

O God, you declare your almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity: Grant us the fullness of your grace, that we, running to obtain your promises, may become partakers of your heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Philippians 2:1-13

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death--
even death on a cross.
Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; **for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.**

Matthew 21:23-32

When Jesus entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, **“By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?”** Jesus said to them, “I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?” And they argued with one another, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say to us, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’ But if we say, ‘Of human origin,’ we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet.” So they answered Jesus, “We do not know.” And he said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

“What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’ He answered, ‘I will not’; but later he changed his mind and went. The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, ‘I go, sir’; but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said, “The first.”...

CONVERSATION

One of the gifts of our cycle of Sunday Scripture readings—with several readings from BOTH the Hebrew Scriptures, AND the New Testament each week, is that it invites us to experience scripture readings as part of *a conversation*. The wisdom of the scriptures begins to emerge when we treat each scripture reading as a conversation partner: the work of interpreting scripture is the work of putting a scripture reading in conversation with our own lives, in conversation with the life of the world, and in conversation with other scripture readings.

QUESTION (POWER?)

In today's Gospel, the religious leaders try to strike up a conversation (or, more accurately, pick a fight) by posing this question to Jesus about the work he's been doing:

“By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?”

Perhaps a more useful translation for the word “authority” in this case is the word “power”

“By what power are you doing these things and who gave you this power?”

That's a good question. Where DOES Jesus get the power to do his work? Where does ANYONE get the power to do their work? (for that matter)

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus (unfortunately for his listeners, but entirely in character for him) refuses to answer the question directly. Instead, Jesus tells an exasperatingly relatable story about a parent who asks his 2 kids to go do some work in the family vineyard—The first kid says he won't but then he eventually does. The second kid says he will, but then he actually doesn't. Where is the kid who *says* “yes” AND then *also* follows through and gets the job done? That's what I want to know.

But back to the CENTRAL question:

What Power enabled Jesus to do his work?

What Power enables us to do OUR work?

And (for that matter) what miraculous Power enables that first Son in the story to get up off the couch and do HIS work, despite his initial reluctance and refusal?

ANSWER (GOD'S POWER/KENOSIS)

This is where putting the scriptures in conversation with each other becomes so helpful. Because, while Jesus, in today's Gospel, doesn't give us a straight answer, Paul, in today's 2nd Reading is crystal clear.

In the final verse of today's 2nd reading, Paul writes:

It is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

The Power at work in Jesus, the Power that enables Jesus to do all HIS work—preaching, teaching, healing, and feeding, and raising the dead to new life—

Is the very same Power that enables the reluctant Son in the story to rearrange his plans and get off his duff and go out and do some chores in the Vineyard—

And it is this same Power that enables us to both **desire and do** work pleasing to God—

This Power, according to Paul, is the Power of God. In fact, it is nothing more and nothing less than the Power of God that has enabled humankind in every time and place and generation—from Adam, to Jesus, to you and to me—to share in God's will and God's work in the world.

The flow of God's power at work in humanity may be more or less evident in any given person or place or time. We might call the things that block or impede the free flow of God's power through humankind by a million different names—ego, anxiety, selfishness, independence, habit, or frailty—or we could use theological shorthand and just call it “sin”.

In contrast to this ubiquitous “blockage”, we find in today's reading, from Paul's letter to the Philippians a beautiful poem or hymn describing how Jesus radically and utterly empties himself—He releases every impediment, and clears every blockage. The theological word for this radical self-emptying is “**kenosis**”. Somehow, by emptying himself of everything, including all Power, Jesus makes room for the Power of God to flow freely through Him, so that, in Jesus, we can see God's will and God's work more clearly and completely than we have in the life of any one person before or since.

GOD'S WORK=CREATION & CARE

So what is this Power, this divine will and the divine work that flowed so freely through Jesus, that Paul claims is flowing through us as well?

God's Will and God's work basically boils down to these 2 things:

To CREATE

And To CARE

God's will and God's work is # 1: to CREATE

And #2: to CARE for what God has created

First: CREATION:

We see in Genesis 1

- **God Creates Good things** (paraphrase Luther's point re: EXCELLENCE not "poor shoes with little crosses on them")
- God Creates Good things, **God affirms and delights in God's Creation** (Not critique, not revise, affirm & delight)
- God Creates Good things, God affirms and delights in what God has created and **God RESTS....** (Natural rhythm, Divine rhythm—not and industrial or mechanical rhythm.)

Then: CARE

Primary way in which God cares for God's creation, is through US—through Humankind—through the Ones God has chosen to create in God's own image

(paraphrase Luther)

"God does not need our service & good works, but our neighbors certainly do!"

God's expansive Care takes many forms:

Obvious—parent, medical professional, aid worker

Less obvious—garbage collector, gardener, plumber, lawyer

Neighbors we are called to love and serve include not only our human neighbors, but EVERYONE and EVERYTHING In God's Good creation.

Likewise God works through us to CREATE & CARE in EVERY sphere of life:

Not only in our Job or Career, Family, congregation, neighborhood, precinct,

As a member of a family, a member of a church, citizen of a nation, resident of earth

The work to which we are called is God's work: The work of creating, the work of caring.

GOOD NEWS-COMMUNITY

It is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

- 1) God's power, NOT my power.
- 2) Scripture doesn't actually say that God is work in me (as an individual), but rather God is at work in US as a community.

It is God who is at work in you (PLURAL), enabling you (PLURAL) both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Just as God flowed most freely and powerfully through Jesus Christ, so God flows most freely and powerfully through Christ's Body, the Church.

CONCLUSION-INVITATION (or CALL)

CONVERSATION-join ongoing conversation with Scripture

QUESTION-join the religious leaders

KENOSIS-join Jesus

CREATION-join God

CARE-join God

COMMUNITY-remember ALL of this—conversation, questioning, kenosis, creation and care—is meant to unfold in Community.

All Glory and Praise and Thanks be to **God who is at work in us, enabling us to will and to work for God's good pleasure—together.**

NOTES:

Q (Gospel): “By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?”

A: (Epistle) it is God who is at work in you (plural), enabling you (plural) both to will and to work for his good pleasure...

(Greek: *authority*...also privilege, capacity, competency, freedom, strength, ability, right, power?)

exousia: Authority, power, right, jurisdiction

Original Word: ἐξουσία

Part of Speech: Noun, Feminine

Transliteration: exousia

Pronunciation: ex-oo-see'-ah

Phonetic Spelling: (ex-oo-see'-ah)

KJV: authority, jurisdiction, liberty, power, right, strength

NASB: authority, power, right, authorities, domain, charge, control

Word Origin: [from [G1832](#) (ἐξέσται - lawful) (in the sense of ability)]

1. privilege
2. (subjectively) force, capacity, competency, freedom
3. (objectively) mastery (concretely, magistrate, superhuman, potentate, token of control), delegated influence

3440 [e]	235 [e]	3568 [e]	4183 [e]	3123 [e]	1722 [e]	3588 [e]	666 [e]	1473 [e]	3326 [e]	5401 [e]	2532 [e]	5156 [e]	3588 [e]
monon	alla	nyn	pollō	mallon	en	tē	apousia	mou	meta	phobou	kai	tromou	tēn
μόνον ,	ἀλλὰ	νῦν	πολλῶ	μᾶλλον	ἐν	τῇ	ἀπουσία	μου ,	μετὰ	φόβου	καὶ	τρόμου	τὴν
only	but	now	much	more	in	the	absence	of me	with	fear	and	trembling	-
Adv	Conj	Adv	Adj-DNS	Adv	Prep	Art-DFS	N-DFS	PPro-G1S	Prep	N-GMS	Conj	N-GMS	Art-AFS

1438 [e]	4991 [e]	2716 [e]
heautōn	sōtērian	katergazesthe
ἐαυτῶν	σωτηρίαν	κατεργάζεσθε .
your own	salvation	work out
RefPro-GM3P	N-AFS	V-PMM/P-2P

sótéria: Salvation

Original Word: σωτηρία

Part of Speech: Noun, Feminine

Transliteration: sótéria

Pronunciation: so-tay-REE-ah

Phonetic Spelling: (so-tay-ree'-ah)

KJV: deliver, health, salvation, save, saving

NASB: salvation, deliverance, preservation

Word Origin: [feminine of a derivative of [G4990](#) (σωτήρ - Savior) as (properly, abstract) noun]

1. rescue or safety (physically or morally)

Strong's Exhaustive Concordance

deliver, save

Feminine of a derivative of [soter](#) as (properly, abstract) noun; rescue or safety (physically or morally) – deliver, health, salvation, save, saving.

see GREEK [soter](#)

katergazomai: To work out, to accomplish, to produce, to bring about

Original Word: κατεργάζομαι

Part of Speech: Verb

Transliteration: katergazomai

Pronunciation: kat-er-GAD-zom-ahee

Phonetic Spelling: (kat-er-gad'-zom-ahee)

KJV: cause, to (deed), perform, work (out)

NASB: doing, brings about, produced, produces, producing, accomplished, carried

Word Origin: [from G2596 (κατά - according) and G2038 (ἐργάζομαι - To work)]

1. to work fully, i.e. accomplish
2. (by implication) to finish, fashion

Strong's Exhaustive Concordance

produce, perform, work out.

From **kata** and **ergazomai**; to work fully, i.e. Accomplish; by implication, to finish, fashion – cause, to (deed), perform, work (out).

2316 [e]	1063 [e]	1510 [e]	3588 [e]	1754 [e]	1722 [e]	4771 [e]	2532 [e]	3588 [e]	2309 [e]	2532 [e]	3588 [e]	1754 [e]
Theos	gar	estin	ho	energōn	en	hymīn	kai	to	thelein	kai	to	energein
13 Θεὸς	γάρ	ἐστὶν	ὁ	ἐνεργῶν	ἐν	ὑμῖν	, καὶ	τὸ	θέλειν	καὶ	τὸ	ἐνεργεῖν ,
God	indeed	is	the [One]	working	in	you	both	-	to will	and	-	to work
N-NMS	Conj	V-PIA-3S	Art-NMS	V-PPA-NMS	Prep	PPro-D2P	Conj	Art-ANS	V-PNA	Conj	Art-ANS	V-PNA

5228 [e]	3588 [e]	2107 [e]
hyper	tēs	eudokias
ὑπὲρ	τῆς	εὐδοκίας .
according to	[His]	good pleasure
Prep	Art-GFS	N-GFS

energeó: To work, to be active, to be effective

Original Word: ἐνεργέω

Part of Speech: Verb

Transliteration: energeó

Pronunciation: en-er-GEH-o

Phonetic Spelling: (en-erg-eh'-o)

KJV: do, (be) effectual (fervent), be mighty in, shew forth self, work (effectually in)

NASB: works, work, effective, effectually worked, working, accomplish, brought about

Word Origin: [from [G1756](#) (ἐνεργής - effective)]

1. to be active, efficient

Strong's Exhaustive Concordance

do, be effectual, be mighty in.

From [energes](#); to be active, efficient – do, (be) effectual (fervent), be mighty in, shew forth self, work (effectually in).

see GREEK [energes](#)