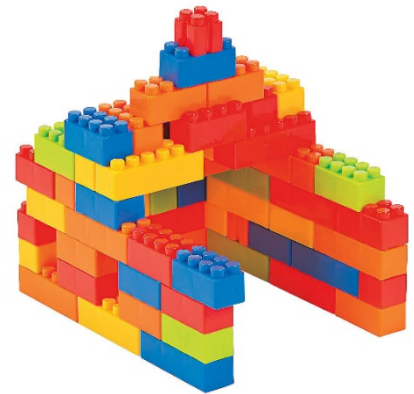


Sunday, September 3, 2023
ENERGY - "Where's Your Charging Station?"
Charlie Berthoud | Acts 1:6-8

Our boys loved playing with Legos when they were young, and we still have a good number of those little blocks in our basement.

Anybody who plays with those building blocks for even a few minutes realizes how important a good foundation is. The foundation needs to be strong and solid.

If I try to build a big Lego house on one block, it's going to be hard.



A solid Lego masterpiece would have four or more building blocks as the foundation, to make something substantial, something that won't easily fall down.

Having a solid foundation is vital for Christians. Jesus helps us to see this. At the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, a long collection of his teachings, Jesus says:

These words I speak to you are not incidental additions to your life, homeowner improvements to your standard of living. They are foundational words, words to build a life on. If you work these words into your life, you are like a smart carpenter who built his house on solid rock. Rain poured down, the river flooded, a tornado hit - but nothing moved that house. It was fixed to the rock.

--Matthew 7:24-25

Foundations are important.

This month, we're looking at four building blocks to build a strong foundation for faithful living: ENERGY, INTELLIGENCE, IMAGINATION, and LOVE.



These four words may be familiar to longtime Presbyterians. They are part of one of the questions that we ask people being ordained to serve as Elders, Deacons, or Pastors:

"Will you pray for and seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love?"

-Presbyterian Church *Book of Order*, W-4.0404h

Over these four weeks, we're going to reflect on these four words, with the recognition that these are gifts from God which we can nurture and grow. In other words, my hope over this month, is that we would all grow in ENERGY, INTELLIGENCE, IMAGINATION, and LOVE.

Energy is first. We all need energy, especially today. Lots of people are exhausted. Exhausted from Covid, from politics, from environmental concerns, economic struggles, racial tensions, family life, and more.

We need energy, we need strength, we need power to faithfully engage with life and sometimes just to get through the day.

In the first century, the disciples needed some energy as well. Jesus had come, proclaiming the new reality of God's kingdom, calling them to follow. He taught them about loving neighbors, about focusing on the forgotten people. He told them to deny themselves, take up their cross and follow. Then Jesus was arrested and convicted by the Empire, and he took up his cross and died.

The Bible tells us that Jesus was resurrected three days later, which certainly lifted the spirits of his followers. Jesus continued to teach them, but he wasn't going to stay with them forever. The Bible says that after 40 days, he ascended, leaving the disciples in charge.

They were certainly in need of some energy. Jesus promises that energy will come, in the form of the power of the Holy Spirit.

Our reading comes from the first chapter of Acts, where we learn that Jesus continues to focus on the Kingdom of God and that he encourages the disciples to stick together to welcome the power from God.

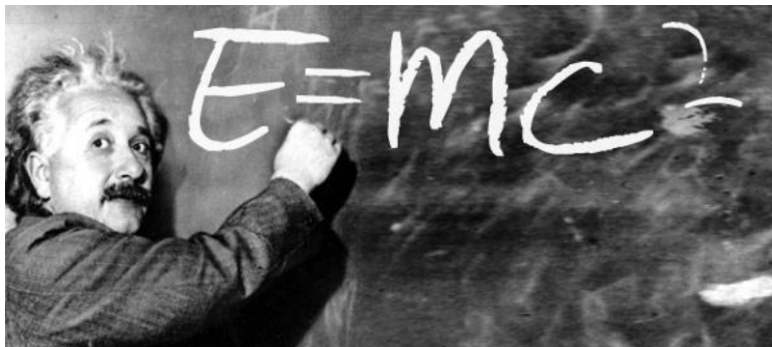
Listen for God's word:

⁶So when they had come together, they asked Jesus, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority.

⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Energy.

I did some reading about energy, and I was quickly overwhelmed with kinetic vs potential, chemical reactions and quantum mechanics, and more.



I was never very good with science. I still don't really understand what E=MC squared means.

But I do know that we humans need energy to function and to thrive.

While we might not understand the science, we can easily understand the importance of energy.

Here is a fan, which might come in handy on these warm days. But if it's not plugged in, it won't work. Some pocket fans have rechargeable batteries and can work for a while without being plugged in.

Here is a phone, which works without being plugged in for a while, but eventually it needs to be plugged in to charge. It needs a charging station.

A few years ago, my dentist talked me into an electric toothbrush. That needs a charging station every week or so otherwise it doesn't work.

More and more electric cars are appearing. Like phones and toothbrushes, they can run unplugged for a while, but eventually, a driver needs to find a charging station in order to keep going.



The question for today: Where is your charging station?

There is an obvious answer here. It makes me think of the story of a pastor speaking to a group of kids, and he holds up a picture of a squirrel. He asks them what they see. One of the kids, who has sat through too many simplistic messages with obvious answers, said "Well it looks like a squirrel, but it must be Jesus."

So yes, the obvious answer to the question about "where is our charging station" is God.

As Christians, our source of energy and life is God, known in the person Jesus and by the power of the Spirit. We hear that in our reading today:

Jesus said: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you."

So, it seems that if we want the power, if we want the energy for faithful living, we have to tap into God the Holy Spirit.

Presbyterians traditionally have never been very comfortable with the Holy Spirit. We look with disdain at other Christians jumping around in their sanctuaries. Instead, we show how God has inspired us by gently nodding our heads or occasionally tapping our

feet with the music.

I'm not going to suggest that we have to start dancing in the aisles to tap into the energy that God offers us.

Instead, I want to suggest five ways that we can harness the energy that God offers us for faithful living, ways that we can connect with the spirit of the living God.

1. WORSHIP

Gathering together in person or online is vital. People tell me all the time that gathering for worship gives them strength and focus for the week. This is why I go to worship when I'm on vacation. We need to regularly connect with God and worship is a great way to do so.

2. PRAYER and BIBLE STUDY

There are many ways to engage with prayer and Bible study. I use a Bible app on my phone to connect with the Bible pretty much every day. And I pray in a variety of ways. This month, I am once again using *A Diary of Private Prayer*, the classic book by John Baillie. He has a prayer for each day of the month, morning and evening. Part of the morning prayer for today, the third day of the month is this:

Thank you Lord, for this new day. For its gladness and brightness; for its many hours waiting to be filled with joyful and helpful labor; for its open doors of possibility; for its hope of new beginnings. Stir up in my hear the desire to make the very most of today's opportunities.

God is ready to offer us wisdom, comfort, and guidance in a variety of ways, but we need to show up and listen.

3. MUSIC, ART, LITERATURE

God speaks to us through songs, paintings, books, and more. We need to choose wisely, as there is a lot of junk out there. I find reading novels and history to be spiritually renewing. I just finished *Harlem Shuffle*, by Colson Whitehead, a fascinating novel about New York and a man torn between two paths.

4. OUTSIDE/CREATION

As the photo on the bulletin reminds us, as we remember with beautiful weather

like this week, God recharges our batteries when we walk and bike and even just look outside.

5. SILENCE and SABBATH

This might be the most challenging for some of us. Slowing down and getting rest is hard.

We are surrounded by noise and busyness. On a regular basis, we need to turn off our devices and just experience the world. Some of us work too much and need to rest. Some of us don't prioritize sleep.

There is a video circulating on social media with the text "If you want 8 hours of sleep you should just go to bed 8 hours before you have to get up." The person then just shakes their head, saying "no way."

It's funny, but it's true. We often have power sources available to us but we fail to take advantage of them.



These are essentially charging stations for us to tap into God's energy, so we can do the work that God wants us to do.

We have charging stations, but we have to use them. They require intentionality. For my phone to keep working I have to plug it in and let it sit there for awhile. I actually have to make use of it. Just holding a Bible isn't going to help me learn God's word and let God guide my life.

Just saying "I'm a church member" won't do much either. We need to plug in.

Where's Your Charging Station?

1. WORSHIP
2. PRAYER and BIBLE STUDY
3. MUSIC, ART, LITERATURE
4. OUTSIDE/CREATION
5. SILENCE, SABBATH



So as we start a new school year, a new month, a new season, it's a good time for all of us to figure out how we're going to stay charged, how we're going to tap into the energy that God offers.

Providentially (?) tomorrow is Labor Day—a time to remember unions, organized labor and efforts for safe workplaces and decent pay.

It's a good time for us as Christians to realize that we are called to be laborers in God's kingdom, God's realm.

Jesus said, "The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few." (Matthew 9:37)

This means there is a lot of work to do, a lot of ways to make this world a better place, a lot of life to live. So we need to stay energized, stay charged.

When I say God's work, that means a variety of things; it will be different for everyone.

For some people that means being an elder or a deacon. Or singing or teaching Sunday School. Or helping with our Guatemala partnership or helping with gardening or maintenance in the building. Or serving coffee and donuts or being part of a committee.

Lots of people serve God through their paid work. We have teachers, doctors, nurses, social workers, retailers, and more who feel like they are living God's love with their work. But you don't have to be a cardiologist or a professor to do God's work.

You can serve God as a spouse, a sibling, a parent, a cousin. You can serve God as a

caregiver.

You can serve God wherever we are. Some people are really good note writers and phone callers. Some people are really generous with their time, their dollars, their ears.

Some people are really good at smiling, which makes a huge difference.

Some people are really good at going to funerals.

No one can do everything, but everyone can do something. God offers energy for all of us.

I was in touch with one Covenant member this week. This person is dealing with health issues and not able to go out much. It would be easy for them to sit at home and feel sorry for themselves. But they are plugged into God's energizing love and because of that, they are in touch with lots of Covenant people, with email, phone calls, and notes. When we spoke on the phone this week, I could feel the smile. And even better, this person told me that on Sundays when they are home alone, before they tune into our YouTube channel for church, they get dressed up.

Friends, the Good News is that God loves us, and that God calls us to make this world a better place.

And God gives us power, strength, and energy for today, for every day. Amen.