

Acts 1:4-9
Let the change happen!

One of the things that I really appreciate about the writers of the Bible is that all through the Bible they are very candid and honest in their portrayal of the “heroes of the faith”. Many times when we think about the main characters of the Bible, we tend to elevate and glorify them to a point where they are larger than life. In our minds, then, these men and women never seem to doubt, they never make a mistake, they never hesitate, and they always understand immediately and perfectly what God’s plan and will for their life is. But this is not the way that the Bible actually reads. Sure, these are heroes of the faith. Yes, it is true that God uses them in mighty and powerful ways. But when we look more carefully at the Biblical record, we find that they are often confused, they often make mistakes, they often misunderstand, and they often make surprising blunders.

I don’t know about you, but I am actually very thankful for the honesty of the Biblical writers. It gives me the hope (and even the confidence sometimes!) that God can also use you and me in meaningful ways within his Kingdom despite the fact that we sometimes make mistakes and misunderstand at times what He wants us to do.

This is why I love the Book of Acts so much. The author Luke tells it like it is.

This is what we find happening in the first chapter of Acts. Luke tells us that the resurrected Jesus has spent 40 days appearing to his disciples and teaching them about the Kingdom of God. Jesus impresses it upon his followers that they should go to Jerusalem and wait for the gift that God has promised them. And Jesus tells them that they will be baptized by the Holy Spirit.

Now, I have to admit that Luke does not tell us exactly what Jesus was teaching the disciples during these 40 days of appearances. And I also have to admit that we have the keen advantage of hindsight when we read this account; that is to say, we know how the whole story turns out. But doesn't their question in verse 6 seem to be rather irrelevant? I mean, Jesus had to be talking to them about his victory over sin and death. He had to be explaining to them about this unconquerable kingdom of love, grace, mercy, and forgiveness. He must have explained to them about his true Messiahship, his true purpose on earth.

And yet the only thing that they can think about is a political kingdom for Israel. "Lord, are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel now?" While Jesus was trying to guide their focus towards the eternal, all they could think about was the temporal. It was NOT one of the finer moments of the disciples!

I'm reminded of the time when I was traveling in Germany, and my train had a 30 minute stopover in Cologne, Germany. Cologne has one of the biggest and most beautiful cathedrals in the world. The cathedral has twin spires that soar 510 feet into the air. It is the second largest Gothic structure in the world. Well, I just had to see this cathedral, even if it were only for a moment before my train departed. And so when my train stopped in Cologne, I quickly ran outside and started looking around for the cathedral. It was nowhere to be seen. Finally, I stopped a man on the street, and I asked him, "Where do I need to go to see the cathedral?" He just shook his head at me, and pointed straight up. And there it was. It towered right over my head! While I was looking all around, all I needed to do was to stop and look up!

I'm sure that Jesus was shaking his head when the disciples asked their question in verse 6. But look at what Jesus says. First, he says, "Don't worry about that right now! God has it covered!" Then he says, "Let me tell you what is going to happen. 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."

I think that it is striking to note that, after the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples in chapter 2, they never asked this question again. Everything had changed.

The entire Book of Acts is actually a story of change. Luke gives us a chronicle of the change that transpired in the lives of the followers of Jesus. Jesus prophesied this change in Acts 1:8 when he said, “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.” As a matter of fact, the entire Book of Acts relates the fulfillment of this prophecy, the fulfillment of this commission, the fulfillment of this promise of Jesus through the changed lives of the disciples!

I believe that we need to experience the same kinds of changes in our lives today. In order to reach our world, in order to fulfill our calling, in order to complete the mission that God has called us to fulfill, our lives need to be changed. We need to let the change happen! Let the change happen!

Here is what I want us to do this evening. I want us to trace some of the changes that Luke outlines in the Book of Acts. I want us to see the change that the resurrected Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit created in the lives of the early believers. But we need to realize that, as Luke tells his readers about these changes, he seems to be urging his readers to make the same changes in their lives. Luke doesn't want us to only read about the changes that transformed the lives of the early believers; he wants us to participate in the change. He wants us to let the same change happen in our own lives.

Now, I know that change is difficult for most of us. And so as we look at the changes in the lives of the early believers, I want us to participate spiritually and even physically in these changes tonight. We have to realize that when God sponsors change in our lives, He does not only call us to a spiritual or inward change; He almost always calls us to a physical change as well. And so to make this truth more apparent for us this evening, we are going to do some moving around. I know that you are probably sitting comfortable right where you are. You've probably selected a chair that is close enough or far enough away from other people so that you can feel comfortable. But let me share a very important spiritual truth with you. In order for God to make you into the person he wants you to be; in order for God to accomplish his purposes in and through you, you are going to have to get out of your comfort zone. Well, I'm going to help you start this process right here tonight!

The Book of Acts is a story of change. We need to allow the same changes to happen in our lives. And so whenever I use the phrase, "Let the change happen", I want you to stand up and change seats. Now, I don't mean for you to simply move over one chair!! I would prefer for you to change sections, to really move around and change your position here completely. We need to break out of the ordinary. We need to step out of our comfort zone. And so when I say the phrase "Let the change happen", we are going to let that change happen.....spiritually AND physically. Do you want to obey God?

Do you want God to use you in his kingdom? Do you want to be all that God has called you to be?

Well, here's the first step in this glorious and adventurous journey. Are you ready? Stand up, and Let the change happen!!

(change seats)

The first significant change that the disciples experienced was perhaps the most important change of all. Jesus told them to wait in Jerusalem for the gift that the Father had promised: the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

In Acts 2, we read that when the Day of Pentecost came, the believers were all together in one place. For 10 days they had waited. For 10 days they had prayed. For 10 days they had prepared their hearts and their minds. For 10 days they had tried to keep themselves busy: choosing a replacement for Judas, doing whatever other business they could think of. 10 days. Sometimes I think that the hardest part of change is *waiting for it to happen!* Can we wait on God? Can we move at his pace? Come on God, what are you waiting for? Let's get a move on! Let's go! When the Day of Pentecost finally came, they had been waiting for 10 days. I have a strong suspicion that this was a LONG 10 days for these believers. I hate waiting! I hate waiting through the night before the day my vacation starts. I hate waiting on the night before a big test. I even hate waiting at a stoplight! But the disciples waited. We can't follow the Lord until we wait for him to get in front of us. And so they waited. Do you

trust God enough to wait on Him? This might have been the hardest part for the disciples, I don't know. But they waited!

And the Holy Spirit came.

Don't you love the way that Luke tells this story? On the Day of Pentecost, there was a sudden sound like the blowing of a violent wind. The sound filled the entire house. There were tongues of fire that separated and rested on each one of them. They were filled with the Holy Spirit. And they began to praise God in languages they had never spoken before. Languages like English: (Marlene) "Christ is risen! Jesus is Lord! Glory to God!" Swedish: (Jack) Spanish: (Lester). Albanian: (Josh Loring). Navajo: (Ray Long). Dutch: (Mieke) "Christus is opgestaan. Jezus is Heer! Ere zij God." Hebrew: (Tom King).

Can you imagine it! Christ is risen. Jesus is Lord. Glory to God! And they ran into the streets preaching the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. Glory to God!

What a change the Holy Spirit made in their lives! We can't forget that these are the same disciples who just a few weeks earlier had hidden in fear behind closed doors after Jesus' death. We can't forget that these were the same disciples who had scattered and run away when Jesus was arrested. We can't forget that these were the same disciples who denied and betrayed Jesus when it was even suggested that they knew Jesus.

But the Holy Spirit changed all of that! He cleansed their hearts. He filled their lives. He chased away their fear. And he filled them with a boldness to tell the world about the risen Christ!

The same Holy Spirit wants to fill your life. The same Holy Spirit wants to take away your fear. The same Holy Spirit wants to cleanse your heart. The same Holy Spirit wants to fill you with boldness to witness for Christ. Are you ready for his presence and power? Are you ready for the change?

Let the change happen!

(change seats)

Just like Jesus had promised, the disciples and the other believers were filled with the Holy Spirit. And the word of God was proclaimed throughout Jerusalem. We can read about this ministry in Jerusalem in Acts chapters 3 through 5.

Let me just share one of these stories with you. One day Peter and John were going to the temple for the time of prayer. In Acts chapter 3, Luke tells us that they met a crippled beggar alongside the road, who asked them for money. Peter said, “Look at us, man! I don’t have any silver or gold, but I will give you what I do have. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk!” And the man began to walk!

When the people crowded around to see this incredible thing, Peter boldly preached to them about salvation in Christ. Peter called out, “Repent

and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord” (Acts 3:19).

Don’t you sometimes long for a time of refreshing? Don’t you yearn for those times when the peace of Christ and the fresh wind of the Spirit fill your heart and your mind from above? I know that I do. Peter experienced it, and he preached it!

Look at what happens next. Peter and John are arrested and thrown into prison. The chief priests and members of the Sanhedrin must have thought to themselves, “That should shut them up. When we arrested their leader Jesus, they all ran away and hid. There’s nothing like a night in a dirty rotten prison to give someone a reality check!”

But the next day, Peter and John were as bold as ever. Without the slightest hesitation, they said to the Sanhedrin, “Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:19-20).

What about you? Are you speaking about what you have seen and heard? I am amazed at the way that we have let ourselves be convinced that we have to be “specially trained” in order to be witnesses. When you witness a car accident, the police don’t ask you to take a course in “eyewitness reporting” before you can tell them what you saw and heard! When you have fallen in love with that special person in your life, believe me, you don’t need to take a

seminar in order to tell your friends and family about your joy! So why do we think that we need to take classes and seminars and undergo special training to tell about what Christ has done in our life? I am afraid that we have been fed a lie by Satan, our enemy.

The only qualification that an eyewitness needs is a personal experience! Ahhhhh. So maybe that's the problem! Have you experienced the infilling power and presence of the Holy Spirit? Have you truly repented of your sins and asked Christ to fill your life? Maybe we are not witnessing to the life-changing power and presence of Christ and his forgiveness because we have not experienced it, or we have forgotten it! Christ wants to bring us forgiveness and new life today.....and every day! The Holy Spirit wants to cleanse us and fill us with his power and presence today.....and every day! Peter and John's lives had been changed radically and completely. And they couldn't help themselves! They HAD to share with others what they had heard and seen. What a change!

What about you? Are you ready for Christ's forgiveness? Are you ready for the Spirit's infilling? Are you ready to have the Spirit fill you so completely that you can't even help yourself from telling others?

Come on! Let the change happen!

(change seats)

Our time is quickly passing and so we have to hurry on. I need to quickly tell you about Stephen and Philip in Acts 6 through 8. The church was growing rapidly. Luke tells us that more than 5000 men had become believers. There must have been at least as many women as men, because women always seem to be more sensitive and responsive to the Spirit than men. What would the church ever do without the faithful service and leadership of women? I hope I'll never have to find out.

The church was growing so rapidly, though, that the disciples could not keep up with all of the responsibilities of caring for the daily needs of the people. And so in Acts 6, Luke tells us that seven men were chosen to overlook the daily distribution of food. Each of these men was selected because they were filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom. The task of these men was to serve tables. They were specially selected and appointed to make sure that all the different ethnic groups of Christians in Jerusalem would not be neglected of having enough food.

I have often heard sermons and Bible lessons given on this passage about the importance of delegating responsibility. The disciples couldn't do all the work themselves, and so they needed to delegate the daily tasks of the ministry to other people so that they—the apostles—could devote themselves to the ministry of the word. Now, please don't misunderstand me here. I believe that pastors and leaders really do need to delegate tasks and

responsibilities to other people in the church. But I don't think that this is the main lesson that Luke is trying to teach us here. I think that there is a much more important and valuable lesson to be learned.

I love to read about Stephen and Philip in chapters 6-8. But do you know what I find so funny about these chapters? Stephen and Philip (and the other 5 deacons) are selected to wait tables. But we never actually see them wait on tables in Acts. Instead, Stephen, whom Luke describes as full of God's Spirit and God's grace and power, does great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. He preaches and teaches to everyone who will listen to him about Jesus of Nazareth. When arrested and confronted by the Jewish authorities, he preaches the longest and most compelling sermon in all of the Book of Acts! He is chosen to wait tables, but he preaches boldly about his salvation through Jesus Christ. And he is murdered because of it!

We find the same kind of situation with Philip in chapter 8. We have to remember that Philip was also selected to wait on tables and to distribute food. But Luke never tells us even one story about Philip doing this. Instead, Luke tells us about Philip preaching about Christ in Samaria. Crowds gather around Philip. Miracles are performed. People are healed. Demons are cast out. And many people repent and believe on Jesus Christ because of Philip's preaching. Isn't this strange? These 7 men are selected to wait on tables so that the apostles can devote themselves more to preaching the Word of Christ. But

then Luke immediately gives us three chapters of stories in which Stephen and Philip are doing everything EXCEPT waiting on tables!

So many times we look at this story as if it is telling us that pastors should not do the things that others can do. But I think that Luke is trying to teach us a different lesson. I think that Luke is showing us that we need to realize that other believers can do the things that most people think that only pastors can do. (Say it again!). When Stephen and Philip were given their assignment to "wait tables", it finally opened up their eyes to the reality that they could be prophetic preachers of the gospel. And they did it! What a change this made in their own lives; what a change this made in the church, and in the world. We need to realize that it is not only the "professional pastor" who is able to serve, minister, evangelize, and "preach" to the people of our world. It is every believer. It is you. It is me. It's every one of us.

We cannot wait for our pastor to share the gospel to our friends and neighbors. We cannot stand back and wait for our pastors and evangelists to share the message of salvation to the people we work with and the people we meet. This is a task that each one of us can and should perform. We need to allow the Holy Spirit to change our thinking. It is our privilege to share the gospel. It is our responsibility to share the gospel. And we have to do it. For too long we have thought that it is only the pastor's job to reach other people for Christ. But we have to allow the Holy Spirit to change this idea. It's your

job to share the gospel. It's my job to share the gospel. It's not the pastor's job alone! We need to change our thinking in this. God has called each one of us to share the gospel! Are you ready for this change in thinking?

Let the change happen!

(change seats)

I wish we could spend more time to look at more of the lessons and stories of change in the Book of Acts, but we just don't have enough time. And so I want us to look at only one more passage in this wonderful book of change.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this sermon, one of the things that I really like about Luke is that he tells us the true story. He doesn't gloss over the mistakes and shortcomings of the early heroes of the faith, but he gives us the true picture of the early believers, warts and all!

You will remember that Jesus commissioned his followers in Acts 1:8 to take the gospel all around the world. He told them to wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit would come upon them. And that afterwards, they would be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Unfortunately, the believers didn't do such a good job of this. I mean, look at what happens. On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the believers just like Jesus said that He would. And the believers immediately became witnesses for Jesus in Jerusalem. All right! So far, so

good! And so we move to chapter 3. There we find Peter and John, healing the crippled and witnessing in Jerusalem. Okay. That's all right.

Then we move to chapter 4. And there we find Peter and John thrown into prison and testifying once again before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem.

Chapter 5 comes, and the believers are still in Jerusalem. Chapter 6 comes, and they are still in Jerusalem. Chapter 7 comes, and Stephen is preaching an incredible sermon. But they are still in Jerusalem! Whatever happened to Judea and Samaria? It just wasn't happening! Jerusalem was the place to be! Jerusalem was the "megachurch" of the first century where all the excitement was taking place. And apparently, the disciples and other Christian believers were completely satisfied to stay right there!

"God, we can't go to Judea and Samaria! Our work is too important in Jerusalem for us to leave now. I suppose we could send some of the other members to those other places, but we would really miss them in Jerusalem. I mean, who would teach our Sunday school? Who would lead the teens? Who would serve the tables if we would send some of our members to those other places? We just can't afford to spare them. Maybe some other time, God, but not now. We have too much work to do right here in Jerusalem!"

Christ had commissioned them to take the gospel everywhere. But they didn't go. Six chapters later, and we still find the believers huddled together in Jerusalem.

But then chapter 8 comes. We have already talked about the great sermon that Stephen preached in chapter 7. When he was finished, the Jewish leaders were so angry that they dragged him outside the city, and they stoned him to death.

Then Luke writes in chapter 8, verse 1: “On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.” Then Luke writes in verse 4, “And those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.” I’m not sure what this sounds like to you, but it sounds to me like God had to use a death and a time of great persecution in order to get his followers to do his will. It wasn’t until a great persecution broke out that the believers finally obeyed the command that Jesus gave them in Acts 1:8. “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem.....AND in all Judea and Samaria, AND to the ends of the earth.”

What does God have to do to cause us to be the believers that he has called us to be? What does God have to do to cause you and me to be the witnesses that He has commissioned us to be? We can’t just sit at home in Jerusalem. We can’t ignore the call and commission of God in our lives. We need to allow our lives to be changed! We need to allow our thinking to be changed! We need to allow the Spirit to control our lives completely.....not just when it is convenient or comfortable for us! What does God have to do to

create the change that is necessary in your life? Whatever it is, however it is,
wherever it is.....

Let the change happen!

(change seats)

Sing: "From glory to glory he's changing me"

Prayer