

A New Era

Acts 1:1-11

INTRODUCTION

As we have already said, and as you no doubt gathered as the first lesson was read, this is Ascension Sunday. Ascension Sunday is one of the festival days of the Christian calendar, a day on which we commemorate the events described in Acts 1, namely:

- On the 40th day of the season of Easter (or 39 days after Easter Sunday).
- Following what might technically be considered His Last Supper, Jesus gave His disciples their final instructions.

Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised ... (Acts 1:4)

- And then right before their very eyes He began to float up toward heaven and disappeared from their sight.
- Just like that, everything changed.

As I tried to picture that moment, here's what I saw:

A bunch of people dressed in robes saying goodbye to their teacher.

Does that remind you of anything? High school commencements.

- We are in the middle of season where a lot of commencing happens.
- Did you know that 10 young people in this congregation are graduating from high school this year?
- They will leave their educational experiences and commence (or begin) a new chapter in their lives, going such places as the United States Air Force Academy, Ohio University, Wittenberg University, Concord University and more.

So it was with the disciples. For the past three years Jesus walked with them, taught them, laughed with them, ate with them. But in a matter of moments ... Jesus was gone.

- It was time to leave their educational environment.
- They were ready to be on their own.
- These circumstances ushered in a new era for them.

That "new era" theme is a good way to introduce you to the final NALC congregation in this series of sermons, another church that meets somewhere other than in a typical sanctuary. Meet GracePointe.

- The church is located in Sedona, AZ, about 100 miles north of Phoenix.
- Their pastor is Dona Johnson.
 - I came to know Pastor Dona when she was pastor of Christ the King Church in Centerville.
 - When she retired from that congregation, it closed, and we inherited those three canvases in the fellowship hall that communicate the Great Commission.

- This congregation has the remarkable distinction of being the only one of the congregations I have highlighted that has already been visited by people from our church. Steve and Andy Schumacher attended there about a year ago while on vacation.
- GracePointe meets at 10 a.m. each week in a coffee shop in the Red Cliff Shopping Plaza along Highway 89A. A store front.
- When Pastor Dona retired from her church in Centerville, she had every intention of being retired. She and her husband Michael moved to Arizona to retire.
- But when they got there, they couldn't find a church they liked. And they met several people who felt the same way.
- So they began to meet together for Bible studies and after a few weeks it became a church.
- For Pastor Dona, it was a new ear. She was really living out what Jesus said in Acts 1:8:

... you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:8)

Witnessing in Jerusalem, and in Centerville, and in Sedona. One era ends. And a new era commences.

Each of us has stood on the threshold of something new, a time when our responsibilities became increased.

- June 28, 1980. My wedding day. A new era.
- February 14, 1983. The day my first child was born.
- Every time I stood before a congregation as its new senior pastor.

And now it was the disciples' turn. And what a major responsibility they had. Jesus Himself identified His mission as:

... to seek and to save the lost. (Luke 19:10)

And now He has gone. And the mission has been turned over to them. It's a new era! How would these ordinary men and women ever hope to accomplish all that Jesus set out before them?

The text identifies two tools they needed:

TOOL #1: THEY NEEDED A STRATEGY TO PURSUE

And Jesus gave them one. Verse 8:

... you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:8)

His strategy was a simple one. First it began with having something to say. They were to say what they had seen. Be my witnesses.

I have been called as a witness in one court case in my lifetime. All I was asked to do was to tell what I knew to be true from my own personal experience. What did I see? What did I hear? What happened to me personally? That's it.

- A witness does not say "I think this might have happened." No, a witness only says "This is what I know to be true."

One day Jesus healed a blind man on the Sabbath Day. That didn't sit well with the religious leaders so they called the formerly blind man in to set the record straight. John 9 records their conversation:

They summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to God by telling the truth," they said. "We know this man is a sinner." He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!"

All he said was what he knew. He was a witness.

The second part of the strategy was to witness wherever life took them.

... you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:8)

For our understanding, let's say it like this:

... you will be my witnesses in Springfield, and in all Ohio and to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:8)

That's my way of describing our outreach strategy for this congregation. For Pastor Dona, it was Centerville and Sedona. We spend most of our time in our Jerusalem, so that is where most of our witness will happen. It is a simple strategy.

Tell what you know wherever you are.

There is a story about a barber who heard this lesson preached in his church one Sunday. So he thought that he should share his faith with his customers. That, he concluded, was his Jerusalem. The next morning as he unlocked the door to his shop he said, "Today I am going to be a witness to the first man that walks through my door."

Within moments a man came in and said, "I want a haircut and a shave!" The barber said, "Sure, just sit in the seat and I'll be with you in a moment." The barber went in the back and prayed a quick desperate prayer saying, "God, the first customer came in and I'm going to witness to him. Give me the wisdom to know just the right thing to say to him. Amen."

Then, quickly the barber came out with his sharpened razor in one hand and his Bible in the other, and he said to his customer: "Sir ... God wants me to ask you a question. Are you ready to die?"

Sometimes we understand the strategy, but we need a little help on the delivery. That's why we need the second tool.

#2: THEY NEEDED A SOURCE OF POWER

The first half of verse 8 reads like this:

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you ... (Acts 1:8)

Harry Reider tells a story about the first car that he ever owned. He was sixteen years old and his father took him to a car auction and bought him a 1957 Ford for \$75. Harry said the car was "pink." His father insisted the color was really "coral."

"Dad, I can't drive a pink car to school!" to which his father replied, "Son, a poor ride is better than a proud walk." Harry said that his dad said it so convincingly that he figured it was probably somewhere in the Bible.

Then his dad opened the hood and to Harry's surprise was a 390 engine that had two four-barrel carburetors. The car had been a South Carolina highway patrol car and the engine in it was known as the "police interceptor." At that time, there was no other engine that was as powerful as this one.

Harry said there were some very interesting things that happened when he drove his pink car. Corvettes or other high-end roadsters would pull up beside him at red lights. The drivers in the other cars would look over at him and laugh. Harry would just nod and then turn his attention back to the light. When the light changed, he put the accelerator to the floor and would shock them by leaving them in the dust.

Harry says "That old car didn't look like much but there was incredible power under the hood."

What we have to understand is that there is power that has come to our lives after we have received the Holy Ghost. You may not look like much but if the Spirit of God can ever get a bit and bridle on your spirit, the world will be shocked at the transformation that takes place.

It is the power of the Holy Spirit that can take ordinary people like those disciples and turn them into witnesses capable of sharing what they had experience to the entire world.

APPLICATION

When you and I start to walk with Jesus, it is a new era in our lives. The Scriptures tell us:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

And like those first disciples we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to be witnesses in all the places life takes us.

Where will life take you today? Amen.