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90 Day Challenge II: The Acts of the Holy Spirit
Obedient
Acts 1

This week was a huge week for the Pacific Northwest. The very long awaited arrival of something many of us have known but few in this area have experienced was promised to arrive. We've known for a year it was coming. But this week, it was so close, we could taste it. Those who knew the powerful meaning of its impact in the community gathered together... about 100 people. They gathered in the promised location and pitched tents—patiently waiting and enjoying the common fellowship of those who know what it is they're waiting for. Yes, I'm talking about Chick-Fil-A.

You'd better believe as a southerner who knows the powerful comfort of their chicken nuggets, the reviving power of sweet tea, and the delicious satisfaction of a chocolate milkshake (and is pregnant), I would wait for 20 minutes in traffic just to turn right into the parking lot and join the celebration.

What images come to mind when you think about waiting? Are you patient or impatient? Do you wait on your own or with a group of people?

We are revisiting Acts 1 today, joining a community of people who are a people waiting. Last week Pastor Mark gave us an overview of the book of Acts as we launched into our second 90 day challenge. There are journals available at the connect center if you were not here last week. We are spending each week in just 1 chapter, learning to listen to God and to study his word in new and deepening ways.

The book of Acts is Luke's historical record of what happened when Jesus ascended to heaven and left his disciples to continue his work in the world. Jesus' work, as we saw in John 17, was the work of making God's name known to the people God had given him and bringing them to believe that Jesus was sent by God. Jesus said his work was complete. And now the disciples in Acts 1 are going to be given the instruction once again that we have already seen at the end of several Gospels—that we are to go into the world to make God's name known and to bring people to belief that Jesus is God.

"Go!" is the final word of the Gospels Matthew and Mark. But the author Luke records a different final command at the end of Luke and the beginning of Acts. Let's discover Jesus' long-term mission for his disciples both then and now as well as what their first step toward that mission should be. Read along with me, and

leave your finger over the words that are the next step Jesus gives. Read with me in Acts 1:4.

"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?' He said to them: 'It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. 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.'"

This is the Word of the Lord.

Is Jesus' final word Go? No, then what is it? "Don't leave! Wait!" Luke 24:49 says the same thing, "Stay!" So which is it? Go? Or stay? The first step of the obedient disciples is to stay and wait on the Holy Spirit. So the long-term mission for Jesus' disciples is to go out into the ends of the earth, but first... "Don't leave; wait for the gift or for the promise of the Father, the baptism of the Holy Spirit."

Now, see, I have a better idea for Jesus' next step. We know from Acts 1:8 that Jesus is still on God's long-term mission—a mission that started back in Genesis. Look at his strategic plan to fulfill this mission in Acts 1:8. This geographic instruction serves as an outline for the rest of the book of Acts. Jesus has witnesses first in Jerusalem in chapters 1-7. Then they will scatter into the suburbs, and we'll see Judea and Samaria receive the Holy Spirit and profess faith in Jesus in Acts 8-12. Finally, Acts 13 to the end record the Gospel going out to the end of the earth.

So here's where my better idea comes in. If you glance down at Acts 1:15 we see that he has about 120 people on board with him at least. He has 10 days from this point—his ascension—until Pentecost. He has 10 days. He could spread them all out over Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth. Then when the Holy Spirit comes down on each one of them, they're already in place! They're already all over the globe; so by Acts 2 we could have fulfilled Jesus' mission from verse 8 that they would all be witnesses in Jerusalem and to the ends of the earth.

That's my American, individualistic, delegation-mind thinking. Let's divide and conquer. Spread everyone out. The Holy Spirit can come upon everyone individually, and with 120 empowered people, that's 120 cities that can all hear the message all at once. What do you think of my idea?

This is how I originally thought about the calling and anointing of the Holy Spirit. It was an individual experience brought upon individuals for the sake of equipping him or her to be God's witness wherever he or she was for that person's particular calling.

When I first knew I would be going into ministry, the call felt like this. It was about me receiving the Holy Spirit so that I could be a witness for Jesus to the ends of the earth. I know I've shared parts of this story before, but I've been thinking about it differently this week as I've been reading Acts 1.

On a Wednesday night during my senior year of college—4 days before I was leading a college, 10 day- mission trip to Bolivia—I was wrestling with troubling dreams and woke up crying out to Jesus. I could not get the sense that evil was leaving my room, so I started reading the Scriptures out loud. I was looking for the passage where Isaiah sees God filling the temple, but I couldn't find it at the time, so I landed in Isaiah 42 and started reading out loud. I came to Isaiah 43 and read these words (which are still underlined from that night):

"Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you... bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, everyone who is called by my name, who I created for my glory, whom I formed and made... 'You are my witnesses,' declares the Lord, 'and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he'... 'you are my witnesses, and I am God.'"

Some of you may have looked at this passage on Monday as you were studying during your 90 day challenge because it is a cross reference for Acts 1. Your Bible editors are telling you—Isaiah 43 and Acts 1 are connected! The promise and the command of Acts 1:8 is a fulfillment of Isaiah 43.

While I was reading Isaiah 43 out loud, I got the sense from the Holy Spirit that these words would be my mission. I would go to the ends of the earth to everyone who Jesus is calling to proclaim who Jesus is that they may believe Jesus and understand that He is God. I am God's witness. So I decided to take God's mission seriously. I was going to the end of the earth, Bolivia. I tried to break up with Larry, because God had put me on mission. And you can see how that turned out.

Can anyone else relate to me in this sense of personal call? Is anyone out there terrified that God might place this kind of call on you?

God does not call us merely as individuals. He calls us as a community. Look at Acts 1:8. Does it say "you will be my witness" or "you will be my witnesses"? (Witnesses) What about Isaiah 43:10—Singular or Plural? Or Isaiah 43:12? All plural!

I can hear Jesus gently correcting me as he did Peter so many times... with my great idea to send out the 120 all over the world. God's idea for how to let the world know who he is is not for 120 people to take His mission into their own hands and strategize efficiency. God's idea was Acts 1:4—Don't leave. (I know I'm going to send you out to the ends of the earth, but right now, stay together.) Wait. (Don't

go to work just yet.) Wait. Wait for the promise of the Father. (You can't do this as you are right now.)

God doesn't just call us to go and obey. First, He changes us by empowering us with His own Spirit. Every other religion says go. This is the mission. Go and do. It's up to you to eradicate desire from your life. Establish sharia. You go and do it. In every other religion, Jesus would say okay, I'm gone. Go! You have your orders. It's on you. It's only Christianity that says you can't do that on your own. You need to be empowered by God Himself. You need transformation, a change that you can't bring about as a matter of will or discipline. So Jesus says GO! But first, stay. The biggest transformation is about who you are, not what you can do. So stay and wait until the Holy Spirit comes to you.

So let's review. The disciples say in verse 6, "Okay, we get it. We know our next step. We'll wait for the Holy Spirit. Now, as to the long-term mission, will you reestablish our government?" And Jesus says, "That's not what's at stake here. But you will receive power. That's a plural you, like all y'all. When the Holy Spirit comes upon y'all, y'all will all receive power. And you're going to be my witnesses here, and then there and then where you don't want to go, and then all the way to the end of the earth." And then Jesus is gone. So what did they do?

In response, the disciples were obedient. As one big group, one community of obedient disciples, they returned to Jerusalem in verse 12. And what did they do as they waited for the promise of the Father? Read verse 14.

They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers."

They united as one community in the 10 days they would wait for the Holy Spirit. Were those an idle 10 days? Well, I guess it depends on how you define idle! Waiting seems like an idle word. What kind of image popped up for you when you thought about waiting when we started? Especially when you think about what it means for you to wait for something that has been promised but you don't know when it's going to come. Is it that group of tents in front of Chick-Fil-A partying it up? I think waiting for more of us is a lonely, impatient state.

When I think about our 7-year season of waiting to be pregnant, I can count how many times God promised us a child. Many of them are Holy Spirit, word-from-the-Lord kind of situations. A 20 year old young man at Thrive told us God said we would have a baby; Pastor Bill approached us his first Sunday here. I had the opportunity to do an infant baptism, and in that moment he sensed God telling him we were pregnant. I have had a dream and a vision, one of a daughter and one of a son. But we still weren't pregnant. We were waiting. Waiting for something we sensed God was promising.

But I wouldn't say it was an idle season. It was a season of prayer and study... of counting days and temperatures. Usually, honestly, a discouraging season.

Remember verse 4 when Jesus told them to wait? Its root is the word for "abide" or "remain." Remember in John 15 when Jesus told us to "abide in him"? "Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." Does that sound idle? No! You are practicing your abiding as you're doing your 90 day challenge! And I practiced my abiding by achingly journaling my hope to Jesus.

The other word that describes what their waiting looks like is in verse 14. The translation you're reading here combined several Greek words to come up with the phrase "joined together constantly." But literally it would look more like, "They were busily engaged" "all together" "in prayer." I love this, because waiting on the Spirit for this group of people looked like being in perfect unity, a big group of busy bodies, busy with the business of prayer. The term "busily engaged together" has the root word of "perseverance." This isn't light lifting they're doing as they wait for the promise of the Father. This is tedious, enduring, persevering work to be busy about prayer all together for 10 days.

Before last December, I don't think I could have given an example of what this looks like. But I think in the last 3 months I just experienced some of this for the first time with our waiting with you. This week I got to meet with 3 new members, and 2 of them shared with me how deeply they got busy with us in the business of prayer these last few months, praying with us for a child. And because we have been praying together, I truly believe God is encouraging us as a Chapel Hill community to see together how he hears and answers our prayer! And because we've been busily engaged all together in prayer, we are seeing the answer to those prayers all together!

Jesus' parting command was "go" make disciples; but first, wait and abide together. Remain together. And they, as obedient disciples of Jesus, didn't misunderstand that. They didn't think they could come up with a better way. They just came all together. And for 10 days, they persevered in busying themselves with the business of prayer. and then they experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit—the powerful promise given from the Father, sent by the Son, that they might be transformed to be those with the boldness to go to the ends of the earth. And they got to experience that all together.

What would 10 days of persevering prayer look like for us as a community? I want to pause right now in Acts 1—this is how the Church started, by obeying Jesus together by abiding and waiting. And they took that instruction as an instruction to be busily praying. And I just wonder—as we've been committing more and more to being on God's long-term mission to make disciples—are we on board for this first step? Not going out merely as individuals with individual callings, dropping and breaking up with one another along the way to go fulfill what we want to do, what

we think God is calling us to do. But can we begin this journey into going with the Holy Spirit by busying ourselves altogether in prayer? I'm calling us to hit our knees before we hit the streets.

This isn't solo work, it is community work! A group that perseveres in prayer together reaps the benefits together. If you want to see Chapel Hill be an on-fire Spirit-filled community, then stay—wait and pray—and we will see him together. And we will go out and make disciples as a community transformed by the Holy Spirit. So my first call is to those of you who call yourselves disciples of Jesus—will you persevere in prayer with us that we might be a Spirit-filled community on a disciple-making mission? And my second call is to those who would not call yourselves followers of Jesus. I want to invite you to begin talking to God. Ask him about who you are. Ask him what it would look like for you to be transformed by His power. And when you're ready, invite the Spirit of the Living God to come and dwell with you. Keep reading Acts with us and see what happens when people dare to pray such a prayer.

I want to invite us to experience being busy all together in prayer this morning. I want us to praise God all together. We want to remember before God who we know Him to be—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I want us to ask God all together for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, that we might know his presence—that we might believe and understand that He is God. And I want us to ask for the power to be his witnesses, all together, here and there and where we don't want to go, and to the ends of the earth.

So I'm inviting our music team to join me up here as I lead us in prayer. And let us spend a few minutes busy all together in prayer. This is our next step as a community of obedient disciples. Our long-term mission remains the same: making disciples of all nations. So now, let's take the first step and pray silently, knowing that God knows our thoughts and he hears all of us as we pray together.