

SERMON TITLE: "Jesus' Power Pulls Us Through"
SERMON TEXT: Isaiah 40:28-31
PREACHER: Rev. Kim James
OCCASION: August 7, 2022, at First UMC

INTRODUCTION

Vacation Bible School was a lot of fun this week. The children, youth, and adults who participated all had a great time learning Bible stories, playing games, singing and dancing to some great music, and making some interesting devices in Imagination Station. We laughed, we talked, and we prayed. And, throughout the week, we emphasized over and over again the theme that "Jesus' power pulls us through."

Some of you may have wondered why we used a railroad theme to convey Bible stories. After all, there aren't any trains in the Bible. The train metaphor was a method or technique, a side story that helped illustrate the fact that all of us have problems sometimes. Our train engineer played by Chris Hicks had the very appropriate name Cam Track. Get it? Cam like Cameron, Track like railroad Track, and Cam Track that rhymes with that other train line we've heard about.

Every day, as we gathered in the sanctuary, we heard about some new problem that Cam was working on. The first day, some big rocks had fallen onto the train tracks. Cam and his workers got those boulders removed, but then on the second day, Cam had to repair the railroad tracks that had been damaged. On day three, Cam was scared because he had never driven a train up and down a steep mountain before. On Day four, Cam had run out of coal because he'd used it all up by driving the train too fast. On the final day, Cam was having trouble with one of his employees whose constant chattering was driving Cam nuts. Cam didn't seem to appreciate his worker's jokes like, "What do you call a train that likes bubble gum? A choo-choo." Personally, I think that's kind of clever. But Cam was annoyed, and every day Cam had to learn the lesson to trust Jesus--that Jesus' power pulls us through.

As a good review to all of us who participated in VBS, and to bring all the rest of you aboard the Jesus train, we're going to go through those daily lessons. As Isaiah 40 tells us, when we feel weak and exhausted, God renews our strength. We never need to worry about feeling faint or powerless because we can trust that God and God's Son Jesus will give us the power we need to pull us through.

1--BIBLE STORIES

On Monday, our Bible lesson came from Acts 9. We learned the story of Ananias, who lived in the city of Damascus. In a vision, God had told Ananias to go to a house on Straight Street and find a man named Saul. God wanted Ananias to help Saul regain his sight, so Saul could become a Christian missionary. The problem was that Ananias had heard that Saul had been mean and cruel to the Christians, but Ananias hadn't yet heard about Saul's conversion to Christian faith. So Ananias was afraid of him. Ananias thought this assignment from God was a very hard thing to do. But with some prayer and encouragement, Ananias was able to rely on Jesus. Through the story of Ananias, we learned that *Jesus' power helps us do hard things*. **Trust Jesus!**

On Tuesday, our Bible lesson came from Acts 27. There we found out that Saul, now named Paul, had in fact become such a powerful missionary for Jesus that he had gotten into big trouble with the Roman government. They were transporting him to Rome as a prisoner on a ship when a storm came up, and the ship started breaking into pieces. The crew and passengers thought they were all going to die, but Paul told them the hopeful message that God would keep them alive if they would eat some food and then swim to shore. Through this story of Paul and the shipwreck, we learned that *Jesus' power gives us hope*. **Trust Jesus!**

On Wednesday, our Bible lesson came from Acts 3 and 4. The disciples Peter and John were going to the temple in Jerusalem to worship. At the temple gate, they found a man who couldn't walk, so all he could do was sit there and beg. When the lame man asked Peter and John for money, Peter responded, "We don't have any money, but we'll give you what we do have. In the name of Jesus Christ

of Nazareth, stand up and walk.” Suddenly, the man’s legs were healed and he was able to stand up and walk. He even leaped for joy, as he went into the temple praising God. Because this miracle of healing drew the attention of the crowd, Peter and John boldly preached that it was through the power of Jesus that this man was healed. Their boldness of speech drew the attention of the authorities, who put Peter and John in jail overnight and insisted that they must stop talking about Jesus. But Peter and John would not be silenced. They had to speak the message God had given them. Through this story, we learned that *Jesus’ power helps us be bold. Trust Jesus!*

On Thursday, the Bible story was about Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection. We learned about the cruelty and injustice experienced by Jesus, and that those who killed him did a terrible thing. We talked about the reality that we humans often do sinful things that hurt ourselves and others. We learned how God overcame sin by raising Jesus from the dead, and that God can overcome our sin by forgiving us through Jesus. When we tell God that we’re sorry for the things we’ve done wrong, we can receive Jesus’ power to live a new, better, and eternal life. To help them make this commitment, the children wrote their names on little red hearts and stuck them on a cross. Through this story of Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection, we learned that *Jesus’ power lets us live forever. Trust Jesus!*

On Friday, the Bible story was from Acts, chapters two and four. We celebrated how the early Christian believers came together for worship and prayer. In many ways, it was like a big party. They ate together and shared their food. They sold their possessions and distributed the money they raised, so that no one would be in need. All their possessions were held in common. Those acts of kindness, generosity, cooperation, and unity were all part of their new life as Christians. The way they lived and loved one another was very attractive, and many more people came to believe in Jesus too. As the believers gave their hearts to Jesus, they also gave their hearts to one another in Christian friendship.

Today, many children, youth, and adults struggle with relationships. Fortunately, through this story, we learned that *Jesus’ power helps us be good friends. Trust Jesus!*

2--VBS ANIMALS

Earlier I explained that the railroad theme was a side story that helped us understand human problems through the struggles of Cam Track the train engineer. Our Rocky Railway VBS also featured some animals to help convey the message that Jesus' power pulls us through. On Monday, we met Ramsey the Ram, to whom God gave strong, curly horns that help him defend against problems high up in the mountains. We also learned the fact that baby mountain sheep can walk and climb just like their mothers within just one day of their birth. There's no time for weakness there. Instead, God's power lifts up the faint and gives us strength.

On Tuesday, we met Ava the red-tailed hawk. By giving her such an aerodynamic body, God helps her soar up high where she can see food below. As God raises her up on her strong and wide wings, we know that God also raises up Christian believers to new and eternal life in Jesus Christ.

On Wednesday, we met Sierra the mountain lion. We learned that these creatures live all over the western hemisphere and have many different names like puma, cougar, and panther. Did you know that a mountain lion can jump as high as 18 feet and as long as 40 feet? Wow! Just as God gave these big cats amazing power, so can Jesus give us the power we need to overcome sin and other problems in our lives.

On Thursday, we met Finn the rainbow trout. God gave Finn and other fish the power to move around in the water by using their fins and their tails. Some kinds of fish swim upstream, against the current for many, many miles in order to reproduce. As God gives power to fish, so Jesus' power is able to pull us through whatever currents we're struggling against.

On Friday, we were introduced to Lawrence the elk. The children didn't understand that joke, but we older people do, right? God gave Lawrence Elk very powerful antlers that are able to fight off enemies like grizzly bears. But one of the best defenses of elk is that they live and travel in a herd, so they can help each other scare off predators like wolves. As God helps elk by keeping them together in a

herd, so Jesus' power makes us good friends who share and cooperate with one another, so that all our needs are met.

CONCLUSION

As I'm wrapping up this sermon, would you like to hear one more train joke? OK. Why are trains so good at what they do? Because they get lots of training!

In Vacation Bible School we got some good training too. We learned that when we trust Jesus, Jesus' power will help us do hard things, give us hope, help us be bold, let us live forever, and help us be good friends.

As the prophet Isaiah said, God gives power to the powerless. So, whenever you're feeling exhausted or weak, afraid or lonely, or like you don't have what it takes—don't worry. Instead, pray for God's help--because we can trust that Jesus' power pulls us through.