

My mother, whom you have just met, is the most brilliant seamstress I know.

When I became a church professional in my early twenties, she made two new suits for me to wear. One was deep, dark, pinkish-red, with a skirt hemline just below the knees. She called it my “power suit.”

My mother knew that clothes were powerful. She knew the energy of the pink suit was electric and daring and active, and would inspire the same kind of energy in me: to speak my truth boldly and proudly. She was literally sewing the strength and the courage and the encouragement of her own powerful motherly love into the very fabric of my physical identity, as she labored over this garment. She also knew the vibrant colors and eye-catching style of the pink suit would draw appropriate visible attention from my colleagues, as I was trying to make my mark in the early days of my career.

That was what she meant by “power.”

It was personal, and it was political.

And it worked.

But my very wise mother knew that power is not always bold, proud, vibrant, or courageous. So she made another suit for me to wear. This one was velvety beige, with a long skirt and a beautiful quilted jacket. She called it “soft power.”

She knew that the softer, rounder, more comforting color and texture of the beige suit were a powerful complement to the stark energy of the pink one. She knew the energy of this second suit was reflective and meditative, and would inspire me to adopt a similar attitude. She knew my colleagues would be drawn to the quilted jacket, and that it would be an invitation for meaningful conversation about family and craftsmanship—or craftswomanship, in this case. She knew this kind of “soft power” would also help me make a meaningful contribution in the early days of my career. Because it would invite other people into a shared relationship of reflective power, in a completely different way than the pink suit would.

My mother wanted me to be a powerful person, so she literally ‘clothed me with power’ from the heights of her motherly love. From now on—no matter whether she is physically with me, or carried up into heaven—the power of her love literally clothes me.

It has become the foundation of my identity. The same way this water, for our baptism, forms “the font of our identity.”

And so it is not just a throw-away line in the lesson from Luke when Jesus tells the disciples they will be “clothed with power” when they receive the gift of baptism in the Holy Spirit in the festival of Pentecost that is just around the corner.

The apostle Paul says something similar in his letter to the Galatians. “As many of you as were baptized into Christ,” Paul says, “have *clothed yourselves* with Christ.”

It is a different kind of “power suit” we wear, as we are baptized into Christ’s body, but it is a suit of power all the same, steadfastly stitched by a mothering God, whose love for all her children is the greatest power we will ever know.

But of course the disciples to whom Jesus speaks in our Scripture Lesson from Luke do not feel powerful at all! They have given all they have to follow Jesus. And now that he is gone, they have lost everything. They think. Not only that, but the disciples to whom Jesus speaks, in the Scripture Lesson from Luke, live in a powerful system of empire that intentionally places those who are Greek in a position of power over those who are Jew. That intentionally places those who are free in a position of power over those who are enslaved. That intentionally places those who are male in a position of power over those who are female.

Which means that ultimate social power belongs to the Greek free male and ultimate social powerlessness belongs to the Jewish slave female. And at least one of the disciples hearing the message of Jesus is the Jewish slave female Joanna, referred to in the eighth chapter of Luke’s Gospel.

Jesus is telling people who feel utterly powerless, who think they have lost everything, who think that the message and the messenger for whom they have given their whole lives has succumbed to the power of Rome, in the form of a cross. Jesus is telling people who feel utterly powerless that their heavenly mother will clothe them in a true “power suit,” so that *they* may take his message of repentance and reconciliation to the very people who have “power” over them!

You can imagine their disbelief!

But they have seen an empty tomb. And a risen Christ. And now they hear that the power of the gospel hope still lives through *them*, as *they* are “clothed with power” to carry it on. Even if they *think* they have lost everything by losing their leader.

You have the power, Jesus says.

In fact, you had it all along . . .

So, “I am sending upon you what my Father promised,” Jesus tells these powerless-turned-powerful disciples-turned-apostles. So that **YOU** may be clothed with the same power of resurrection that I am, Jesus says. So that **YOU** may now take the gospel hope—of a new way of life—among the “powers that be,” even to the Gentiles.

Because in your baptismal power suit, whether it is deep dark pinkish red or quilted soft velvety beige, there is no longer Jew or Greek. There is no longer slave or free. There is no longer male and female.

For all are one in Christ Jesus.

Your baptismal power suit gives you strength to overcome the ethnic and economic and gender disempowerment of the society in which you live. And instead be transformed into a discipleship of equals.

And your baptismal power suit gives you the strength to overcome your “inner demons,” too. So that your God-given power might enhance—rather than diminish—the power of others. So that your God-given creative and life-affirming power might finally overwhelm the powers of domination, control, or imposing your will upon another.

This is the good news of the resurrection gospel! This is the good of the baptismal Spirit of Pentecost! And so as we gather here, on this last Sunday in the season of Easter, watching the risen Christ ascend to the heavens, preparing for our official joining as Pastor and People in the service of installation this afternoon, wondering what in the world will happen next, like those disciples in our Scripture Lesson from Luke this morning, our heavenly mother is stitching us up a couple of power suits, preparing to clothe us with power from on high, to strengthen our own creative, empowering, life-affirming discipleship of equals.

So that we, too, may go out to the very people among whom we think we are powerless and proclaim a new way of life, sealed in our baptism and strengthened by the Holy Spirit. Every time we confront our own powerlessness, our own prejudices, our own violence, and our own despair. Every time we speak a word of justice and peace. Every time we feed the hungry, sate the thirsty, clothe the naked, visit the sick. Every time we preach the gospel, in word and in deed, challenging the church to be faithful to its calling of repairing the world one stitch at a time.

So when that baptism in the Spirit who clothes us with power comes, may we use our power wisely and well, trusting in the One whose steadfast love empowers us beyond anything we can possibly imagine.

I pray it may be so.

Amen.