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First Presbyterian Church, Birmingham, AL
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Power Pose
Luke 24:36-49

Before I make a phone call I am reluctant to make – not to any of you, of course – I stand up in my office, put my hands on my hips, and breathe deeply for a few minutes. Really. It's my wonder woman power pose. Research has shown that body language doesn't just communicate to other people – the way we hold our bodies can also communicate something to ourselves. Our bodily positioning can change the way we think and feel! If you are nervous and unsure of yourself, you make yourself smaller – which in turn, raises your cortisol levels and decreases your testosterone. And if you are confident, like a grizzly bear, you literally expand, take up more space – which then raises your testosterone and decreases your cortisol, your stress hormones. Researcher Amy Cuddy and her collaborators have shown that by adopting a power pose for as little as two minutes, you can fool yourself into having more confidence and ultimately winning better outcomes. Standing like superwoman, or putting your hands behind your head reduces your stress and makes you feel more confident. I challenge you to try it sometime this week and see what happens.

If I'm honest, I'll tell you that power isn't something I'm very comfortable with – not really. Power dominates. Power is board rooms and wall street; Washington and Hollywood. Power is dark suits and high heels. Power mansplains and doesn't apologize. Money is power. Strength is power. Power does what it wants. Power struts and strides, takes and exploits.

For a long time, I thought power was a bad thing – it had a negative connotation. Power over, the power to destroy was something to be resisted – the kind of power we saw flex its muscles this weekend, that launches missiles and dismisses collateral damage.

However, organizing training taught me that power is necessary. And it's neither good nor bad – power is just the ability to create change. Look at what happened in West Virginia and Oklahoma over the past month – teachers organized and went on strike, joining together to demand better pay and more support/ supplies for their classrooms. They closed schools, took over statehouses, and ultimately won. That was the power of people. Organized power.

Organizing taught me that power is necessary to create the world we long for. But it's a different kind of power. Shared power. The kind of power we build when we work together. This power doesn't coerce or dominate – it listen and connects, then exerts pressure for the greater good. It's strengthened by pulling people together, many hands and hearts offered to the cause.

People power doesn't look any one way. It looks like a girl with a tearstained face and a buzz cut, saying enough is enough, and issuing a call to action. It looks like the Dolores

Huerta's dirty cowboy hat and megaphone, like t-shirts and blue jeans – it looks like you and me.

Easter is about power – God's power to bring life out of death. Yet, when the disciples were confronted by God's life-giving, creative power, when they came face-to-face with the risen Jesus, they didn't know what was going on. They were afraid – the text actually says, they were *terrified*. The disciples were gathered together, three days after Jesus died. They were aggrieved and resigned to a world where the power of empire reigned supreme – that is, the power to exploit and oppress, maim and kill any who stood in its way. But then Christ came and stood among them.

Peace be with you, he said. Look, and see, touch me and know that I am real. Lest there be any doubt, he shared food with them – fish – and blessed them, and again taught them their redemption history. Then he left them with a charge and a promise: they were to share the story, to offer forgiveness and witness to God's power until they themselves were clothed in power from on high.

What a phrase- clothed in power. The disciples weren't waiting for power suits, or power vests – not even shields or armor. They were to await the power of the Holy Spirit, power that enlivens, creates, connects, resurrects. That is what is promised to us – the power of the Holy Spirit. I believe the Spirit is the power of the people. The power that enabled the disciples to preach repentance and offer forgiveness, and to confront the deadly power of empire. the power that enables us to do the same thing.

What does this Holy Spirit power look like?

I wonder if it doesn't look a little bit like what we see in this story of the Risen Christ with his friends. It's interesting – Jesus must have looked a little different than he did before he died, because the disciples on the walk to Emmaus didn't recognize him; Mary Magdalene didn't recognize him; then the eleven disciples aren't sure it's him either. It takes a closer look, seeing, touching, sharing a meal with him or breaking bread with him for everyone to realize who he is, and begin to believe what has happened.

Jesus shows up speaking words of peace instead of anger at their denial, doubt, and abandonment. This gives the disciples a shared experience of forgiveness. Then, together they are terrified at his presence and also overjoyed. They feed him, he teaches them – it is just like old times. Only this time, they really begin to understand and believe the truth of God's promise of redemption. Ours is a God who will go anywhere and do whatever it takes to extend grace to us!

By drawing close and sharing a meal with someone who initially scared them, who they didn't recognize, the disciples are opened up to deeper understanding, and are ready to be witnesses to what they now know in their bones to be true – that death does not have the final word; that the terrorizing, crucifying, militarizing empire is not in control – God is. God is.

Tunde Wey is a chef based in New Orleans. He cooks Nigerian food, because he grew up in Nigeria, and he uses food as a way to provoke conversations around issues of race, racism, privilege, and disparity in the US. He has hosted a travelling supperclub called Blackness in America, where people gather around spicy, unapologetically Nigerian dishes with plantains and goat meat and fermented funky earthy sauces and are challenged to reflect on not just the food, but also the socio-political context in which the meal is taking place – creating a space where people shared a meal and reflected together on race and the black, immigrant experience. He ran a month-long popup in a food hall in New Orleans earlier this year that took on racial inequality, charging a flat price of \$12 per meal, with a suggested price of \$30 for white diners, with the proceeds redistributed to customers of color. This invites diners to take responsibility – personal responsibility – for their unearned privilege and the racial wealth gap that exists in our country. He is not solely interested in the quality of the food he serves – though he says, it is delicious. He believes food spaces should enable us to discuss important and hard things.¹

When Faith in Action Alabama meets for hub sessions or leadership development, we almost always share a meal. FIAA meetings are consistently the most diverse room I get to experience, and our meals together are a chance to connect with the other folks who show up, who want to confront and wrestle with systemic racism in Alabama. It is not always a comfortable space, but it leads to stronger relationships and deeper understanding across difference.

When Latin American migrants are deported from our country, it's a Border Patrol strategy to take them far from their point of crossing. The thinking is that it will be harder for someone to regroup and try to cross again if they're dropped in a border town where they don't know anyone, far from their friends and families. In theory, this works. In reality, it makes migrants more susceptible to coyotes, who charge several thousand dollars to traffic people across the border, through the vast Sonoran desert, to a rendezvous point and on to bigger cities where they might work or be reunited with family members. There was a time when Border Patrol would drop people just after midnight with no money, no contacts, no where to go in a town they didn't know. And so a group of people connected to the Frontera de Cristo border ministry started the Migrant Resource Center – a safe haven just steps from the checkpoint in Agua Prieta, Mexico. The center is a long, narrow building painted a garish shade of orange, lit by flickering fluorescent lights and filled with folding chairs. It's staffed mostly by volunteers who provide hospitality to those who need it. They have a closet stocked with clean clothes and blankets and lots of warm, dry socks. The center offers free phone calls so people can call their families to let them know they're safe, and discounted bus tickets in case people want to return home. Volunteers give first aid care for blisters, swollen feet, and sprained ankles, and offer water to rehydrate weary walkers. The center always

¹ Wey, Tunde, “New Orleans Stall Project,” www.saartj.com and “Blackness in America,” at www.fromlagos.com. I heard about Tunde and his work through Splendid Table and Sporkful podcasts coverage of his supperclub series, Blackness in America.

has a stash of burritos or bologna sandwiches to offer folks who have been in detention for too long without anything to eat. And volunteers listen to the migrants' stories, to document abuses for Human Rights Watch, to offer some degree of oversight to the border patrol.

The people who visit the Migrant Resource Center are not who the world would call powerful. But this work of tending wounded feet, listening to stories, and sharing food and hospitality is powerful. It is powerful because it is among strangers who are drawn together by circumstance and need into a relationship of care and support, relationships that restore health and dignity to vulnerable people. And the mutual witness and testimony that is shared there is building power to advocate for change in immigration policy in the US, power that has contested and changed the repatriation practices of the border patrol, power that provides oversight to an agency that often acts with impunity.

Which makes me wonder if our power pose as Christians is different than my wonder woman stance. I wonder if being clothed in power looks like wounded hands and feet, touched and tended with care. Like broken hearts held together by the bonds of prayer and reinforced by strips of hope and love wound by a community working together. Like meals shared between strangers, with the hope of gaining understanding that leads to action. Like a hand, outstretched to offer hospitality and welcome. Like arms open wide in forgiveness. Like a fist, raised, to call for change. Like bread, broken and shared to be strength for the journey. Like a cup poured out, offering new life to one and all.