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MISSIONS 2024
Together . . . to the People
November 3 – 30, 2024
Preaching Voice: Apostle

The Book of Acts

“Thank God for *The Acts of the Apostles*! The New Testament would be greatly impoverished without it. We are given four accounts of Jesus, but only one of the early church. So the Acts occupies an indispensable place in the Bible . . . It is important, first, for its historical record . . . Without the Acts we could not have reconstructed the course of Paul’s intrepid missionary career or known how the gospel spread to the strategic cities of the Roman world . . . The Acts is also important, however, for the contemporary inspiration which it brings us . . . It has, in fact, been a salutary exercise for the Christian church of every century to compare itself with the church of the first, and to seek to recapture something of its confidence, enthusiasm, vision and power.”

-John Stott, *The Spirit, The Church, and the World: The Message of Acts*, InterVarsity Press, 1990, pp. 5-6

While our church’s commitment to and investment in missions is a year-round reality, we have chosen to spend each November focusing specifically on our call to take the Gospel message to our city, state, nation, and world. We also give attention to our World Mission Offering during this month—even though our people give to this offering throughout the year.

With that said, our theme this year is **Together . . . to the People**. This short statement encapsulates our calling as a church. We are engaged in this ministry *together*. And we are going . . . *to the people*.

To guide us in this conversation on Sunday mornings, we will use the Book of Acts. As John Stott so eloquently states in the quote above, we are all indebted to Luke, the first church historian, for this significant account of the role of the Holy Spirit, the missional impulse of the early church, and the amazing power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Each week, we will highlight a focal passage from the Book of Acts for our *Together in Word* text for the week. We will also provide

a *narrative reading* for those who would like to read more of the Book of Acts together. If you choose to read the narrative readings, you will have completed the Book of Acts by the end of the month.

In the Book of Acts, Luke picks up where he left off in his Gospel. He provides a brief summary of the teachings of Jesus for the 40 days after His resurrection. He then shares the Great Commission from Jesus in Acts 1:6-8 and then provides the narrative about the Ascension of Christ. Again, we are indebted to him for this pivotal information!

Luke moves quickly to tell the riveting story of the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church at the Pentecost Festival immediately following the Ascension of Jesus. Here Luke describes how God fulfilled the ancient prophecy from Joel, given some 800 years earlier and the fulfillment of Jesus's promise in Acts 1:4-5,8. The Holy Spirit was given to the Church! Nothing will ever be the same!

Once God's people were empowered by the Holy Spirit, equipped for mission, and instructed fully by Jesus (Acts 1:2), they were ready to fulfill the *Missio Dei* (the Mission of God). God called His people to take the message of Jesus to all the people of the world. Wow. What an incredible undertaking!

Luke then shares the story of how the early followers of Jesus embraced this calling and lived it out in real time. He gives special attention to Peter and Paul as these two men were catalytic leaders of the early church. He shares how the Gospel spread across the ancient world, churches were established, Paul's letters were distributed, and thousands of Jews and Gentiles joined this movement to follow *The Jesus Way*. It is a remarkable story!

With that said, let me remind us all that the calling of God, shared specifically with the early followers of Jesus, is still in force today. God has empowered, equipped, and instructed us so that we might play our role in the fulfillment of this commission. There is much work still to be done. Our church is engaged in numerous endeavors that serve as our answer to this call to take the message of Jesus to the people of our world.

We recognize the task before us is huge and challenging. We must join hands and hearts with fellow believers across the world to fulfill this call. For us as a church, we must do this . . . *together!*

So – first of all, thank you, Lord for allowing us to be a part of this divine mission! Thank you, Lord for empowering, equipping, and instructing us. May you find us faithful as we live out the call ----- **Together . . . to the people!**

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November 3, 2024: *God's People: Equipped for the Mission of God*
Acts 1:1-8

Luke opens his follow-up to his Gospel with a brief introduction that summarizes the 40 days of Jesus's interactions with His disciples. Luke points out that Jesus spent time offering further instruction to His followers about the Kingdom of God. He also promised them they would be baptized by the Holy Spirit and empowered for the calling placed on their lives. In other words, Jesus gave instruction needed and the Holy Spirit provided the enablement needed. This is still true today. We have the instructions we need to fulfill the calling of God to His mission today. We also have been empowered and equipped by the Holy Spirit. May God use us in this grand endeavor!

Narrative Reading: Acts 1-6
Together in Word: Acts 1:6-8

The mandate to share the message of Jesus Christ with our world is from God! God sent His Son Jesus to the world to bring redemption, healing, hope, and eternal life to people. The world is desperate for this life-giving message. We answer the mandate from Jesus by being a witness for Him where we live (Jerusalem). We are also responsible to make sure the message is shared beyond our local context (Judea, Samaria, ends of the earth). We have been empowered by the Holy Spirit for this task. As you read the focal passage this week, take some time to reflect on how God is using you as witness where you live every day. Do you need to make some changes to be a more effective witness?

November 10, 2024: *God's People: Life in the Church*
Acts 2:42-47

At the very beginning of the New Covenant Era, the Church was established as the base for the Mission of God. God's people would now be a part of this new movement by being a part of a local church. These churches would be connected through the message of Jesus, the work of the Holy Spirit, and the shared call to be a witness to the wider world. Luke records the formation of the very first church in this new movement – the church at Jerusalem.

Narrative Reading: Acts 7-13
Together in Word: Acts 4:32-37

Luke pauses in the narrative to give us a summary reflection on the state of the early church life in Jerusalem in our text for this week. This is a complementary passage to our text we discussed on Sunday morning. The church was brand new! Luke describes the spiritual dynamic present in its midst. God was moving. The Holy Spirit was bringing together. The Gospel of Jesus Christ --- the good news of the resurrection of Jesus was being boldly proclaimed. It was a powerful time, to say the least. As we reflect on this text this week, let's take the time to pray for our church. Together, let's ask God to work powerfully in our midst. Let's commit ourselves to being the church that is needed today for our community. May it be so!

**November 17, 2024: *God's People: Shaped by Evangelism*
Acts 11:19-30**

Now we come to my favorite church in the New Testament! I love the church at Antioch! At the heart of this church was the conviction to share the good news about the Lord Jesus! Wow! What a testimony! God used Peter to share the Gospel with Cornelius in Acts 10. This was the first evangelistic endeavor among Gentiles. Next, these believers in Antioch shared the message of Jesus with both Jews and Gentiles. As the church began to grow, this evangelistic zeal had an impact on the ministry of discipleship as well. In fact, the people in the city began to call these followers of Jesus ---- *Christians!* Amazing!

Narrative Reading: Acts 14-21:36

Together in Word: Acts 4:1-13

In Acts 3, Peter and John healed a lame man as they made their way to pray at the Temple in Jerusalem. They healed him in the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Many people in Jerusalem rejoiced because they had known of this man's desperate situation. Afterwards, Peter and John were arrested by the Sanhedrin. We pick up the story in our text for this week. In this exchange between these two disciples and the Jewish leaders, we notice the firm commitment on behalf of the disciples to evangelism. They were intentionally devoted to sharing the good news of Jesus. They boldly declared that salvation could only be found in Jesus. The Jewish leaders were amazed and recognized these men had been with Jesus. Wow! May people in our community recognize that we have been with Jesus!

**November 24, 2024: *God's People: Sent to All Peoples!*
Acts 12:25-13:3**

The Church at Antioch was distinguished already because of its commitment to evangelism and discipleship (as shared in Acts 11). God continued to move in their midst. He called this church to launch the first church-based missional movement. This church heeded the call of God and sent representatives to take the message of Jesus across the ancient world. Thus, they were at the tip of the spear in global evangelization. God continues to use churches to answer this call to take the message of Jesus to the peoples of the world. May He find us faithful in responding to His call in the life of our church today!

Narrative Reading: Acts 21:37-28:31

Together in Word: Acts 14:21-28

The church at Antioch obeyed God and stepped out in faith to send the first Christian missionaries out into the world. They have been lauded ever since then as a model of how a local church can personally participate in the Great Commission. After this first mission, Paul and Barnabas returned home, reported the results of their journey, and lived in community for a season with their church. Our focal passage this week shares the story of their return to Antioch. As we reflect on this passage this week, I wonder how God is leading you to engage in taking the Gospel to the peoples of this world. Is He calling you to go to the nations? Is He calling you to be more sensitive to how you can be *sent* into your own community? Is He calling you to be more faithful in praying for the missional efforts of our church? Is He calling you to be more financially committed to the Great Commission? Is He calling you to become more personally connected to our missional endeavors? Let's give Him an opportunity to speak to you this week as you reflect on the call ----- **Together . . . to the People!**