

May we get down on our knees before God, and ask God to strengthen us by the Spirit—not a brute strength but an inner strength—that Christ will live in us. As we ask that both our feet be planted firmly on love. The power of love. Amen.
(Ephesians 3)