

Acts 1:1-11
(Isaiah 11:1-5; Luke 3:15-17; 21-22)
“You Will Receive Power and You Will Be My Witnesses”

Introduction

Last week, we celebrated Pentecost, the third great festival of the Christian church. On Christmas, we celebrate the Incarnation, God’s Son being born as a human to share our life, die our death, and rise to reconcile us to God and give us life. During Passion Week and Easter, we celebrate Christ’s sacrifice on our behalf and his victory over sin and death and everything that would separate us from God. And on Pentecost, we celebrate the fulfillment of God’s promise to pour out his Spirit upon his people, no longer merely living *among* us, but now living *in* us.

This morning, I invite you to step back with me to the days between Easter and Pentecost, the days when Jesus prepared his disciples for what was coming, when he would return to the Father and pour out his Spirit upon them. We don’t study this merely as a bit of Christian history, but rather as the key to our life in Christ, the key to our life together as God’s people, and the key to our life in the world, living as the people we were created and redeemed to be. If your spiritual experience up to now has been far from what you had hoped it would be, if you have not yet begun to know the reality of the new life that seems so clearly promised to God’s people in the Scriptures, then these verses are able to point you toward the path to possessing the inheritance God’s Word promises you as a child of God.

We note in the first verse of chapter one that this is the second part of an account already begun in the gospel of Luke. Both parts of this account are addressed to Theophilus, which means lover of God, whether a single person of that name or simply Luke’s way of addressing those who love God. He tells us at the beginning of his gospel that he is working from eyewitness accounts and that he has made an effort to understand and record accurately the events surrounding Jesus’ life and ministry. The unanimous testimony of the early church was that this particular account in two parts was the work of Dr Luke, a physician who accompanied the apostle Paul on some of his mission journeys.

The earliest title of this work was simply Acts and, as several commentators suggest, this is really the best name for it, because it recounts not only the acts of the apostles, but also the acts of the Holy Spirit, and the continuing ministry of Jesus Christ through his Spirit in the lives of his people. It is aimed particularly at reminding us of our history, of God’s fulfillment of his promises, and of the mission entrusted to us as the people of God. It should serve as God’s instrument in reminding us of all that is ours in Christ Jesus, and of all that God stands ready to do in and through us who have ears to hear, eyes to see, and hearts made ready by grace to follow Jesus. This morning, note four ways that Jesus prepared his first apostles, and would prepare us, to join the living God on mission.

Body

1. Jesus chose them (1:2).

The clear declaration throughout Scripture of God's sovereignty should serve both to humble us and to encourage us. We cannot use religion or morality or education or good deeds to become God's people or to equip and empower ourselves for the mission God has entrusted to us. So, it humbles us. But God tells us over and over again that we are his beloved people, even his children, because in his grace and mercy he has chosen us to be his. So, it also greatly encourages us. Here, Luke tells us that his disciples – now called apostles, because he is sending them as his emissaries into the surrounding world – are his apostles precisely because he chose them to be his.

So, too, if you and I are his, it is because in his great mercy and love he chose us to be his children and aims to entrust to each of us our part of the family business, our own part of the mission, which (as we will see) is his plan to reclaim and redeem from every nation sons and daughters who will also serve as his emissaries and make him known in every sphere of life.

2. Jesus revealed himself to them (1:3).

It is interesting that Luke emphasizes this, telling us that “by many proofs” Jesus convinced them that it was really he, the same Jesus who once walked among them, loved them, taught them and gave them hope, who was now risen from the dead and once again in their midst loving, teaching and preparing them for what was coming.

While his resurrection appearances were unique to those first apostles, constituting them as what Luke called “witnesses to his resurrection” (1:22), nevertheless, Jesus reveals himself even now to those whom he has chosen to be his. How does he do that? He does it first through “his body,” the church, when it truly functions as the church, the community of Christ, serving in his power and in his name, doing the things he did, offering the gospel message and living the gospel-transformed life. Then, as he draws us to himself, we know him in the intimate study of his written Word, as we read the Bible as God's Word *to us*, God speaking to us, teaching us, chastening and encouraging, reminding us of the history of his dealings with his people, promising us salvation, showing us the transformed pattern of life to which those are called who have been loved by God and are responding to his love by loving one another and serving the broken world around them. We meet him in the meal he has left for us, and in the ways he speaks to us even through creation and through one another. The whole earth is ablaze with his glory, if his grace has opened our eyes to see.

3. Jesus promised to empower them for the mission (1:4-5).

This is key. He did not say that his disciples could do what he had called them to do. Quite to the contrary: He told them to return to the city and “wait for the promise of the Father,” the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit who would soon be poured out upon them. Without him, we cannot truly obey.

However much the church at large may debate the nature and meaning of Pentecost, this much should be clear to all: Unless the power of God has laid hold of us and is transforming us from the inside out, unless we are learning to live out of his power rather than our own, unless we realize that all that we are and have is meant to be surrendered to him for his use and service, we are simply religious folk who may know the language of the gospel but who lack its power and reality. It is for this power and reality of God’s Spirit that we should always and everywhere be willing to wait and pray until God comes down again in power and fills us afresh with his life.

4. Jesus spelled out the mission he was entrusting to them (1:6-8).

Jesus described the mission of God that alone explains the meaning of human history and that calls us to find our place within that great mission. He did this by addressing a two-fold misunderstanding expressed in the disciples’ question, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” (1:6).

Their first misunderstanding regarded *time*: The Spirit does not give us a special insider’s knowledge of the chronology of history’s end, but rather the power to be Christ’s witnesses – entrusting to us the great mission of God that will issue in a God-glorifying end of history.

The second misunderstanding regarded *space*: the Spirit does not bring a kingdom with geographic boundaries, but rather a kingdom extending to the ends of the earth and embracing people from every nation, every ethnic group, and every language on earth. *And that mission is ours!*

Conclusion

What of you at the start of another summer? What are your goals for the days ahead? What will the things you are now pursuing matter to you when you look back on your life and ask what it signified? What will you think when you lie dying of the dreams you are dreaming and the choices you are making today? Here we have a call to the only life that finally matters, and the offer of God’s own power to pursue such a life. Do not close your ears or your hearts to the Spirit as he calls you to himself and offers you a life abundant and free, rich with meaning – and everlasting.

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