

Sermon Series: Outward

May 28 – Week 7

Sermon: Going back to how the Spirit moves the church

Scripture for Reflection:
Acts 2:1-21 (22-36)

Context:

The book of Acts describes the wondrous events on the day of Pentecost after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Often called “the birthday of the church,” Pentecost is about the giving of the Holy Spirit to the first followers of Jesus. In this series, we have reflected on ways the Spirit drew people outward. This week we conclude by going back to the beginning.

1. We speak of God using metaphors, and this is especially true when we talk about the Holy Spirit. Images of fire, wind, breath, a dove, and flaming tongues are some that have been used throughout the centuries. What images of the Holy Spirit do you find helpful?
2. In Acts 2:1-11, what did the Spirit allow people to do?
3. Can you think of a time when language barriers or cultural barriers prevented you from understanding someone? Describe that experience.
4. The Spirit enabled the early church to communicate Christ in many ways and in many languages. In your local community, what different “languages” do people speak? (Linguistic, cultural, political, etc.)
5. Has your understanding of the Holy Spirit changed over time? If yes, how so?
6. How have you experienced the work of the Holy Spirit in your life?

7. Where do you see the wind of the Spirit moving in and through our congregation?

8. What spiritual practices draw us closer to the person of the Holy Spirit?

May 21 – Week 5

Prayer Weekend

Scripture for Reflection:
Acts 3:1-13

Context:

The Holy Spirit came upon the church, and 3,000 men and women were saved (see Acts 2). This is known as Pentecost, the birthday of the church. Signs and wonders then accompanied those who believed. Peter and John continued their ministry of healing as they encountered a man lame from birth who begged for money at the temple gates.

1. What caused Peter to redirect the conversation when the man asked Peter and John for money? (See Acts 3:3.)
2. Was it Peter's own power or was it the Holy Spirit that led to the lame man being healed? Did Peter take credit for this miracle? (See Acts 3:12-13.)
3. How did Peter and John's faith and confidence in God factor into this man's healing?
4. What impact did this miracle have on the early church?
5. Have you ever experienced a healing or miracle in your life? Have you ever witnessed a miracle or healing in someone else's life? What was your response? How did it change you?
6. Why does it seem like some people receive healing and others don't?
7. Is there any correlation between faith and miracles?
8. Any other thoughts?

May 14 – Week 5

Sermon: Those Turning the World Upside Down, or The Almost Christian

Scripture for Reflection:
Acts 16:16-34

Context:

The early church has expanded outward, and Paul, accompanied by Silas, are on Paul's second missionary journey. This takes them to Philippi, the capital city in Macedonia. (The book of Philippians was written as the result of Paul and Silas's founding of the church in Philippi). While there, Paul and Silas are tormented by a fortune teller. Paul casts a demon out of her, and the girl's owner incites a riot that leads to Paul and Silas being put in jail.

1. Why did Paul and Silas get thrown in jail? (See vs. 19.)
2. While in jail, Paul and Silas could have lamented their misfortune and complained to God, but they didn't. Instead, they began to worship God. How do you most typically respond to adversity? Can worship change one's perspective?
3. The Scripture says the prisoners were listening to Paul and Silas worship God. Does our worship of God lead others to take notice?
4. God sent an earthquake that freed the prisoners, including Paul and Silas. Did God free them simply because of their praying and singing? Or, did God act independently of their acts of piety?
5. The jailer wanted to know what he had to do to be saved. If someone came up to you and asked you that same question, how would you respond?

May 7 – Week 4

Sermon: The Jerusalem Council

Scripture for Reflection:
Acts 15:1-21

Context:

This week's text features the largest church controversy in Acts: the question of Gentile inclusion. Based on their reading of Old Testament Scriptures, some leaders thought Gentiles who came to believe in Jesus had to become Jews (with males being circumcised) in order to be included in the church. Others—like Paul and Peter—sought fully to include Gentile believers without requiring them to obey all Jewish regulations.

1. Can you recall a time in your life when you felt truly welcomed? Can you recall a time when you did not feel welcomed? What impact did these events have on you?
2. There were two “sides” to the debate about Gentile inclusion. Acts only reports one side’s response, seen most clearly in the speeches of Peter and James. How do you think the opposing side could have countered their words?
3. Many Old Testament passages warn the people of Israel to stay away from Gentiles. And there are other passages that look ahead to a day when Gentiles would be included as God’s people (like the passage from Amos quoted in Acts 15:16-17). How do we move forward when Christians from different “sides” both quote the Bible in their arguments with each other?
4. About the Gentile Christians, Peter says “in cleansing their hearts by faith he [God] has made no distinction between them and us” (Acts 15:9). Are there ways that Christians today have an “Us vs Them” mentality?
5. What does it mean to be one in Christ?

6. What groups of Christians today have the most difficult time being included?
7. Eventually, Gentiles in Acts are allowed to join the church without becoming Jews, but what are they asked to do in verses 19-20?
8. By the time of Acts 15, the church was roughly 20 to 30 years old and had experienced different forms of internal conflict. How do stories like this inform how we can engage in conflict in healthy, Christ-honoring ways?
9. Can you share a story of reconciliation that you have experienced or witnessed in your life?

April 30 – Week 3

Sermon: Feeding the Faithful

Scripture for Reflection:
Acts 6:1-7

(Context: The early church was growing rapidly and increasing in size. Fresh challenges come with growth. The key is the response to those challenges. This text will help us to identify those challenges and how to best respond).

1. What was the primary challenge the early church faced?
2. What steps did they take to meet this challenge?
3. What might have happened if they didn't meet the challenge?
4. Can you identify a time when you faced challenges to growth?
How did you respond?
5. The apostles knew they needed to delegate this ministry for their own welfare and the welfare of others. What would have happened if they hadn't delegated this ministry to 7 other disciples?
6. Why is it important for Christians to serve based upon their talents and spiritual gifts?
7. Have you ever felt that your gifts and talents didn't align with where you were serving? How did it hinder you?
8. Do your gifts and talents align with where you currently are serving?

9. All ministries in the church are important. How did the apostles validate the ministry of the 7 men who were called to oversee the daily distribution of food?

10. What was the outcome of the apostles' decision? (See verse 7).

April 23 – Week 2

Sermon: Faith Sharing

Scripture for Reflection:
Acts 8:26-40

(Context: The fledgling New Testament church is undergoing great persecution. But even so, the church is growing as it spreads outward from Jerusalem)

1. Who is Philip? We know Philip is a believer who has been filled with the Holy Spirit. But this is not Philip the Apostle mentioned in Acts 1:13, nor is it the Philip mentioned in Acts 6:1-7, who is chosen to wait on tables.
2. How important is it to know that God uses ordinary people to share the good news?
3. The Eunuch is a seeker after God. He is reading from the prophet Isaiah but has not heard about Jesus. He needs guidance and direction from someone who understands. How important is it for us not to assume that people have a full understanding of who Jesus is and what he came to do? How can we identify those who need guidance in the Scriptures? How can we receive guidance in the Scriptures?
4. The Holy Spirit spoke to Philip, “Go over and walk along beside the carriage” (vs.29). How can we grow and discern the voice of the Spirit speaking to us? Has the Holy Spirit ever prompted you to act? What was the occasion? What did you do?
5. Philip hears the Eunuch reading the Scripture from Isaiah aloud. He then asks him the question: “Do you understand what you are reading?” How important is it to ask leading questions like this one when it comes to sharing Christian faith with someone?

6. You do not have to be an expert in the Bible to share Christian faith with someone. What is necessary to know about the Bible when it comes to sharing Christian faith?

7. The Eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, was the prophet talking about himself or someone else?" (vs.34). Philip then began to tell him the good news about Jesus. What approach would you have used to introduce the Eunuch to Jesus?

8. How was the Eunuch's life changed as a result of his time with Philip? What did he ask Philip to do (vs. 36-38)?

9. While it is true that the Holy Spirit brings about conversion, we are still called to cooperate in that process. In other words, God uses us to plant the seed of the gospel in people's lives. How can we be more effective at sowing the seed of the gospel in people's lives?

April 16

Sermon: A New Day with Jesus

Scripture for Reflection:

Acts 1:1-14

(See also the story of ascension in Luke 24:44-53.)

Optional activity—Luke and Acts were written by the same author. Yet in Luke 24 and Acts 1, we find two different versions of Jesus' farewell and ascension. What similarities and differences do you notice between these two ascension passages?

1. Churches are usually filled with worshippers on Easter Sunday, but how can followers of Jesus keep Easter with us every day? What prevents us from keeping the resurrection always before us?
2. The books of Luke and Acts are addressed to someone named "Theophilus," whose name literally means "God-lover." Some scholars think this refers to a particular person, while others think it is a general title for anyone who loves God. Or perhaps both. What do you think about these options?
3. Do you know what your name "means"? Do you know why you were given your name?
4. The disciples are told to go back to Jerusalem and to stay there until they have received power from God. Why do you think some of them would have been hesitant to go back to Jerusalem?
5. Luke wants us to know that Jesus ascended into heaven. Reflect on the ascension. What hope and encouragement do you find here? Does the church—in general—need to celebrate the ascension more fully?
6. Jesus tells his followers to wait (Acts 1:4). How comfortable are you with holy *waiting*?

7. During this same time, the followers of Jesus were “constantly devoting themselves to prayer” (1:14). How does prayer sustain us during times of waiting?
8. Would you consider yourself devoted to prayer? Are there hindrances to prayer that you need to remove?
9. It is sometimes said that the main character of the book of Acts is the Holy Spirit. How does Acts 1 prepare the reader to see the work of the Spirit? What will the Spirit do (verse 8)?