

When the Spirit Comes

April 29, 2012

1 John 3:16-24 Acts 1:7-8

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¹⁶ This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. ¹⁷ If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? ¹⁸ Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. ¹⁹ This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence ²⁰ whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. ²¹ Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God ²² and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him. ²³ And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. ²⁴ Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.

Acts 1:7-8

After his resurrection, Jesus showed himself to the disciples and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

⁷ He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

You know the drill;

When the Holy Spirit comes you will receive _(power)_, to be my _(witnesses)_, in _(Jerusalem)_, _(Judea)_, _(Samaria)_, and _(the ends of the earth)_.

It ought to sound familiar – we’re in a holding pattern, as the first disciples were, between Easter and Pentecost. I’m not fond of holding patterns – air traffic circling waiting for their place in line to land. Standing in a checkout line in a store, waiting our turn to pay for our purchases. Holding patterns; waiting for the next episode of our favorite TV show or counting the days until the release of an anticipated movie, even simply waiting for the coffee to brew.

Being in a holding pattern with this text doesn't mean that we're not doing anything or that we're not making progress – it simply means that God's sense of time is not like ours. The disciples had 40 days with Jesus after the resurrection, and they hoped that Jesus was going to rise up and throw the bums out. Jesus told them to wait, to stay in Jerusalem until they received the Holy Spirit. Hopefully, in this time of holding, we, like the early disciples are listening to the Lord, growing in our faith, and preparing for the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

As we looked at this passage the past two weeks we noted that there are three basic elements to this promise: there is a resource, a purpose, and a direction.

Two weeks ago we talked about the resource: power from the Holy Spirit. We defined power as energy aligned and applied in a manner to accomplish work. Which led us last week to explore for what purpose was the Spirit to come: When the Spirit comes you will receive _(power)_, to be my _(witnesses)_

So we've looked at the resource (power from the Holy Spirit), and the purpose (to be his witnesses), so that brings us to the (direction).

What does the text tell us about the direction?

When the Holy Spirit comes you will receive _(power)_, to be my _(witnesses)_, in _(Jerusalem)_, _(Judea)_, _(Samaria)_, and _(the ends of the earth)_.

The direction is outward... The text from John's letter also points us outward. *And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.* I can't tell you how many times I have heard that half quoted – "this is his command to believe in the name of God's son, Jesus Christ" and be saved. Period. End of quote. But that's not where the scripture stopped. That's not where Jesus stopped. That's not where Spirit empowered Christians with a purpose stop. ... "and to love one another as he commanded us." The direction is outward.

The Christian life is not about relishing the salvation we have received in Christ's sacrifice, or about celebrating God's grace to us. The Christian life is about being a witness to God's grace, which yes

we have received and celebrate, but which we testify is also available to all who would choose to turn from sin and follow Jesus in to life. The purpose of a Spirit empowered life is to be witnesses in (Jerusalem), (Judea), (Samaria), and (the ends of the earth).

So, if we take the text seriously we should all pack our bags and fly to Jerusalem next week to start witnessing right? No, I don't think that's what we're supposed to get out of this text. Where were the disciples when Jesus said this?

"do not leave Jerusalem until..." So, Jerusalem is where they were. What did Jerusalem mean in their lives?

It was the site of the Temple, religious center, where they went to worship. They were not residents of Jerusalem; they were from Galilee – up north. They weren't 'Yankees' but they were 'northerners.' Weekly Sabbath gatherings were in their local synagogue but, like other devout Jews, they came to Jerusalem for the high holy days. No modern religious expression really has any equivalent for the role of the Jerusalem Temple in the life of Jews at the time of Jesus. Even for Catholics who have the Vatican, or Muslims who have Mecca, or Mormons who have Salt Lake City, a pilgrimage to "the Temple" might be a once in a lifetime goal, not a multiple times per year expectation.

So Jerusalem, for the disciples, represented the religious center of their faith, the place where all Jews gathered in the Presence of God. Perhaps the best we can approximate that concept to our own setting is that the church itself is our Jerusalem, the center of our faith, as we gather and expectantly anticipate the Presence. Their local synagogue gatherings were teachings, lessons, prayers, but no one quite expected the Presence as it was expected in Jerusalem.

Like the disciples, who would have called the Temple the dwelling place of God, we often call the church building 'God's house.' We know full well that the dwelling of God is not in buildings made with human hands, but in repentant and contrite hearts. We know that God inhabits the praises of his people. Yet we anticipate that in this place where we gather in His name, His presence will be particularly apparent.

Still, sometimes when we gather not everyone expects or anticipates the Presence of God. Some come with expectant anticipation and do experience the Presence. Others come with

expectations, not of God's presence, but of familiar, comfortable liturgy, songs and rituals which leave us with warm, happy feelings.

What is missing in both of those sets of expectations is the *purpose* for which we are empowered by the Holy Spirit. It is not just to experience the Presence, or to partake in familiar rituals... there is a greater purpose, defined by God, not us...

When the spirit comes you will receive (power) to (be my witnesses) .

Witnesses starting in "Jerusalem;" starting right here. Here is where we begin to witness, amongst friends in faith, telling each other about our experience of the presence of the risen Christ in the past week...

As we volunteered at General Conference last week – Theresa witnessed that she was moved by hearing the Lord's Prayer in multiple languages simultaneously. Joe witnessed the 'Spirit's presence' as Bishop Goodpaster challenged us now, immediately, move! To follow Christ we have to move from the pew into the world. Jim witnessed that greeting people at the airport felt like Jesus was greeting through us.

In the Emmaus men's weekend, and the women's weekend this week, the Spirit's presence was manifest.

Where have you seen, experienced the risen Christ?... As we lean on the rock of ages, and by our witness to our experience of the living Christ, we lead each other to deeper faith, a more sensitive awareness, a firmer commitment to God's purpose of being empowered as witnesses to the risen Christ.

Our witness begins here, in the community of faith, sharing our God sightings with our fellow believers, and we will have opportunity to continue sharing over lunch... but the direction is...

Next week we'll look at the next step in the direction; witnessing in Judea.