

Nov. 1, 2020
The Kingdom of God (3)
The Church Unleashed
Acts 1:3-11

As the body of Christ, we live in a sense of tension. We are to make a difference in other people's lives and build the kingdom of God. So, we need to wrestle through the tension of looking to God, but also respond to what He already revealed in the world around us. We need to find ways to live our lives more effectively for Christ and basically to become unleashed and to relate to the world around us. We are to employ the gifts that God gives us to build up Faith Church, but most importantly to make a difference and an impact for Christ in the world. But often times we are caged in the church lives and we neglect the world around us. So, we need to find ways to go beyond our fellowship and worship at church and to engage the world around us and the people that God brings across our path.

In today's text there is guidance on how we deal with this dilemma and this tension. Jesus began by telling His disciples to do two things which were completely contradictory to one another. He told the disciples to wait, and He also told them to go. Why would Jesus tell the disciples to do two completely opposite things? I think that Jesus understood where the disciples were in their emotional state. They had lived and traveled with Him for a number of years. They had seen Him crucified on the cross and die. Suddenly three days later Jesus rose from the dead. Jesus had conversations with them, taught them again about the kingdom of God, and challenged them about the life that they were to lead. And then they found themselves again on the mountaintop, the Mt. of Ascension. Here Jesus was getting ready to depart. They were still confused at that time.

I think Jesus knew that if they went down the mountain and engaged in ministry right away, they would have been driven by

the many emotions that they were experiencing at the time. Jesus knew that if they would have been driven by fear and confusion, they would have done things on their own power. He knew that if they would have ministered on their own power, they would not have made an impact on the world. They couldn't fulfill the great commission if they did it on their own power. But by waiting, they had an opportunity to hang together in unity, to express their fears to one another, to love one another, to pray together, and to plan a course for the future. When God poured out His Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, they were ready and they could move out in the ministry that God had already prepared for them to do. That is exactly what happened. When the Holy Spirit came, the disciples were empowered and energized to live out their calling and they were finally able to literally change the world of their time. They went out and led thousands of people into a relationship with Christ.

We need to follow this example. We need to find time to wait upon the Lord and allow God to minister to our spirit. We need time collectively as the body of Christ to wait together in prayer and to receive our marching orders from God. When the Holy Spirit comes, we are able to move out in order to embrace the ministry that he has prepared for us to do. I think that Faith Church is right on the threshold of a time of waiting, although we have waited impatiently for a time when we can really embrace the ministry that God has called for us to move out and do. I hope that when God's Spirit directs and leads us and when we see evidence of God's power in our midst, we will follow God's Spirit. We will go and build the kingdom of God and be His witnesses here in our community and the world.

It is important that the waiting and going are not a on-time thing. If we read the entire book of Acts, we begin to see a pattern for living as believers. This pattern is what theologians call a church gathered and a church scattered. It is important for all of us to realize that we need to live out our faith in the realm of both types

of churches; in the church gathered and in the church scattered. The church gathered is what we typically think of the church. It is important that we come together in the church gathered mode to worship and to learn Christian doctrine so that we can be thinking believers. It is important that we enjoy fellowship with our brothers and sisters in Christ. It is important that we pray together. It is important that we have a chance to figure out ways that we are going to move ahead in mission and in ministry together.

But, we never can be fully satisfied just being in the church gathered mode. God wants us to engage people in conversation about Jesus Christ, to go out into the world, and to work for peace and justice. God also requires us to go into the world and to make a difference in needs that God will bring across our path. So we are continually in this pattern of gathering and scattering, and gathering and scattering. That is supposed to be the rhythm of our lives as believers. We come together this morning to be filled and equipped and to worship God and to learn. Then we need to go out after church and engage in ministry in our own place. We are to make a difference wherever we go for Jesus Christ and for His sake.

But when we go out into the world, we do not do this alone. Throughout Jesus' ministry He promised the Holy Spirit would be a counselor, a guide and one that would provide the power for these early believers and for us today to accomplish our ministry. If we are the body of Christ, then we want to be a healthy body. We want to be a body that is alive, vital and functioning in an amazing way. Doctors tell us about our vitality as human beings. Our level of fitness is determined by our vital capacity, by our ability to be in shape. So it is important that we learn and train ourselves to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit, to receive the Holy Spirit, and to offer the Holy Spirit to people that we come across on a regular basis. We need to work at it. As a church we need to grow in our ability to be sensitive to God's Spirit. We need to grow to receive God's

Spirit, but we also need to grow to pass God's Spirit along to the people that we encounter. Therefore, we inhale the Spirit of God here in the church gathered on a regular basis, and then we also exhale the Spirit of God as we are scattered to the world. Jesus sets up this pattern for us. We are to wait and we are to go. We are to gather and we are to scatter. We are to inhale to take in His Spirit and then we are to exhale to express His Spirit to those that we run across on a regular basis.

If we want to be believers that are unleashed, we constantly live by the example that Christ had here. Our success as believers is not necessarily how many new members we bring into the church family in a year. We don't measure our success by our attendance and by how many programs that we have. But we measure our success by our sending capacity. We look to see that people's lives are being touched and changed by Jesus Christ through effective and vital ministry. If we become the church unleashed, God will continue to bless our church and help us to grow and help us transform and change lives in this community for Jesus' sake. I hope and pray that Faith Church would be the church unleashed. It's an exciting adventure. God's Spirit is going to go with us and to bless us and enable that ministry to happen.