
The Power is Out, But There's Power in Here!

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Proper 15B

Jesus said, "I am the living bread." -John 6.51

During all the thunderstorms of this past summer, did your power ever go out? Here, in the older parts of Atlanta (and along Peachtree Road), the situation is almost routine. Summer rains will come, winds will blow, ground will soften, and trees will fall - across electric lines! Thanks to the good people at our power utility companies, we do not usually have to wait long for the power to be restored.

But I have just returned from a place where the restoration of power was not so routine. My family and I try to spend, each summer, a good four weeks at a cabin in Ontario, Canada - in what they call the bush country. Of course, that weather up north is cooler than it is here in Georgia, but the conditions can be much more rugged. For instance, our water for the cabin is pumped up from the lake; and it is not drinkable. Most of us bathe directly in that lake. We have to be on guard each night for the creatures who live there year round: bears and skunks, porcupines and mosquitos.

Yes, it can be rugged there, and that is why we like it! And, actually, we DO have electricity there - at least some of the time. This past summer, however, far more often than usual, the power went out. And when the power goes out, our routines change dramatically. Each person in the camp tends to something: caring for the food that could go bad in the refrigerator, moving water into the bathroom for a toilet, getting a fire and candles ready.

It seemed to happen routinely this past summer. But our household developed a saying this past summer. It came to us as we got into a boat one night, when the power was out, and travelled up the lake to see some friends. In a jovial mood, we hollered out to their cabin. "The power is out, but there's power in here!" We meant, "in our boat." There were 7 or 8 of us in there, and we could care less about the power. We were free and happy and quite powerful. "The power is out, but there's power in here!"

One day, a couple of weeks ago, the power went out at a most inopportune time. It was cold and rainy. We could have used some warm food throughout the day. One person in our camp was pregnant (my daughter, Martha), and Sarah, my other daughter, was feverish and a bit sick. In fact, she had just returned from a ninety minute drive to the hospital with a supply of antibiotics. She wanted a warm bath, but the power was out. Still, we all managed.

Having started a roaring birch wood fire, we gathered in the main room of the cabin, and we spent the afternoon laughing. We could see threatening clouds bringing more darkness and wind and rain, and we wondered about tornadoes. Yes, there could be a tornado, we knew, and we also knew there was no absolutely safe place to avoid one. We laughed about who we would hold on to. We easily agreed that my tall son-in-law would be our anchor; and we laughed about that.

One daughter played cards with her husband. I tried to listen to the crossword puzzle clues from my other daughter; but I don't hear so well. So, we laughed about that. We were hungry. We drank wine and ate delicious cookies that my wife had made; we ate other ones, too, because, of course, everything tastes great when the power is out.

And then, then, the children arrived. Unknown to me, earlier that day, someone had invited all the children of the lake to our cabin for a musical afternoon. Even with no power on the lake, and even with threatening clouds and rain, children and their parents arrived. They were not deterred.

With a piano to begin with, we played all sorts of songs, from Itsy-bitsy Spider, to This Little Light of Mine. And some of the assembly really had musical talent! One little boy was an exceptional violinist. Others were not so good. Some had musical instruments, and others had pots and pans. There was a particularly large pot next to my ear, which did not help my hearing at all.

We laughed. It didn't matter whether we were that good or not. We had enough. We had enough to go around. Then, others arrived. Friends arrived. Grandparents and soon-to-be-great grandparents arrived. A party arrived.

Power arrived, even when the power was out. Yes, electricity flowed in that room - from child to child, parent to parent, friend to friend, stranger to stranger. And we made true the saying again: "The power is out! But there's power in here!" And we were filled! We got warm! And my daughter got well.

Wherever we are in life, in urban Atlanta or out in the woods, the principle is the same. Power does not come to us from something outside ourselves. Power comes to us from the inside. Power comes from God.

Power does not come from the electrical power grid. Power does not come from the latest computer contraption, or download device, or movie, or television show. Power does not come from oil or gas or coal. Power comes from God.

And that power of God emerges from our souls, from within. In community, the more souls we have around us, the more power we have.

"I am the living bread!" is how Jesus described himself in the Gospel of John today. He spoke those words just after the famous Feeding of the Five Thousand. You remember that story. Five thousand were gathered outside, away from town, without anything to eat. The power was out. Only a small boy had a meager five barley loaves and two fish. What were they among so many?

They were enough. Somehow, that food became charged with power; and it came alive for the crowd.

What made that bread come alive? Jesus. Jesus touched it. He took it, blessed it, broke it, and gave it. And it had power. It had life. When the power is out, when the power looks gone, Jesus is still around - in our homes, in our cities, and in our souls. When we feel the touch of Jesus in our souls, from within, we have power.

In a few minutes, Jesus will touch us this morning. First, he will touch these children gathered for baptism. When this holy water splashes them, something inside of them - their souls - will be touched with power. They will be empowered to be witnesses for Joy and Wonder - Truth and Beauty and Love.

And then, these very children, small as they are, will be providers of power in our lives. They may not have much - what are five loaves and two fish among so many - but they will have enough. They will teach us to laugh when we are lonely and cold; and when the electricity goes out, they will sing of new power. Jesus touches us through these children, touches even those of us who do not know them.

Finally, of course, Jesus will touch us through Holy Communion this morning, the Eucharist of blessed bread and wine. Outside, in the world, people are looking for power; they are looking for life. So often in our culture, the power is out.

But there's power in here. There is power when we, the Church, assemble week after week, when we share our small gifts

and talents of whatever measure, when we touch the living Jesus in our worship and fellowship. In community, the more souls we have around us, the more power we have. There's power in here.

That will be our message today, on this Homecoming Sunday, and it will be our message throughout this Fall. It will be our message throughout the year. There's power in here!

Let it be our message wherever we take the love of Christ this year. To the hospital where our loved one is ill. To the homeless shelters we serve. To the poor and to the rich, wherever someone has lost power.

Wherever someone has lost power, this is our message. "Yes, yes, the power is gone. The power is out." But do not fear. In Jesus Christ, we have another kind of power; we are charged with another kind of electricity. In Jesus, we have another kind of bread, a living bread.

The power is out. But here, in the church, in the souls of the faithful, in this community of love and grace, there's power in here!

AMEN.

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