

# Witnesses not Warriors

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 18 April 2021

Preacher: Rev. Andrew Ong

[ 0 : 0 0 ] We hope that you enjoy this teaching from Christ Church. This material is copyrighted and no unauthorized duplication, redistribution, or any other use of any part is permitted without prior consent from Christ Church.

Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Good morning.

This is a reading from the Acts of the Apostles. In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven.

After giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive.

He appeared to them over a period of 40 days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command.

[ 1 : 0 4 ] 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.

Then they gathered around him and asked him, Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom of 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 Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them.

Men of Galilee, they said, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.

[ 2 : 1 5 ] Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city. When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying.

Those present were Peter, John, James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James, son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas, the son of James.

They all joined together constantly in prayer along with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers. This is the word of the Lord. Amen.

Amen. Thank you for that scripture reading, Emily. Good morning, Christ Church. My name is Andrew. I'm the director of pastoral care here.

And just to let you know, Jonathan had spring break this week. And his family's here, but he wanted to visit one of our friend churches in Oakland. And that's where he is. He might show up later if he can make it on time.

[ 3 : 14 ] So we're glad that our pastor can rest and rejuvenate. And we hope that that happened this week, you guys. Will you join me in prayer as we come and listen to God's word? Father, like I asked earlier, what are we doing?

Show us what it means to be the church as we open up this series in the book of Acts. To be a provocative church that's filled with your spirit, that bears witness to the kingdom of God that is here, and yet that we also await.

We give you praise this morning and ask that you would accomplish much in the preaching of your word. And we pray these things in the name of Jesus. Amen. So again, today is the third Sunday of Easter, and we're here to continue celebrating that Christ is risen.

But I imagine that for many of us coming into worship today, we feel this tension, right? The tension of celebrating the resurrection as the first fruits of new creation, while also acknowledging the rotten fruits of fallen creation that we still taste here.

Christ is risen, and Dante Wright and Adam Toledo, two more people of color have just been killed. By law enforcement officers. And then there was that mass shooting in Indianapolis as well this week.

[ 4 : 24 ] And many of us probably feel like the disciples in this text, right? Who witnessed this amazing resurrection, this amazing ascension. They believed that Jesus was their king, and yet they still found themselves wondering.

And overwhelmed and just staring into the sky, unsure about what to do next. Like Christ's disciples, many of us are probably wondering, Christ has risen great.

But now what? What now? Talking to many of you here at Christ Church, I know many of us, even as we believe this gospel truth with all of our hearts, that Christ has risen, we also feel rather helpless, don't we?

And limited in light of this world's injustices, and frustrated with ourselves, and with our society, and with the broader American church, and maybe even frustrated with Christ Church in particular.

And we're perplexed and looking for answers to the question of what are we supposed to be doing as the church in response to all this brokenness. What are we doing to fight racial and economic and environmental, gender inequality and injustice?

[ 5 : 30 ] What are we doing to defend and support and uplift the unsheltered, and the orphans, and the widows, and the foster children, and immigrants, and this or that marginalized or minority people group?

Well, today we're going to continue to follow Luke's orderly account of Jesus, into his orderly account of the earliest followers of Jesus, as we open up this new series in the book of Acts.

We're titling this series, The Provocative Church, and it's our prayer that we would be that provocative church, that in the months ahead, as we give our attention to the acts of the Holy Spirit in and through the early church, that this same Spirit would give us a clearer vision for how we, how Christ's church East Bay might be the provocative and Spirit-empowered church that God wants us to be.

And it's going to start with an acceptance that God's plan for us, it might be different and better than ours, and it definitely is better than ours. And it also starts with prayer, as we will see here.

It's going to be covered in prayer, and we also want to be led by the Spirit with clarity about how exactly, how concretely are we going to be witnesses of Christ in this season ahead. So let's take a look at this text.

- [ 6 : 37 ] Luke kicks off this account in verses 1 to 3 by mentioning that in this surreal 40 days between Jesus' resurrection and his ascension, one thing in particular that he spoke to them about was his kingdom, it says in verse 3.
- He spoke to them about his kingdom. But now try to imagine those 40 days as one of his Jewish disciples. Yes, you've just witnessed the most amazing thing that you've ever seen in your life, the resurrection of the Messiah, the one who was to fulfill all the promises of God to Israel and to establish the everlasting kingdom.
- But then imagine waiting for over a month, right? 40 days as this Messiah speaks about the kingdom of God, and yet King Herod is still sitting on his throne, right?
- Pontius Pilate's authority is still intact. You're still paying taxes to Caesar, and you, a follower of the risen Lord, still find yourself hiding behind closed doors from the Roman soldiers and from the Jewish religious establishment.
- So imagine the expectation, the anticipation, even the confusion and frustration that these Jewish disciples probably felt over a month, for over a month after the resurrection.
- [ 7 : 45 ] Jesus the Christ is risen, but now what? And so what if I'm still subjected to the oppressive forces of this world? Now they're waiting, and they're waiting, right?
- But toward the end of this 40-day period, Jesus says something quite interesting that Luke wants us to pay attention to in verses 4 and 5. They're gathered together, they're eating, and then Jesus issues this command.
- He says, And in this moment, Jesus' disciples probably started to perk up, maybe even grin and rub their hands in excited anticipation, this is it.
- This is it. All right, here we go. Here comes the revolution starting in the holy city, Jerusalem. In just a few days, Jesus says, we'll receive the ultimate gift, the ultimate power, the baptism of the Holy Spirit of God.
- See, throughout the Old Testament prophets, God had foretold of a time and a day when His Spirit, His personal divine power would be poured out upon His servant Israel. It would be poured out upon their barren land and their people and their offspring, even on their young and their old and their daughters, and even their servants in Israel.
- [ 9 : 00 ] Upon their barren land and it would bring fruit. It would make their land fruitful and their enemies would be defeated and their sins forgiven and their shame removed, and ultimately their kingdom would be restored.
- So you can imagine how much they longed for God to pour the Spirit out upon them, to receive that power. Oh boy, right? I can't wait. Oh, what I'm going to do when I finally get that power.
- Roman soldiers, Roman Empire, watch out. The revolution is coming. And so imagine them all leaning in, as it says in verse 6, maybe putting down their pita bread and falafels and huddling even closer to Jesus to hear more.
- And they ask, Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel? They want to know if this time has come, because in their minds, the time has not yet come.
- The kingdom has not yet come in their minds. They look around and they see the resurrected king, but they don't see the kingdom of Israel. And so with butterflies in their stomachs, they eagerly lean in to hear Jesus tell them what they'd long been waiting for him to say, ever since the day he said to them, come, follow me.
- [ 10 : 09 ] They longed to hear that they, endowed with the Spirit's divine power, would lead a triumphant political revolution like the world has never seen, restoring the everlasting kingdom of Israel to its glory and to its splendor and prosperity.

And with all their Gentile enemies subjected underneath them. But of course, as we've seen time and time again from Jesus in the Gospel of Luke, he has an answer for them that they never would have expected, right?

First, he replies in verse 7, He basically says, He says, He says, He says, Verse 8, But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.

But he even says, This power though, even this power, guys, I'm not empowering you to be the warriors that you wanted to be. I'm empowering you to be my witnesses.

Witnesses, not warriors, he says. And then notice, he says in verse 8, Witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea, they're cool with that. But then he says what? And Samaria, even to those half-breed Samaritans you so hate, you will bear witness to them about me and my kingdom.

[ 11 : 36 ] And not only to the mixed-race Samaritans, but also to the ends of the earth. Yes, even to India and to Spain and Africa and even in the very hearts of the Roman Empire, to those who hate and oppress you and persecute me and you and all of Israel, those godless, unclean people who you want nothing to do with, whose destruction you probably even pray for, yes, even to them, you will be my witnesses.

So in response to the disciples' question about whether Jesus would at this time restore the kingdom to Israel, Jesus responds by revealing to them just how off-base their whole conception of the kingdom of God really was.

He says, you're missing the point, guys. You're missing the point with your nationalistic preoccupation with the timing of Israel's restoration. You're missing the point about the Spirit's power on you and you're missing the point about the scope of my kingdom and your role in it.

You will be my witnesses, not your own warriors, he says. He says, guys, this isn't gonna be the kingdom you envisioned. It's gonna be even better.

It's gonna be the kingdom I envisioned. And the question the disciples are forced to reckon with here, the question that we are forced to reckon with as we observe the words of Jesus, as we all consider what he said to them, is could it be, could it be that God's kingdom plan is both different and better than the kingdom plans that we've set our hearts upon?

[ 13 : 01 ] Could it be that God's kingdom plan is better and different than the kingdom plans we've set our hearts upon? You know, these kingdom plans that we have for the world and for this nation and for this church and for our families and for ourselves.

These made-up kingdoms, right? These made-up kingdoms that we've all idealized, that we've all pictured and planned for, about how we would like our world and our lives and our families to turn out.

This idealized vision of serenity and bliss and paradise and this sense of safety and security. I mean, call it the American dream. I talk about it in my PhD. I talk about the Asian-American dream, right?

You know, complete with degrees from respectable universities, high-paying and secure careers, homeownership in a nice upper-middle-class suburb, and then the ability to honor, treat, and care for our immigrant parents or grandparents, and then to have that consumer lifestyle where you can have boba dates whenever you want, right?

And you can go on that destination vacation and you can have that Tesla or at least a Prius, and then your children just follow that same pattern over and over again but to even greater heights of advancement.

[ 14 : 08 ] And maybe for you, the crown of your kingdom dream is something else. Maybe it's a certain professional or economic status, right? You're longing for that promotion or that financial independence so you can retire early, that fire life, right?

Or maybe it's a certain relational or familial or marital status, longing for that romantic partner, longing for that child, that marriage, that nuclear family with two and a half prodigy children, right?

Or maybe I'm just showing my cards. That's kind of what I want, right? Or maybe for some of us, you know, maybe for some of us, it's bigger. It's a certain vision of a public justice and peace where this or that political or religious tribe is finally dominant and in control where certain kinds of people who believe and behave differently than us are shut up and humiliated and put in their place, right?

And certain policies and laws and values that we think will make for a better world are finally reinforced. Well, again, Jesus' question to us today is what if my kingdom, what if my kingdom is even better than all of that?

And this is not to say that we shouldn't pursue that promotion or pursue that family or that political legislation or act in ways that we truly believe will make for a better world, but Jesus wanted his disciples to know and he wants us to know that his glorious and his perfect kingdom is not dependent upon the arrival of whatever myopic visions of the kingdom we may have conjured up on our own.

[ 15 : 37 ] See, the disciples, they thought that they had it all figured out. They thought that they had it all figured out. They thought that they knew exactly what kind of kingdom the world needed. And they gladly called Jesus Lord of these small kingdoms that they imagined in their minds.

He was the risen king to them, no doubt. And they loved the idea of this risen Jesus from Galilee conquering the Romans for them and restoring their nation to power. But the true test came when their king revealed a different kind of kingdom than the nationalistic one that they'd envisioned.

When he revealed a different purpose for the power he was about to give them with the spirit, yes, the resurrection power of the spirit was indeed about to come upon them and it was the mightiest power the world had ever seen.

But it wasn't for them to just do whatever they wanted with it. It wasn't for them to manipulate. I love how a Yale professor of systematic theology, Africana Studies, Willie James Jennings, he says this, Jesus, Jesus will define resurrection's meaning and resurrection's purpose.

It will not be used by these disciples as a tool for statecraft, nor will it constitute them the winner's circle. Such ways of thinking produces disciples who follow Jesus only because they actually worship power.

[ 16 : 54 ] And what he's saying is that the kingdom of God and the lordship of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit that raised him from the dead, it will not be manipulated. It will not be appropriated.

It will not be weaponized for our small and short-sighted purposes. So the hard question for Jesus' disciples, the hard question for all of us today is will we still follow Jesus as lord and king when the messianic kingdom's arrival does not conform to our myopic kingdom's aims?

Can we accept a king who empowers us not as warriors on our way to a victory of our own design, but as his witnesses, witnesses of his victory that's already been won?

Are we willing to resign ourselves to witness rather than to war? But now you may be wondering, what does that even mean? What does that look like to be witnesses, to be Christ's witnesses?

As you might imagine and gather from this episode, after Jesus confounded his disciples' expectations with his answer to their question about the kingdom, and then he kind of, you know, just dropped the mic and then he, you know, said peace out and he bounced or he floated, right, up into heaven.

[ 18 : 07 ] The disciples were just kind of stunned, right? Left there quite stunned and gazing into the heavens and kind of like, oh, wait, what just happened? He said we're going to receive power from the Spirit but not to be warriors of Israel but to simply be witnesses of Christ and then to the ends of the earth?

That's all he said? What does that mean? What are we supposed to do now? And paralyzed in astonishment, they had to be shaken up, shaken up from their stupor. Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky?

So there they were with, you know, a mix of emotions. The one they believed to be the Messiah had just risen from the dead and they'd seen him ascend into heaven right before their eyes and they knew that their lives would never be the same and they were filled with joy and excitement and yet in another sense, not much had changed in Israel.

The Roman Empire was still intact. They still paid taxes to Caesar and the threat of death upon their lives was still very real to them. And so not knowing exactly when the Spirit's power would come or what that would even mean for them or what it meant to be witnesses of this king who wasn't there anymore, witnesses of this kingdom which seemed to be imaginary, right, compared to all the other kingdoms that they'd ever seen, what did they do?

What did they do? Verse 13 and 14 says, they all joined together constantly, it says, and devoted themselves to prayer. They got together and they prayed.

[ 19 : 36 ] Christ Church, what do we do when we don't know what to do? We get together in community and we pray and we ask God what to do until he tells us what to do. The disciples couldn't have known what lay ahead for them and the church.

Like us, they didn't have a clear sense of how to answer that now what question facing them. But what the disciples did know was that God was up to something and it was only a matter of time.

So in the meantime, they devoted themselves to prayer and they prayed for clarity and direction and this power that God promised them because they trusted that this would come when they were baptized in the power of the Holy Spirit.

And as they say, the rest is history, right? And you and I are here today, 2,000 years later, sitting halfway across the world from where the early church's first prayer meeting took place in Jerusalem.

And we are all here along with the countless multitude that's gone before us as an answer to these prayers right here in Acts chapter 1. They're prayers that the Spirit would come and empower them as witnesses to the ends of the earth and to make Jesus and His kingdom known.

[ 20 : 44 ] So my question for us Christ churches, do we believe that God will answer our prayers too? In this season where we ourselves are discerning as a church, what now?

What's next? What do we do now in the season ahead? Are we praying? Are we a praying church? Are we gathering with our families? Or as a church body like we did last night with Tonya, Maria, Leanne, we prayed on our third Saturday prayers for justice.

Are we lifting up prayers like this to God? Lord, fill us with Your Spirit and let us be powerful witnesses of Your kingdom. And show us, God, this has been my prayer, show us concretely, concretely what this looks like.

Show us what we can do with the resources that we have here as Christ Church East Bay with our Berkeley and our Oakland and our Albany, you know, our Richmond communities, me and Castro Valley. Show us what it looks like to be the church, to be witnesses of the kingdom of God.

Today, Christ Church, I just want to invite you to join me in this prayer. Join me in this prayer. There's a Sri Lankan commentator that I'm reading for this series in Acts. His name is Ajit Fernando.

[ 21 : 54 ] And he would remind us of this. He says, often great prayer movements start with one or more individuals with simply a burden to pray, who share this burden with others and then keep on praying with them until the blessing comes.

Simple, but we need this. We need this, Christ Church. We need to hear from God and to be led by His Spirit because, you know, we are in a significant and complicated moment in the history of our church and in the history of our world.

For our church, we've gone from one to two to three and now back to one location and congregation. You know, we've gone from six pastors and 17 staff to two pastors and six staff and having seen even more turnover and transition than already, you know, the already huge amount that we typically see in the Bay, we just are trying to keep going, right?

And then, you know, with our church family slowly trying to figure out how to come back to worship in person after a global pandemic that's kept us apart. And then you also have the injustice and the heartbreak and the division that we see multiplying, it seems like, in our society and our nation and our world.

Christ Church, we are at a huge now what moment in the history of the world and particularly in the history of Christ Church East Bay. And to be honest with everyone here, it's incredibly intimidating to lead at a time like this, to lead this church at a time like this.

[ 23 : 22 ] But you know, I'm also absolutely convinced that it's also a time that's pregnant with opportunity to see and to experience the Spirit of God in and through our church as witnesses of Christ.

But again, what does that mean? How are we to bear witness to Christ in the season ahead? And to be honest, I don't have all the answers. Our session of elders, they don't have all the answers.

And Jonathan St. Clair, even Jonathan doesn't have all the answers. You might be surprised. So we gotta be in prayer. And what I wanna do today is I wanna share a couple guidelines for us as we consider what it means to be witnesses as we go through this book of Acts to hang our hats on and to really consider for our own lives and for our own church body, how are we gonna be witnesses Christ Church East Bay?

In addition to accepting that God's kingdom plan can and may very well be different than ours, and in addition to our constant and devoted prayers, I think Jesus' words here today offer a lot of helpful guidelines as we seek to bear witness to the kingdom of God.

And the first thing I want you to notice is that Jesus says, He says, you will be my witnesses. You will be my witnesses. And this means that our witness, our witness, it has to be thoroughly Christ-centered, Christ-oriented, Christ-motivated, and Christ-exalting.

[ 24 : 45 ] See, because if our witness isn't tightly bound with Christ, if we aren't Christ's witnesses, but someone else or something else's witnesses, we will always end up pursuing a vision of a kingdom that isn't actually Christ's.

And we'll be doomed and disappointed and we'll become failures. I also want us to notice that He says, you will be my witnesses. It's plural. See, this is a huge calling, Christ-church.

This calling to be Christ's witness is, it's a huge calling. It's not an individualistic endeavor, but it's something to be done in community with each other. And no one witness can do it all and bear witness to all the glorious richness of the kingdom of God to the ends of the earth, especially not in a single lifetime.

I also want you to notice that the plurality of witnesses spanning, you know, church history even, it implies also a diversity of witness bearing amongst Christians and churches.

Some people, some churches will be doing very different things than us and that's okay and that's good. And others even who are trying to do the same things might go about it in very, very different ways.

[ 25 : 57 ] And what we need to hear is, that's okay, we need to accept that that's good and that that's right and it's according to God's sovereign plan. You know, some will bear especially powerful witness to Christ's heart for racial justice, others to his heart for the fatherless, others to his heart for the unborn or the sick or the poor or for creation care and the list, it goes on, guys.

It goes on because God's heart is huge and his kingdom is expansive and yes, we want to be about all those things as much as we can. We must always strive to pursue God's heart and to bear witness to his intentions for this world to the fullest extent that we can but we also need to be humble.

We need to humbly accept that none of us will equal, you know, with equal strength and with just as loud of a voice and with just as much influence do every single thing that God wants all of us, all witnesses across the history of the church to do.

So right now, that's why I say we've got to pray Christ's church. Right now, it's so important for us as this one little local church in the East Bay to pray and discern the ways God is calling us to serve him as witnesses in this particular season now.

You know, and that may have been different, that may be different than what it was in the past for Christ's church and it probably will change later in the future of Christ's church but that's good and that's okay and that's part of God's intricate plan.

[ 27 : 28 ] I also want you to notice when Jesus tells us to be witnesses, he says you're to be witnesses from Jerusalem to all Judea to Samaria and even to the ends of the earth and I see two things here.

The first thing I mentioned earlier is that we're to bear witness to everyone, to everyone, not just the people we want to, even those we don't like, even those we wouldn't expect to appreciate our testimony about Christ.

He says to the ends of the earth, to the ends of the earth. But the other thing I see here is that, well, yes, we want to bear witness to Christ's power and his liberation and his abundance and his compassion and we want to change the world with this witness and we want to do it, you know, by ending world poverty, right, and by ending international human trafficking and then securing clean water for the entire world.

But if you're like me, you probably feel quite overwhelmed by these demands, by all the things that need to happen in this world and if you're like me, you probably have been struggling with where do we start?

Well, I want us to look at Jesus' blueprint. He says, Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, to the ends of the earth, Christchurch. He's saying it's okay to start local, but keep going.

[ 28 : 41 ] Start local, but keep going. Keep making your way out. Consider what spheres of influence has God gifted me with right now and how can I leverage my influence to be a witness for Christ?

Before feeling like we have to change the world, maybe think about what it means to bear witness to Christ in our home, in our family, in our neighborhood, in our workplace.

Let's not underestimate, Christchurch, let's not underestimate the power of incremental local witness bearing even as we pursue and pray for large, large-scale ways to bear witness for the sake of systemic change.



Another thing I want to mention is that to be a witness also implies testimony. testimony. When you are a witness, you are showing and telling. You are communicating a message. You're giving a verbal account.

And as we will see in the book of Acts, the book of Acts does indeed contain a lot of crazy amazing acts that bear witness to the kingdom of God and the power of God. And they wonderfully demonstrate that.

[ 29 : 44 ] But the primary witness bearing activity that we will see in the book of Acts is highlighted in the messages and the speeches and the sermons that are given. In Acts, there's a strong theme of the word of God increasing and going out and moving and stirring this whole world up and provoking cities and then being confirmed by the mighty acts of the Spirit.

Our witness, Christchurch, it has to be in word and deed. It's not simply enough to do justice, but we must also preach. We must preach justice and preach the basis of justice, which is the kingdom of God in Christ.

And lastly, lastly, what it's going to take for us to be these witnesses, I want us to see how liberating this call is to be a witness rather than a warrior. I'm also reading this Cuban-American commentator, Justo Gonzalez, and he reminds us that the call to be a witness is not a call to be just a peddler of ideas, but simply to provide testimony regarding an event that's already occurred.

See, witnesses aren't people who have to go and make the victory happen or people who have to go and actualize the kingdom. To be a witness means that we've already witnessed, we've already experienced the victorious establishment of the kingdom.

In Christ's church, this is the gospel. This is the gospel that we don't have to be the warriors of God, but simply spirit-empowered witnesses of a victory that's already been won by Christ in the resurrection.

[ 31 : 10 ] This is the gospel that the establishment and the full and actualization, the final realization of God's kingdom kingdom is neither limited by our finite imaginations nor dependent upon us winning on behalf of Christ.

Rather, the kingdom of God has already been inaugurated in the resurrection of Christ. And our job is simply to bear witness to this present reality. You know, to those of us who are tempted to go warrior mode, right, in pursuit of fulfilling our own self-imagined kingdom visions, Jesus' word to us, just like it was to his disciples, is no, you're actually thinking far too small.

He said to his disciples, you're just thinking about a political, material, and earthly kingdom, but that's not the whole of my kingdom. I'm talking something much bigger, much wider, much deeper. You're just thinking about the shalom of this little land and this little nation of Israel, but I'm talking about the shalom of the entire cosmos and all the nations, every tribe, tongue, and language to the ends of the earth.

You thought that this power was going to help you destroy the nations and conquer the world, but I'm giving you an even better power, he says. A power that will include and engraft the nations rather than destroy and dominate.

Think about that kind of power, a power that wins and persuades rather than wars and punishes. What is the greater power? Think about this. What is the greater power? What is the greater challenge? Dominating and destroying one's enemies like all the world empires that have gone before, or winning them as friends and family with extravagant compassion and love, sacrificial love, divine forgiveness secured by the blood of Christ's cross.

[ 32 : 47 ] What's the greater power? What's the greater power? The power of destruction or the power of resurrection? What is the greater miracle? The death of our enemies or the death of death and the death of Christ?

See, from the get-go in the book of Acts, Jesus says to us, Jesus says, don't you see? The powerful kingdom of heaven is already upon us because I've come and I'm risen and the beauty of my kingdom is that it doesn't need warriors.

That's the true power. This is the sovereign grace of God. We don't have to be his warriors. We can simply be his witnesses, witnesses of the only story, the only king, the only kingdom really worth bearing witness about to the ends of the earth, Christ.

So will you join me in prayer and being these witnesses to the glory of God and for the good of our cities? Let's pray. God, we're here seeking clarity from you.

We want to be your witnesses. We know that you have woven into history the greatest story ever told and we ask that you would show us how to embody that story, how to live that story out, to bear witness to the beauty of this story.

[ 34 : 01 ] For the glory of your name and for the good of our neighbors, we pray. Amen. Christ Church, part of bearing witness, part of showing forth the incredible value of the kingdom of God is by offering our lives and our gifts to him.

So will you join me in this offertory prayer? Mighty God of resurrection power, we know that you have been with us through all that the past year has brought us. And we have seen you in the generosity of heart that has brought us through these days.

As we offer ourselves back to you now, may we do so as those convinced that light will always wash away darkness and life will always defeat death. In the name of our risen Savior, we pray.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.  
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.