

Date: October 26, 2025 (Pentecost 20)

1. Texts: Joel 2:23-32; Ps. 65; 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18; Luke 18:9-14.
2. Subject: theology.
3. Topic: images of God.
4. Aim: create awe, broaden understandings.
5. Proposition: "God is also a God of power."

GOD OF GRACE, GOD OF POWER

We always think of Jesus as gentle Jesus, meek and mild, who invites all the good little children to come to him. The Holy Spirit is likened to a beautiful butterfly, alighting gently on God's chosen people. Our image of God the Father is more likely to be that of a kindly grandfather with a white beard holding out his arms in a love-filled embrace.

But the Bible has other images to add.

Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit. I will show portents in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes.¹

For we know the one who said, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people." It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.²

On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, as well as a thick cloud on the mountain, and a blast of a trumpet so loud that all the people who were in the camp trembled. Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God. They took their stand at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the LORD had descended upon it in fire; the smoke went up like the smoke of a kiln, while the whole mountain shook violently. As the blast of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses would speak and God would answer him in thunder.³

¹ Joel 2:29-31.

² Hebrews 10:30-31.

³ Exodus 19:16-19.

We'd rather God be nice and sweet and kind and gentle. He is, after all, a God of grace. He is also a God of power as the Book of the Revelation wants to remind us. It seems as if, in a rush to let go of guilt as a motivator, the Church has looked away from the God of power. After all, how many times have you heard a motivating sermon about Jesus and the cleansing of the temple?

If we are to be faithful to the whole gospel, we have to acknowledge God as a God of grace and power. God is both love and judgement. In fact, his powerful judgement is an expression of his love. But we have to arrive at this conclusion without driving ourselves crazy with fear.

God is perfect. That's easy to say, more difficult to understand and describe.

God is perfect love, grace and forgiveness. At the same time, God is perfect understanding, assessment and judgement. God is perfect righteousness, truth and balance. At the same time, God is perfect power, strength and wisdom. God is perfect in all his attributes and character. These include perfection in strength, judgement, power and wrath.

God is the Good Shepherd, who lovingly guides his flock to find good pasture and water. At the same time, God is the God of the great and terrible day of the Lord, who will judge those who could have known his will and yet refused to acknowledge it. We must accept God in all his attributes and character.

There are two immediate consequences of this.

First, we are forced into being spiritually honest with ourselves and with God. When we acknowledge God in all his attributes and characteristics, lying to ourselves and to God is meaningless. God's perfection forces us to admitting our faults and failures, particularly those of our conscious choice. Spiritual honesty is forced upon us by the nature and existence of a God of grace and power.

Second, we must allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by the generosity and grace of God's saving forgiveness. God is perfect in all his attributes and characteristics. He does, in fact, know all our faults and failures, including and especially those of our own making. Despite that perfect knowledge and his condemnation of all that is petty, self-serving, malicious and evil, God still chooses to offer us salvation. He knows what we have done and what we will continue to do, yet he says, "I love you enough to bring you home to myself." His perfect knowledge is processed through his perfect love to create our individual and communal salvation.

You see? We need to know and experience God in all his perfection. Our salvation is hollow without his perfect knowledge. His forgiveness is a "Get Out of Jail Free" card without his condemnation of evil. Our God must be both gentle Jesus, meek and mild, and the God of the great and terrible day of the Lord. To neglect either is to rob our salvation of its glorious freedom.

So, here's the risky application of this sermon.

We all are now aware of something we have done or been that shames us before God. It doesn't matter whether it is something monstrous or insignificant. It doesn't matter whether you are ready to surrender this action or issue right now or not. Whatever this dark place in your soul is, you can accept that God knows it completely and still loves you entirely. Just for this morning, accept that God has passed judgement on your failing and still proclaims his love for you. God, in all his perfection and power, loves you. He has always loved you, even with his perfect knowledge, judgement and power. Just for this morning, let that be your hymn of praise to our almighty God.

AMEN.