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Acts: Be the Church

Acts 1:1-26

### “Firm Foundation & Next Man Up”

The Bible is a volume of history, an ongoing story of the movement of God. In the table of contents for our new series it might say Book Two Volume Two entitled, “The Early Church.” Think Game of Thrones where we know have extensive volumes of history and back story, we know the ending, yet we’re awaiting the finishing of the story, for we are continuing to write the history of the church today. The Book of Acts is Luke’s sequel to his self-titled history of Jesus. As we enter our new series “Acts: Be the Church,” we are going to follow the early church from its inception to its spread throughout the Ancient Near East and beyond. As we learn more about the early church, we’ll hopefully learn more about how we can be the church as they were.

But before we turn the page onto the next chapter, we must do what any good book in a series does, recap the past and set up the story moving forward. Luke is efficient with his words here. Sharing the summary of the Book of Luke and turning the page to the new story being told. Luke shares, “I told you about Jesus and what he did and taught while he was alive up until this point and how he rose from the dead appearing to the disciples and telling them about the kingdom of God. Now see what happens after, he goes on to share the incredible story of how Jesus ascended into heaven.

In the ascension Jesus speaks to the disciples and tells them to wait on the Holy Spirit. Jesus then makes the declarative statement that the disciples will be empowered by the Holy Spirit. “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere...” The power of the Holy Spirit is what is going to make the disciples be witnesses. And what they be witnesses of? Jesus’ life, teaching, death, resurrection, and ascension. Jesus’ example and teaching fueled by the power of the Holy Spirit is the foundation of the church. You really can’t have one without the other. The Holy Spirit points to everything Jesus said and did and empowers Jesus’ disciples to tell others about what they have seen and heard. This is our mission as well to be fueled by the Holy Spirit to tell what we have seen, heard, and experienced.

As Jesus lays out the mission, “you will be my witnesses,” Jesus gives them the roadmap as well, “...in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Literally, Jesus says start where you are at, in the town you are currently in, physically closest to you. Share about me here then work your way out and around. I think of this in kind of concentric circles. Jerusalem is where you start but then as you continue to talk about what you’ve witnessed telling folks about Jesus and what he’s done then work your way farther away from home. From Jerusalem go to the surrounding areas of Judea, then to where you’re not supposed to go, the forbidden Samaritans. Yes, we’re even supposed to go to those we don’t think deserve it, or think they shouldn’t exist, our bitter rivals. Then after you’ve done that Jesus says, then go to the ends of the earth. John Wesley the founder of our Methodist movement encapsulated this as he said, “the world is our parish,” meaning church is not just a building but we are to treat everywhere as a place of worship and witness, sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ wherever we go. As we will see as

we continue in the book of Acts the disciples follow Jesus' roadmap and are witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to other parts of the world.

And so, as the page turns in this new volume, Jesus ascends the focus shifts to the disciples as his witnesses in the world. The mission continues even after Jesus departs empowered by the Holy Spirit. As the disciples are waiting on the Holy Spirit to descend upon them, they need to make sure they are at full strength again after the betrayal by Judas, they choose another disciple. In the nomination process they must choose a person who has been a witness from the baptism of John to Jesus' ascension. Someone who has heard and seen Jesus too. This idea of replacement is in line with the psalms that spoke about Judas' betrayal. And so, they prayed and cast lots, and it fell on Matthias.

(Side note: If you notice in this passage that they nominated two folks from the 120 who were with them all along the way. You might notice that one of them is named Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus). That's where we got my son Justus' name.)

This idea of replacing Judas or any other disciples is always a part of God's plan. It must be to continue the mission Jesus put before us. God has always worked through humans to carry out his work on earth. There is always someone else called to carry the mantle. We too are not beyond the criteria used to select Matthias, witness to Jesus' work in our lives and tell others about it. We do so empowered by the Holy Spirit to be Jesus' witness in our lives. Just as there needed to be folks to step up and take leadership of the mission in Acts 1 we too continue to take the next person up mentality. When the chapter closes on one or more of the disciples of God, we are called to continue to be witnesses.

And just as one volume of church history turns a page to another the same can be said of our church here in Bucyrus. We are turning the page into a new volume sharing the same content but with new people stepping up to carry out the mission. Friends, we are in the next chapter of the volume of Bucyrus United Methodist Church, we've turned the page on some dear saints who have gone on to glory thinking of Pastor Mike, others have moved to another church, yet the mission is still before us. It's time to build upon the firm foundation which has been laid before us. It's time to move forward and continue the mission in which Jesus calls us, to be his witnesses in our families, in our neighborhoods, in places where we think people don't deserve it, and to the world. Friends, we are Jesus' witnesses in Bucyrus, Crawford County, Ohio, the USA, and the world. There are still more volumes to be written... Let's step up and go be witnesses empowered by the Holy Spirit to share Jesus' love, mercy, and grace with our words and with our actions. Amen.