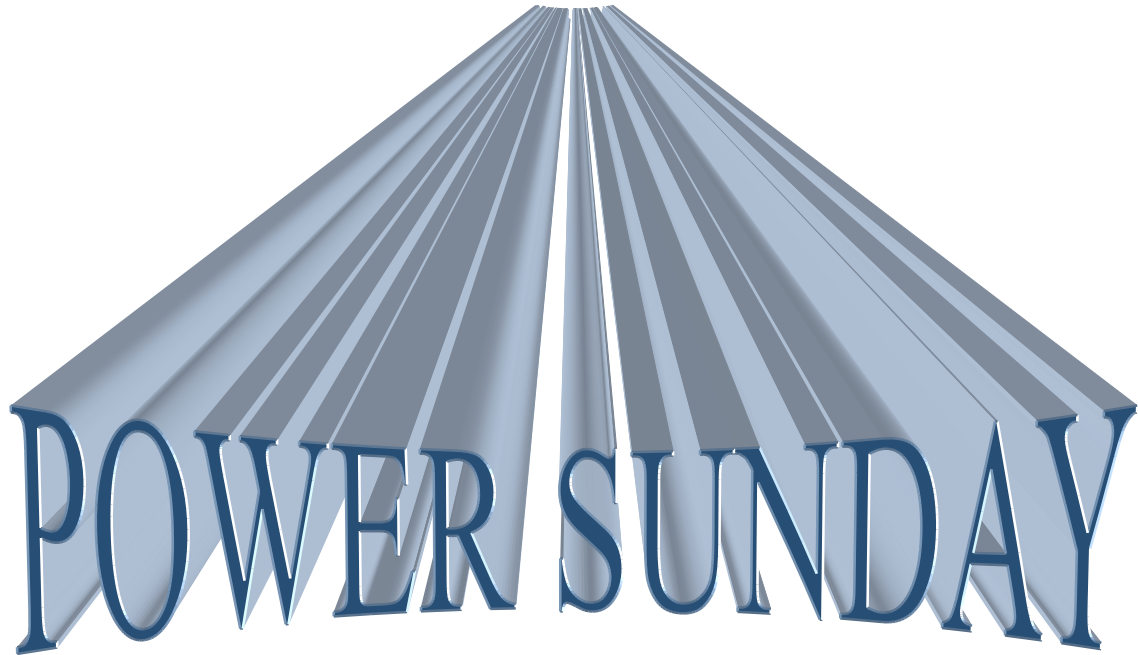


**FIRST EPISCOPAL DISTRICT
AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

June 8, 2014



POWER SUNDAY

Bible Study Challenge Guide

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THE BISHOP'S WORD

Welcome to **POWER SUNDAY** 2014!

The key for **The First Episcopal District**, Annual Conferences, Presiding Elders Districts, and local churches having a successful **Power Sunday** is in following the plan and getting people involved. While Pastors will play a pivotal role in providing leadership and encouragement, effective planning and preparation for reaching our goals, are too important to reside within a single person no matter how motivated or talented. The involvement and commitment of each person to win souls for Christ is needed and imperative. There is no ministry in the church more important than sharing the Good News of the gospel and witnessing to people about the saving grace of Jesus Christ. ***Without evangelism the church ceases to exist.*** Therefore, total involvement in this vitally important ministry in the church is most significant and not taken lightly.



There is no “*Iron Clad*” rule for churches in the District to follow every idea and concept for **Power Sunday**. Quite frankly, given the size and resources of some of our churches it would be virtually impossible for some churches to do everything we are asking. On the other hand, no matter how small or large, I guarantee all of our churches will benefit and reach a spiritual harvest if they would follow some of the steps and accept one suggestion: **How you plan is more important than what you plan.** This Power Sunday Guide was created as a “road map” designed to lead members through the first three (3) sessions of the Power Sunday home cell study groups. The guide is divided into two sections: a short synopsis on Power Sunday, its goals, and the cell group model; and study group lessons for the three weeks leading up to Power Sunday. The fourth lesson should occur at the local church on Power Sunday.

Our ultimate goal is to establish the conviction that discipleship ***is at the heart of everything our churches are about—in worship, education, social action, stewardship, fellowship, etc.*** Therefore, it is imperative for every Pastor and member to enthusiastically covenant to pray and work for the success of **POWER SUNDAY 2014.**

Go Out – and Make a Difference!

Yours in His Service,

Gregory G. M. Ingram
118th Bishop
African Methodist Episcopal Church

All About **POWER SUNDAY**

POWER SUNDAY is designed to infuse a new dynamic and replicate how the early **New Testament Church** made an impact upon its community. Through study, fellowship, teaching and prayer, **Power Sunday** will provide us, just as the early church, an opportunity to encounter a mighty move of the Spirit to be empowered through the Word of God to win souls for the Kingdom and **The First Episcopal District**.

We believe Power Sunday and what it represents is a biblical and spiritual mandate of God. **We believe the Church** is God's instrument in this present age and that all people (Christians) should both belong to and be an active part of a local New Testament church. **We believe** the church is a body of baptized believers in whom Jesus Christ lives and that we are united together in the Holy Spirit for the sole purpose of sharing God's good news to win the lost and develop the saved. We believe implementing **Power Sunday** will focus and challenge members to remember that it is the responsibility and privilege of every believer in Christ and member of the local church to do everything he/she can to make the gospel of Jesus Christ a living reality in people's lives. Hence, we believe through an intentional evangelism effort at home, in communities, cities and states our membership should increase in local churches and the First Episcopal District.

The Goals

Fundamentally, there are seven primary objectives and goals we hope to achieve on **POWER SUNDAY**.

- 1 To have every church establish home cell groups for one month using the theme, scripture, and special bible study materials we will write, publish and distribute.
- 2 To diligently witness and work to win **700 souls to the kingdom** and **The First Episcopal District**.
- 3 To raise public awareness about **The African Methodist Episcopal Church** and publicize **Power Sunday** through media and publications.
- 4 To encourage every member in our local churches to witness and bring a friend to church with them on **Power Sunday**.
- 5 To train and equip ministries, organizations and individual church members for servant leadership roles.
- 6 To receive a special sacrificial love offering for a mission outreach project.
- 7 To set up an on-going network for outreach, evangelism, church growth and enhance the discipleship ministry.

Cell Groups to Discipleship

POWER SUNDAY employs the cell group model to extend ministry and evangelism to every person in a local church body. Cell groups aren't simply another name for a Bible study, fellowship group or Sunday School class. They are a group of believers who have banded together to reach the lost, minister to the hurting and each other, and discover their leadership potential. Cell groups are effective in winning new Christians into their membership, teaching its members basic Christian living and worldview; and providing motivation and vision in the minds of the members for serving Christ.

A spiritual cell group is very similar to a biological cell. Followers of Jesus Christ edify one another and increase the kingdom by sharing their lives with unbelievers. New leaders are raised up from within the group to grow and expand the ministry to a hurting world. When the group multiplies, the process repeats itself.

As born again believers in Jesus Christ, we have been commanded to fulfill the Great Commission found in Matt. 28:18-20. This can easily be accomplished if churches will launch cell groups to harness the power of basic Christian community to reach friends, family, coworkers and neighbors for Jesus. Cell groups employ "net fishing" and successfully reach the lost through relational evangelism. God desires for us to live in community and commanded us to work out our salvation together (Phil. 2:12).

Cell groups serve a combined role of friendship building, mutual support and training, or discipleship. For all these roles, the groups need to be small. Three to eight people is best. A cell group should meet in a place and time that is comfortable for both the believers and unbelievers visiting, and provide enough time to share deep concerns and pray for one another.

Cell groups should include both instruction and interaction. During interactive periods, the leader needs to guide discussion while not discouraging creative sharing. Cell groups should not be held to a rigid outline. Invite interruptions. Creative discussion focuses not on specific answers the leader wants to hear, but on questions of interpretation, opinion, and experience. Alternate between short periods of teaching and discussion. This is called leader-guided or moderated group discussion.

We can maximize the effectiveness of discipleship through cell groups. The members of a cell group usually disciple one another, resulting in group, or community, discipleship.

Frequently Asked Questions

The following information will answer some of your basic questions about Power Sunday:

Question: How do churches initiate Power Sunday?

Essentially, churches will establish cell groups where members will invite other members and friends for their study groups in their homes. Together, they will complete three (3) sessions studying the material in the Power Sunday Guide. At the conclusion of this process those trained are ready to disciple new believers and other new members.

Question: How will we use the Power Sunday Guide?

The Power Sunday Guide is basically a “road map” designed to lead members through the first three (3) sessions of the Power Sunday Booklet home cell groups. The fourth session will be at the local church wherein all are expected and invited to be in attendance. Each cell group is expected to have a “Cell Group Leader” who will be responsible for coordinating group members and leading the study guide sessions.

Question: How will we invest our time in the Power Sunday Sessions?

Your weekly assignments in the Power Sunday Guide are designed to help undergird your understanding of discipleship and provide you the tools necessary in becoming a disciple-maker. The Power Sunday Sessions are also designed to assist in strengthening the minds and spirits of individual members and the communal body.

Question: What will happen after my cell group/local church complete the Power Sunday Study Sessions?

The Power Sunday Guide is designed to be a major blessing for the First Episcopal District and it will help to bring to fruition the Discipleship Goals set for the District. Your participation in these study sessions will ensure that you have all that is necessary to assist in the growth and development of your local church.

POWER SUNDAY Bible Study Challenge

Our Mission as Mandated by Scriptures

- I. “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”
Matthew 28: 19, 20 (KJV)
- II. “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.”
Mark 16: 15 (KJV)
- III. “Go out to the highways and along the hedgerows and make them come in; I want my house to be full.”
Luke 14: 22 (NEV)
- IV. “These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as ye go, preach, saying the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”
Matthew 10:5-7 (KJV)
- V. “Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted. It is henceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.”
Matthew 5:13 (KJV)
- VI. “And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.”
II Corinthians 8:5 (KJV)
- VII. “After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place whither he himself would come.”
Luke 10:1 (KJV)

Study Group Lesson - Week I

May 5, 2014

“THOSE IN THE WAY”

“And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.” Acts 9: 1-6 (KJV)

“God is Good!” But even though we all know that God is good, and that God continues to shower us with His goodness and His blessings, God’s church in Bermuda, God’s church in Delaware, God’s church in New Jersey, God’s church in New England, God’s church in New York, God’s church in Western New York, God’s church in Philadelphia, God’s church in the United States, God’s church in the world is in failing health.

- (1) Church enrollment is down.
- (2) Church member participation is low.
- (3) The church-school hour, in many churches, is still the loneliest hour of the week.
- (4) The number of souls being won for Christ seems, in many churches, to be of little or no importance at all.
- (5) Our missionary effort, both at home and abroad, is meager as compared to the need.
- (6) Our young people, our relatives, and our friends are being drawn “every day” to drugs, into gangs, into cults and into other strange organizations; anything that they think might help them gain a more abundant life.

Yes, the church of our Lord and Saviour Jesus the Christ is in failing health and, unfortunately, many of us who are members of the body of believers — we who are “the

called out ones” — seem to feel about our plight, the way the weather man feels about the weather; everybody talks about it but nothing can be done about it. But my brothers and sisters, as we gather together on this **“POWER SUNDAY”** — a Sunday when God has afforded us another chance — the word is coming to you from the officer of the day for this regiment of God’s army, and it has come to announce to you that all leaves have been canceled. (We need you to spread the word to those who are not here today.) Preachers who have not been preaching, *your leave has been canceled; it’s time to report for duty.* Stewards, stewardesses, trustees, class leaders, church-school workers, choir members, lay persons — all who have taken leave for the electric church, or no church — *your leave has been canceled; it’s time to report for duty.* Forget about your personal hurts, forget what might have happened that chased you away ... All who want to do God’s will— it’s restoration time — *it’s time to report for duty.* It’s time to get God’s house back in order. It’s restoration time. **“Get up and go into the city where you will be told what you must do.”**

In the meantime, Saul kept up his violent threats of murder against the disciples and the people of the Lord. He even went so far as to go to the high priest and to ask for letters of introduction to the synagogues in Damascus, so far as to say that if he should find any followers of the way of the Lord, {that is, those IN THE WAY} he would be able to arrest them, both men and women, and take them back to Jerusalem. **{Those IN THE WAY are those who have accepted Jesus as Lord and Saviour and are patterning their lives in accord with His life and teachings.}** But on his way to Damascus, as he drew near the city, suddenly a light from the sky flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying, “Saul, Saul!” Why do you persecute me”? “Who are you Lord?” he asked. The voice responded, “I am Jesus whom you persecute. But never mind what you have done, just get up now and go into the city where you will be told what you must do.” ***Get up and go into the city where you will be told what you must do.***

An old painter, after having put in many productive years at his trade, came one day to the realization that his business was a little below where he thought it should be; he felt that he should be doing better than he was doing. So he began thinking about a business restoration plan — a plan of revitalization. He decided that he would not do much of the actual work anymore, but would rather go out and get the jobs and then engage a young painter, whom, he could train, to do the work. He thought that by so doing he would aid in the development of an up-and-coming painter and, at the same time, would restore his business to a healthier state. So he went out and began looking around in hopes of finding someone who could do what needed to be done. And after what seemed to have been an extremely long time, he finally found a young man whom he thought could fit the bill. The fellow was young, he was bright, he was strong; he seemed to have had a unique talent for the work and he was eager. The old man hired him on the spot. And to get him started, the old man gave him a book of color charts, a bag of cleaning cloths, a box of brushes in assorted sizes, several cans of paint and a tall extension ladder. Then he told the young man: “If used properly, this ladder can be

your ladder of success; be careful now, make certain that you use it properly.” Then he gave the young man several job sheets and sent him on his way.

Now, the reports that came back on the young man were glowing; he was quick, he was neat, he was clean; he was a fantastic painter. The old man was glad that he had taken him under his wing. But as time went on, a small problem began to arise. The young apprentice began to think that he knew a little more than the old master painter; he had newer and better ideas, he had some techniques that the old man didn't know anything about — he could do a better job. (You know how we get, sometime, when we're put in charge — Madam President, Mister Secretary, Program Chairperson, new, young pastor ...) So the boy began to do things his way: to shortcut, to slip and slide, to be contemporary — you know what I'm talking about ... And soon it became necessary for the old man to go out and directly supervise every job that he gave the young man to do. One day, though, the old man was tired. And he went out to the job site a little later than usual, only to find the young man atop his ladder, painting a freshly painted wall in a different color. Quickly, the old man went back and checked his copy of the job sheet, and then hurried over, as quickly as he could, to the foot of the ladder and called out: “John, John, come down, come down!” And John answered with surprise: “What's the matter? Is there something wrong? Is there something wrong with my work? Am I not doing a good job?” “John, you're doing a good job,” the old man replied, “in fact, you're doing a great job. The problem is, though, that your ladder of success is propped up against the wrong wall, and you've got to come down.”

Brothers and sisters, young and old, it is restoration time for the church. The church has become weak and is in failing health, and the time has come to restore it to a healthier state. Now most of you here are probably working well in the church; in fact, many of you are probably spending more time in the church than you are spending anywhere else and, that is good.

You all have good intentions, and most of you are probably doing a good job at what you were doing. The problem is, though, that many of your ladders of success were propped up against the wrong wall and, in order to pull our church back together, you have to come down ...

Most of you, I am sure, have read the story about a king whose name was Saul. Saul, as you read about him in the book of Samuel, was not a great king, but was a pretty good king, until he began to think that what he wanted to do was more important than what God wanted him to do. You see, he had become a bit confused about the little bit of power that he had (church officers, I know you can relate to that ...) Unfortunately, though, he either forgot or didn't realize that the power he had, came from God, and that whenever God was ready, God could take it away from him. You see, Saul and God, it was very clear, had two very different agendas. Despite that fact, though, God was patient with him for a long time, just

as He is patient with you and me. But since Saul simply refused to alter his agenda — to change, and to God's will — strange things began to happen to him. You remember the story ...

There was a period of time, during Saul's reign, when there was discord between the Israelites and the Philistines. I'm sure you remember the story about the little boy and the giant.

Goliath was the Goth champion who came out of the camp of the Philistines to challenge the best of the Israelites. You remember that story! This proposed altercation had been billed as a climax to a power struggle to determine which body of people would reign supreme.

The scriptures let us know that Goliath's height was six cubits and a span. He had a helmet of brass on his head and was armed with a coat of mail; his coat, by the way, weighed five thousand shekels of brass. He had greaves on his legs, and a target of brass between his shoulders. The staff of his spear was like a weaver's beam and his spearhead weighed six hundred shekels of iron; also, one wearing a shield always went before him. (NOW, one doesn't have to be an expert in ancient armament to know that this must have been an awesome sight.) And many of the Israelites would run at the mere sight of Goliath.

Nevertheless, King Saul sent out a little boy; a boy who had been touched by God; a boy named David. And David, under the influence and the divine enablement of God, with a slingshot and five smooth stones, went out, and slew Goliath. And as a result, the Philistines had to bow down to the Israelites.

But, as I said before, Saul was a bit confused about his power and instead of being pleased by the fact that the Philistines had been defeated and his people were free, at least for a time, public opinion began to get the best of him ... People were saying more good things about David than they were saying about Saul and Saul became envious of his young champion and tried to kill him. Saul, at this point, was not concerned about what God wanted; Saul was only concerned about what he wanted. You see, he had come to equate success with the personal power he felt he had, but he had not realized that he was going up against God's anointed. He did not realize that he could not win; he had to fail. There was no way he could win because his ladder of success was propped up against the wrong wall.

And you know, the same holds true for us today. Sometimes we get so caught up in what we want to do that we forget to even think about whether or not it might be what God wants us to do. And we mount our ladders of success and begin working, never realizing that we are working at cross purposes with God — that is, that our ladders of success are propped up

against the wrong wall. We need to realize today, however, that it is restoration time and that if we really want to do God's will, we have to come down!

One writer has said that of all the great men of antiquity there is not one, except perhaps Cicero, whom most of us know better than Paul. Not only do we have the story of a large part of his life written for us by his friend Luke, in the Acts, but we also have at least ten of his letters. So it is not necessary to recount his whole life story — you already know that.

What is significant about his life story, as it relates to us today, however, is the vivid portrayal of the fact that if you are serious about the business of doing God's will, even if your ladder of success is propped up against the wrong wall, the master will bring you down and set you right.

Paul was a brilliant man; broad in his scope of understanding so far as many things were concerned. He was born in Tarsus, an important center of commerce, a famous university city, and a meeting place for Hellenism and Orientalism. He was brought up in accord with the strict Jewish tradition and learned a trade at an early age.

At the age of fourteen he sailed to Jerusalem to study under the great Gamaliel, one of the greatest Rabbis of all times. As he grew into manhood, he advanced in the Jewish religion far beyond most of his countrymen. Paul was truly a brilliant man. He first became notorious, however, for the strange and unusual ways in which he went about dominating and persecuting Christians.

Now with the understanding that we have of Paul's background, it should be clear to everyone that he was not persecuting Christians for personal reasons or personal gain, nor was it because he just wanted to harass a body of people. He was not against Christians because he didn't like the way they looked, nor was it because he had some repressed anxieties or hostilities that he wanted to vent on somebody. No! Rather, because of his years of study, and his comprehensive familiarity with religious law, he looked upon Christianity as heresy — that is, something that was against the laws of God — thus, he felt a compulsion to stamp it out. You see, at this point, although he had good intentions, and was doing an effective job, he was a bit confused. Yes, Paul was confused.

But one day, on his way to Damascus, as he drew near the city, suddenly a light flashed around him and he fell to the ground. A voice called out to him (and I'm going to use my words) "Saul, I know you want to do My Will. You're putting in a lot of time, effort and energy into the job, and you're working without ceasing on task accomplishment. You're most effective in your approach, and I'm sure your results are far better than you ever expected. But, the problem is, Saul, your ladder of success is propped up against the wrong wall, and I had to bring you down to set you right.

Now that you're down, you don't have to worry about the past; all that is behind you. I just need you to get up now, and go into the city where I will tell you what you must do. I've already changed your mind, I've already changed your heart, I've already cleared your foggy thinking; just get up now and be ready to My work, My way."

The rest of the story of Paul is history, but the message of his conversion experience speaks poignantly to us especially now, as we stand on the threshold of a new beginning. God knows that most church people want to do His will. He knows that many of us spend more time in the church than we spend anywhere else. He knows that we have been working hard and that what we're doing we are doing well. He knows too, however, that many of us are confused about the power that we have, and that we have unknowingly propped our ladders of success up against the wrong wall. But He sends a message to us through His Son, Jesus the Christ, that it's RESTORATION TIME; that the church is in failing health and that He needs workers to restore it.

God knows that we have our own agendas, and He knows we are resistant to change but, it's restoration time ... We need to come down ...

Something to Think About

1. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE IN THE WAY?

2. ARE YOU A MEMBER OF THE CROWD OR THE CONGREGATION?

3. IS YOUR LADDER OF SUCCESS PROPPED UP AGAINST THE WRONG WALL?

4. ARE YOU DOING MORE HARM THAN GOOD, AS YOU PERPETUATE SELF?

5. WHAT CAN YOU DO TO PROVIDE HEALING TO OUR AILING CHURCH?

6. WHAT IS ONE SPECIAL SOMETHING THAT YOU CAN CONTRIBUTE TO OUR CHURCH GROWTH EFFORT?

Study Group Lesson - Week 2

May 12, 2014

“A Place Where You Belong”

Matthew 28: 19

In the Gospel According to St. Matthew, the 28th chapter beginning with the 19th verse, we find Jesus saying to His disciples:

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”

And then, in the Gospel of St. Mark, the 16th chapter beginning with the 15th verse: ***“Go ye, therefore, into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature.”***

These two passages are two different renderings of The Great Commission; that is, Jesus' admonition to His disciples and to us, to go ... Yes, this is also directed to us because, when one becomes a Christian, we are not just to sit in the pew, or sing in the choir, or serve on the Usher, the Steward or the Trustee Board. No! We are admonished by Jesus to go and to do something ... And this Great Commission — these powerful words from Jesus have indeed become (1) the mandate for MISSIONS — that is, for helping people as a means whereby the Word can be left, the hope being that none will be lost, (2) the mandate for EVANGELISM — that is, for reaching the unreached with the proclamation of the Gospel, the basic aim being to lead people to a commitment to Jesus the Christ and (3) the mandate for CHURCH GROWTH — that is, for seeking the lost, for sharing the faith, for lifting the fallen, and for aiding all people in gaining a more abundant life.

Over the years, as we have heard and read these words, many of you have taken them very seriously and some have taken them literally. You have been going out on the street, on the highways and along the hedgerows: witnessing to people, helping people, uplifting the fallen, comforting the sick and visiting those in prison. You have gone everywhere, trying to reach the unreached, to seek out the lost, to lead people to a commitment to Jesus the Christ; to do what Jesus has mandated that we should do. But very often, after you have done the work, and have gotten people to come in, you have found a strange situation existing in the church. You have found that the doors of the church—which you thought were open wide

for all to come — had turned into revolving doors; and as quickly as some new folks came in, they went right out. You found out, too, that many of those whom you thought were members, had also gotten caught in the revolving door.

But you know, when Jesus directed His disciples to “... *go out on the highways and along the hedgerows and compel them to come in, I want my house to be full,*” (Luke 14:23) He wasn’t expecting you to have to deal with any revolving doors; he just wanted the people to come in. When He said “... come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.” He wanted the folks to come. When He said, “Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not for of such is the kingdom of heaven.” He wanted us to get out of the way and let some other folks come in.

And as we reflect on these passages on this POWER SUNDAY, an gear up together to start anew, let’s pray that we might be given direction, strength, power and divine enablement to stop that door from revolving, in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, so that our church can become that viable instrument that God has ordained for it to be.

Let’s read the Word as it appears in the Gospel According to St. Matt.10:5-7 (KJV)

“These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them saying, ‘Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as ye go, preach, saying, The Kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ ”

.... and in the Gospel According to St. Luke 15:8-10. (KJV):

“Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbors together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.”

A good place for us to begin our thinking on the POWER SUNDAY is, “A Place Where You Belong.”

Although the Gospel writer, Luke, is responsible for having written more than a quarter of the New Testament, there is really very little that we know about the man, Luke. We know that he was a Jew, and according to reliable sources, he was a scholar of no small reputation. There are clear indications, too, that he was a medical doctor, and we can surmise, as perceived through his writings, that he was a pretty good doctor; a knowledgeable man, a man of compassion, a man of concern, a man who knew what he was doing and who knew how to do it.

He seemed in his writings, to have put forth a great deal of effort to depict Jesus as a lover of the poor; to show Him in the company of those with whom respectable Jews would not be seen — with a woman who had been branded an adulteress, with Zacchaeus; telling the story of a penitent tax collector; telling stories of how much Jesus loved finding the lost and bringing them home — you know, those who were down and out, the downtrodden, the depressed, the repressed, the suppressed, the oppressed. And there, in the 15th chapter, He depicts Jesus at His contemporary and compassionate best.

In that 15th chapter, Jesus tells the parable of the lost sheep, the first in a series of three parables designed to give encouragement to sinners to repent. This parable shows the love of Jesus for the outcasts, for the despised, even for the criminal classes. And it shows His rebuke of the Pharisees, who professed to be shepherds, but who neglected the part of the flock that needed their help the most. It indicated, also, to the Pharisees that they were, in many respects, worse than the sinners whom they despised; for surely, in their position, they should not have been sitting in the judgment seat, but rather in the mercy seat. Jesus having shown the shepherd leaving the ninety and nine to seek out the one lost, is an indication, too, of His concern for every individual soul. (Yes, even you and me. You see, no matter how insignificant we might appear to one another, Jesus is concerned about every one of us; every living soul.)

He leaves the first parable and goes to the second; ... the lost coin. And this is the one we're going to concentrate on, for a minute, the lost coin. The **woman**, in this parable, can be likened to the church, the **pieces of silver** to all of the souls entrusted to the church's care, and the lost coin to a soul that has fallen from grace, or has fallen out of communion and fellowship because of someone's negligence. And as we think about our understanding of Christian stewardship (taking what God has entrusted to our care and developing it so as to provide a return for the betterment of humankind), we see, here, clear evidence of unfaithful stewardship; the woman was not a good steward.

Many of us go out everywhere, trying to help those "in need," to reach the unreached, to uplift the fallen and to seek out the lost, and that's good. Very often, though, we become so busy OUT THERE, that we fail to realize that we have a whole lot of lost folk in our own house; those whom God has entrusted to our care. Or maybe we feel that the lost in our

house require so much work, that it's just easier for us to stay out there — if you will — where we can quit whenever we get ready. Or perhaps we perceive of the lost in our house as being so low, that we'd just rather not be bothered... Or maybe we rationalize, as in the nursery rhyme: "Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall. Humpty Dumpty had a great fall. All the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put Humpty Dumpty together again." Some of the lost folks in our house, we feel, are beyond help. All the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't help them. It would take a miracle.

But we forget, sometime, that Jesus is in the miracle business, and that He wants to perform that kind of a miracle whenever He can. But He needs you and me to be his instruments, to make those lost souls available for the miracle. But He directs us, however, to go FIRST, to the lost in our own house.

The Humpty Dumpty attitude is not in accord with the life, the teachings or the actions of Jesus; it is not like the self-help concept espoused by Richard Allen; and it in no way mirrors the attitudes nor the actions of the founding fathers of the Black Church movement. No, it is more in tune with the attitudes of Anti-Christ group; those of the adversaries; those who want to see God's church fall apart; who want to see the church fail.

African Methodist Episcopal Church, Jesus truly wants you to go out, as He has mandated, but He doesn't want you to start on the street, or on the highways, or along the hedgerows. He says to us: "Go first to the lost in your own house." You see, there are some lost in our house who are here, and there are some lost in our house who are not here.

What are we doing about those people who are down and out, and who need some help; about those whom we don't see; about those people in our own house who are lost; about those who became members and got caught in the revolving door (who came in the front door and saw confusion, or dissension or nothing constructive going on, and slipped out the side door or the back door?) What are we doing about the old folks who have time, talents, wisdom and money whom we have let be swept aside by the tides of progress? What are we doing about all of those folks?

As we read on in this parable of the lost coin, we see that the woman comes to realize that the coin is lost because of her negligence, because of her carelessness, because of her indifference, because of her lack of concern. And it goes on to say that she lights a candle and begins to move things around, to sweep the house, to clean things up; to put forth her very best effort to find that precious thing that has been lost. She knows that it's going to be taxing and tiring, and difficult (as it will be for us), and that it might take a long time but, she can't stop (nor can we), until that which is lost has been found.

It's kinda difficult, I know, to get up the desire, the energy and the boldness to go after the lost in our own house, especially when we know that we are partially responsible for some of them being out there. We know that God is directing us to go but, we just feel that we can't do it. We can go after those who don't belong anywhere, but we can't go after those who do; those who belong with us ... The lost in our house ... We come up with all kinds of reasons why we can't visit the sick, or go after the lost, or reach out to those who we might have pushed through the revolving door. And lots of us — Class Leaders, Stewards, Trustees, Ushers — we are motivated by yet another nursery rhyme. “Little Boy Blue come blow your horn. The sheep are in the meadow, the cows are in the corn. Where's the little boy who looks after the sheep? He's under the haystack, fast asleep.” And very often, as our churches are coming apart at the seams, many of us, who could help to make good things happen, are under the haystack, fast asleep. Stewards, Trustees, Choir Members, Church-School Leaders, Ushers, Organization Presidents — no one is excluded — very often, when we are needed the most, we're under the haystack, fast asleep. And I know, sometimes we're just too tired ...; we have to get a little rest; somebody else will get a hold of those lost folks. We won't be concerned about them; they'll be all right ...

But Jesus, in this parable, would not let the woman rest, would He? No! He shows her as being concerned and anxious to atone for her neglect, and determined to bring the lost back into a right relationship. He emphasizes the importance of every individual piece, and how precious each one is, in His sight. None can be lost, no not one; everyone has to be found. And this parable says to us, in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, that we are call connected — and that a house divided against itself cannot stand. We have to seek out the lost in our house if this house is going to stand. Charity begins at home. It is our stewardship responsibility; we can do no less ... We have to brighten the corner where we are, and spread the joy of Jesus in this house. We need to replace the revolving door with an OPEN DOOR OF CONCERN, A WELCOME MAT OF CARING, A RED CARPET OF SHARING, A BASKET OF CHRISTIAN LOVE, AND A WHOLE LOT OF JESUS JOY. We need to seek, FIRST, after the lost in our house.

Unfortunately, too, many of us have the Little Bo Peep philosophy about the lost in our house. Little Bo Peep has lost her sheep and can't tell where to find them. Leave them alone and they'll come home, wagging their tails behind them. But there are at least four things wrong with this way of thinking:

1. We know where they are — we just won't go and get them.
2. More often than not, if we leave them alone, they won't come home unless we carry them in or roll them in.

3. It indicates that we don't have any idea of the grief that is experienced by Jesus when any one soul is lost. And it is counter to the mandate from Jesus for us to go — not to wait but to go. Go to the lost in our house, and preach, and teach, and uplift, and comfort, and heal, and lead, and love.

Let us go to the lost in our own house and, provide the care of a Missionary, speak the Good News of Jesus the Christ as an Evangelist, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, lift the fallen, comfort the comfort-less, visit those in prison and speak words of truth with power; and be willing to do all of this as one of the body of Christ — as the “called out” ones. And when we do this, the lost in our house will be found, the house will not be divided against itself, and the house that has been entrusted to our care by God, will stand.

And when we have fulfilled our Christian responsibilities, (1) as with the shepherd when the lost sheep was found, and (2) with the woman when the lost coin was found, and (3) with the father when the prodigal son was found — ***there will be joy in the presence of God's angels when the lost of The African Methodist Episcopal Church are found.***

Something to Think About

1. WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THE GREAT COMMISSION?

2. HOW CAN THOSE IN YOUR COMPONENT GET INVOLVED IN THE CHURCH GROWTH EFFORT?

3. DO THOSE IN YOUR COMPONENT AREA HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY IN THE CHURCH GROWTH EFFORT?

4. ARE YOU, IN ANY WAY, RESPONSIBLE FOR THE LOST IN OUR HOUSE?

5. WHAT ROLE CAN YOU PLAY IN LEADING THE UNSAVED TO A COMMITMENT?

6. 75-90% OF THOSE WHO WHO BECOME NEW MEMBERS ARE RELATIVES OR FRIENDS. WHAT PART WILL YOU PLAY IN THE “CHURCH GROWTH EFFORT?”
