

# SERMONS FROM ST. FRANCIS

February 11, 2007 –

Text: Luke 5:1-11

Pr. Robert Goldstein

**“Christ Has The Power”**

*“Power came out from Jesus and healed them all.”*

What a picture to behold! A person whose life was for the healing of this world. And a world that is being healed! Christ has the power. Christ can heal. Christ has healed us all and continues to heal us on our spiritual journeys.

I began this sermon high above the Pacific *en route* to San Francisco. After burying my mother of 92 years, I feel bereft of that deep love. And yet I am invited by the Holy Spirit into a deeper understanding of the meaning of eternal life where our hearts extend to our loved ones now departed. I also write this thankful to you all for your understanding and your expressions of condolence as I raced home and for pitching in my time of need. You are helping to heal me. You are Christ's power.

We are not like the crowd struggling to touch him to be healed. We may feel like that sometimes. Yet, through baptism God has graciously poured a Spirit of healing into our hearts. Through Word and Sacrament that healing power comes into us and through us to others.

From moral nurture, the telling of the ancient stories of God to give both children and adults a structure by which to negotiate the road of life, the church carries on the life and work of Christ. For in the telling of the story, Christ has the power to heal. We rightly say that a church is a place for moral nurture and healing in its wider community.

Christ has the power. We are a means, a channel, for Christ's power to work. It is from this perspective, from this assumption that we undertake to make a report on the state of this congregation and to hold the annual meeting. Christ has the power to heal and we are channel of that miraculous power.

As we deal with nuts and bolts, votes and finances, let us not forget that Christ has the power to heal and has called us as sisters and brothers to channel that healing power to the world.

Like the human body, the body of St. Francis Church is a living and complex organism. St. Francis is a very healthy body –like the physical condition of a regular runner. Our muscles are firm and strong in that we have a strong organization because we have a membership that takes seriously their calling as a people of God. Our response to stimuli is quick: we elect a church council and committees that are not afraid to take on the challenges that San Francisco poses. Our eyes are sharply focused: we have a vision of the life of this church in the community and as a beacon of justice in the world. This is a healthy church. The state of this church is good, very good.

But like any human body there are some items needing attention. There is a little grumbling –instead of communicating with the council president, the pastor, a member of council or members of the pastor’s ministry committee. I suppose these behaviors are as unavoidable as earwax. But it doesn’t help the health of our ecclesial body to complain without purpose. Left alone, grumblings can fester when they could have been originally a misunderstanding or simply a lack of communication. Let us make the body of Christ stronger – communicate your concerns to a leadership that is poised to respond helpfully.

Our vision is not always sharp as it could be. Since we have a two-pronged vision of justice and congregational growth, there is the danger of emphasizing one of the prongs at the expense of the other. While we have been focusing on bringing stability to the congregation through the call process of both myself and a Pastor of Parish Programs, we have been balancing those energy-consuming tasks with the needs of our justice vision of being a beacon of light for sexual minority rights. It has not been easy to devote our energies equally.

Of particular concern, in my judgment, is a condition that is producing a muscle weakness. We are still in transition even though there is more stability –especially with the Pastor of Parish Programs now on the horizon. Yet St. Francis has to continue to adjust to the changes in sexual minority rights taking place in this country. In the last 10 years we have seen huge shifts in the political landscape on sexual rights. On the one hand we have a state that allows same sex couples to file joint tax returns and yet does not have the legislation or judicial decisions validating same sex marriage. We have few states that recognize same sex marriages and others that have begun that arduous process. On the other hand we have well organized and financed conservative religious and political cultures to fight such advances with state amendments denying those rights.

But the role of St. Francis in this is not as clear as it was in the 1990’s. We see advance and retreat at the same time. As detailed in *The Times*, the recent announcement by the ELCA disciplinary committee that the Rev. Bradley Schmeling of Atlanta will be removed from the clergy roster is a retreat. Yet the nearly unanimous advice of that same committee asking the ELCA to remove the celibacy requirement for LGBT clergy and laity is an advance.

And because both the landscape and the role of St. Francis in that landscape are changing, a few of us feel set adrift, wandering away or grumbling because the vision seems clouded. That is of particular concern to me. But the vision is not so much clouded as more complex. Perhaps revisiting our vision from time to time will help in communicating how St. Francis is to fit into the task of changing a church and a culture that are themselves in flux.

Right now the Adult class on Sunday morning is reading the book *Christianity For the Rest of Us*. But only a dedicated few attend. This book is one excellent proposal of how St. Francis can adjust and refine its vision –a suggestion for a Council or even a Congregational Retreat.

The ligaments of this body of Christ are strong. I am deeply impressed by the ligament of support you give to the budget and in involvement. It is quite exemplary for the whole Lutheran church –few equal your generosity of faith, hope and love in this area. Well done! I join you in this level of giving. Not everyone can give so generously –but all are asked to give as God has prospered them. And such giving is not achieved overnight but a little more each year

by year.

How do we relate to the wider church? St. Francis is not the church, but a congregation of the church –the wider church. But realistically, our connection is fractured –even though we are welcome in the San Francisco Conference and have received overtures of welcome from Sierra Pacific Synod Assemblies. We certainly do connect to the wider church by our support of the ministries of LLGM and the Extraordinary Candidacy Project. To continue to change that wider church we need to be connected in any way that is consistent with our conscience, exploiting all means and channels as God graciously presents them to us

The musculature of this Body called St. Francis is strong. But without the life-giving oxygen of Christ's power we would soon weaken and die. Christ has the power. The power to heal. The power to renew and revision our future. May we continue to make this church on Church Street a channel for the healing of the world and of this community. This will only occur through our openness to God's grace. It will only occur through all of us supporting the budget and mission of the congregation to the best of our ability. It will only occur if our vision is adaptive and bold to the changing contexts of life. In the 1990's you saw the future and became it. Only now is the rest of the church beginning to behold it.

Now I ask you. What is the next future church that we should strive to become? Let us work and let us pray. May God give us the power and the vision! Amen

St. Francis Lutheran Church  
152 Church Street, SF, CA 94114-1111  
Phone: (415) 621-2635; Fax: (415) 621-8819  
E-mail: StFrancisSF@sbcglobal.net  
[www.st-francis-lutheran.org](http://www.st-francis-lutheran.org)