

A Praying, Expectant Church

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Preacher: Rev. Jonathan St. Clair

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at Christchurcheastbay.org. Today's Gospel lesson is from the Acts of the Apostles, Acts chapter 1, verses 1 through 14, as printed in your liturgy.

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, 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 and 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 of 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? The same Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven. 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 Balthus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas, 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. Thanks be to God.

Good morning, Christ Church. We are beginning a new sermon series today in the Acts of the Apostles, and before we get into this text, it may not be familiar to some of us, and so I want to give you a little bit of context. Who is this book written for? We can see in verse 1 it's written to a person named Theophilus, and Theophilus was a guy like many of us. He was well-educated. He was cultured.

[3 : 1 5] He is intellectually sophisticated, and we know that because Luke is writing at a very high level of literary Greek that Theophilus can read and understand, he's likely a high-ranking Roman official, an influential Gentile who has been recently converted. He had this Greco-Roman worldview and pagan life system, but now he's become a Christian, and so Luke's writing to him because he needs to be instructed. He needs to be able to understand about Jesus and about the church, and so Luke is trying to convince him of the things that he already believes. He's trying to assure him in the Christian faith, and the name Theophilus means beloved of God or friend of God. It's probably a name that he took on when he got baptized as someone who's loved by God and who wants to love God. So it's written to Theophilus, and what is this, who is this book written by? Well, it says in verse 1, in my former book, *Theophilus*, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach, and this is Luke speaking, Luke who wrote the Gospel of Luke, and one of the things I love about Luke is that he's the only Gentile author of the New Testament. Think about that. We have a Gentile who wrote, you know, a quarter of the New

Testament. He was a doctor. He was a historian. He was a highly educated companion of the Apostle Paul, and he says, I wrote a former book. I wrote volume one, my gospel, which he says is about what, I wrote to you about what Jesus did and what he taught, right? Jesus' miracles and his teachings. Jesus' powerful works and his penetrating words. It's all there in the biography of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus that I wrote for you. But the other thing I love about Luke is that he's the only one of the four evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. He's the only one of the four who gave us a second volume.

And, you know, Acts, this book that we're going to be exploring, it's one of the most exciting parts of the New Testament. And it's the only part that tells us the story of the first Christians.

It's telling us about the beginning of the young church in action, which is actually our history. It's our background. And so we're going to be studying this book not out of detached antiquarian interest, but we're going to be looking at it because it tells us about the power of the Holy Spirit to reach the nations with the gospel of Jesus Christ. That's what this book is written for.

And I want to talk about four things today. Educated by history, empowered for witness, enthroned in heaven, and engaged in prayer. And some of you are nervous because you usually have three points, so this is going to be like a really long sermon. It's going to be the same length, but what I want to talk about is educated by history, empowered for witness, enthroned in heaven, and engaged in prayer. First of all, educated by history. Luke's goal is to take a person and people like Theophilus who've been educated in all the worldviews and life systems from, you know, the sophisticated philosophers to the superstitious pagans and a mix of everything in between. And he's saying to people like Theophilus, he's saying, now that you've come to believe, now that you've put your faith in Christ, now that you've been converted, I want to teach you how to think like a Christian and how to live like a Christian. And so in verse one, he says, in my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach. And so if you want to know what Jesus began to do and to teach, go and read my first book. Go and read my gospel.

[7 : 13] But Luke is also saying here that because all of the gospels end with God raising Jesus from the dead, Jesus did not stop his doing and his teaching on Good Friday, but rather from Easter Sunday onward until the end of human history, the risen and living Jesus is continuing to do and he's continuing to teach. His powerful works and his penetrating words are not limited to the time before his cross, nor are they limited to the 40 days between his resurrection and his ascension into heaven.

Luke is saying to Theophilus and he's saying to us now in this second volume, I'm going to tell you about all the things that Jesus continued to do and continued to teach after he was taken up to heaven.

Theophilus, the life of the church is the continuing teaching ministry and doing ministry of the risen and exalted Lord Jesus. That's what you need to know. That Jesus is still doing and he's still teaching today through his body, the church. What C.S. Lewis would say at this point is, Theophilus, Aslan is on the move. He's alive and he wants to continue to do powerful works and teach penetrating words even here in Berkeley, even here in 2026. And so what does Theophilus need to know?

Well, he goes on in verse 3. He says, after Jesus' suffering, he presented himself to them, to the disciples, and he gave them many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of 40 days and spoke about the kingdom of God. See, Jesus gave his disciples clarity and he gave them conviction about the historical event of his resurrection. And he had to do that because everybody knew that the Romans were really quite good at killing people. And so if the Romans, you know, put you on a cross, you were not only going to be dead, you were going to stay dead. And so Jesus is needing to present himself and to give them proofs, to give them evidence that he's actually alive.

And that all the claims that he made to be the Messiah, all the claims he made to be the Son of God were not nullified by his crucifixion, but rather were vindicated by God raising him from the dead.

[9 : 50] And he's there saying to his disciples, look, my resurrection is proof. It's not the reversal of a defeat. It's the manifestation of a victory. And Jesus is having to prove this to them. For example, in verse 4, it says he was eating with them. And this is something he continued to do for 40 days.

He kept having to come and say, all right, let's sit down. Let's do this one more time. Give me a piece of bread. Give me some fish. This glorified body that I have, it's a real body. Look, you can see me eat. You can hear me eating. You can touch my body. I'm here. It's me. It's real. It's

happening.

And he did this for 40 days. And we have the eyewitness testimony. We have the historical record of these 40 days. And we've been trying to talk to you about it in the resurrection narratives of the Gospels when Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene. And when he appeared to the two people walking on the road to Emmaus. And when he appeared to Peter and John and all the disciples. When he appeared to Thomas. The Apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15. He says, Christ was raised on the third day according to the scriptures. And he appeared to Cephas, that is Peter. And then he appeared to the twelve. And after that, he appeared to more than 500 of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living. And then he appeared to James. And then he appeared to all the apostles. And last of all, he appeared to me also.

So over the course of these 40 days, Jesus is giving them convincing proofs that he was alive. And he's grounding them in this great fact of history. He's anchoring them in this evidence-based act of Almighty God. And this is so important for us because Christianity is not built on vague spirituality or speculative philosophy. Christianity is built on a historical person, Jesus, and a historical event, his resurrection. And it says in verse 3 that not only was Jesus proving that he was alive, but he was speaking with them for 40 days about the kingdom of God. He was speaking to them about God's rule as king. And this is really the central and unifying theme of the entire Bible.

[12:07] It's God's rule over human hearts. And Jesus just spoke to them. He said, the kingdom of God has come, and the kingdom is coming, and the kingdom will come. The kingdom of God was inaugurated in my coming. The kingdom of God will be consummated in my coming again. And you all now are living between the times. You're living between the end of the old age and the beginning of the new age. You're living between the already of the kingdom and the not yet of the kingdom. And so I'm here to talk to you about what God's rule is going to look like between now and then.

And we know that this is what Jesus was talking to them about because it's what the apostles went and proclaimed, the kingdom of God. It's what they wrote about in their letters, the kingdom of God. And so let's just pause here for some application. First of all, we call this book the Acts of the Apostles, but really we ought to think about it as the Acts of the Living Jesus.

Or we could maybe call this book the continued doings and teachings of King Jesus by His Spirit through the apostles. But that's kind of a cumbersome title, so that's probably why they didn't choose that. Secondly, a second word of application is that it's a word for those of you who may be exploring Christianity or new to the Christian faith. And it is this, that you, like Theophilus, beloved of God, friend of God, need to get educated. You need to build your life, not primarily on your subjective experiences of God, but you need to build your life on the objective work of God in history, in the resurrection of Jesus, and the kingdom of God that has already come and been established by Jesus. In other words, you need to become educated by the history of the Gospels, the history in Acts, the history of the New Testament letters. You need to become literate in the Bible. You need to learn the basic truths of Jesus and the church. And like Theophilus, you need to learn what Luke is teaching him about the historical Jesus who lived and the contemporary Jesus who lives.

And so my encouragement to you is to get educated by history. And we've actually have two groups that are starting up. One is a Gospel of Mark group for people who are exploring Christianity. If you've never opened the Gospel, never read a Gospel, Gospel of Mark group would be for you. The second is an Essentials of Faith group for people who are newer Christians. If you want to just learn the basic things that you need to know to be a Christian, we would encourage you to become part of that group. Third point of application here is a word for those of us who may have been following Jesus for a little while, and that is this, that if Jesus is alive, if Jesus is a living and powerful reality among us now, if Jesus is a person who can be known and loved, if he's a person who can be obeyed and followed, if he continues to be active and on the move, directing and speaking and performing deeds of power in and through his church, then you shouldn't allow yourself to get too comfortable.

Right? Some of us have our routines. We sit in the same place at church and we kind of think it's going to be the same every week. But this says, no, you should be alert. You should be awake. You should be ready and prepared. You need to be responsive because there are probably new things that Jesus is wanting to do among us. There's probably new things that Jesus is wanting to teach among us in this season ahead. So don't get too comfy. Are you with me so far? Okay. Educated by history. Secondly, empowered for witness. Empowered for witness. Jesus' two main topics of

conversation between his resurrection and his ascension were the kingdom of God and the spirit of God.

[16:07] And he's talking about these two things because the spirit of God, the power of God, is what makes the rule of God and the reign of God a living and present reality among his people.

And we preached about the Holy Spirit a little bit ago when we preached on John 7 and John 14, if you want to go back and review what we said there. But I'm going to add on to that now because Jesus says in verse 4, he says, Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift of my father that he's 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.

All three persons of the Trinity are spoken of here. Jesus, the Son of God, says that God, the Holy Spirit, is the gift promised by God, the Father. And he says that, you know, just as the Father gave us the gift of his Son, so he will also give us the gift of the Holy Spirit. And Jesus says this gift is not going to be in a small and limited amount. It's not like you're going to be gifted a few drops of the Holy Spirit or that you're going to be sort of lightly misted by the Holy Spirit. No, what does Jesus say? He says you're going to be baptized. You're going to be immersed. You're going to be plunged into the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not just going to come in a gentle rain. The Holy Spirit's going to come like an atmospheric river and flood you and saturate you with the presence of God, the Holy Spirit. And then he goes on in verse 8, and Jesus says, 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. Now, what does Jesus mean when he says you will receive power? Well, the word he uses here is *dunamis*, which is where we get the word dynamite. And he's saying that when a person has the Holy Spirit of God come into their life, when the Holy Spirit comes to dwell inside of you, he will give you individually, he'll give us collectively, not just like a little boost, but he says, I'm going to give you the dynamic explosive power of God. And my highly charged, my easily combustible power, the same power that raised me from the dead on the third day, it's going to come on you, and it's going to come into you, and you will be operating in power beyond your natural strengths, abilities, and resources. And now, why does Jesus emphasize the need to be connected up with this power source? What is it that we are supposed to do with the power of the Holy

Spirit? Well, Jesus says, actually, I'm giving you all a massive job to do. I'm going to make you a part of my global rescue operation. And Jesus says, in verse 8, he says, you will be my witnesses to the ends of the earth. So that's the mission of the church. The mission of the church is to bear witness to Jesus.

[19:32] And these disciples are to operate in the power of the Holy Spirit to go out and bear witness to Jesus. And they're going to do that in a really unique way because they're the eyewitnesses of the resurrection. They're the ones who are going to go out and evangelize the Roman Empire. They're the ones who are going to go plant the first churches. They're the ones who are going to write the New Testament under the power and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. And Jesus says they're going to go out into these spheres of mission to Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and then to the ends of the earth.

And they're going to go out in all these ever-widening circles with the power of the Holy Spirit and the power of Jesus and the power of his gospel to people who do not believe it. Now let's pause here for a little application as well. Most people think about, when they think about being a Christian witness, we tend to think in individual and subjective terms, right? We think about witnessing as going to a friend or a neighbor or a colleague and giving them the testimony of our own personal journey out of a life of sinful self-centeredness and into a life of faith in Jesus. And that's not necessarily wrong. It's a really good thing. It's a sound and important instinct. But let me encourage you to think about this in more corporate and objective terms. Jesus says, you all, plural, are my witnesses. Y'all are my witnesses. And witnessing is something that we do together as a collective unity. It's something we do as a church family. It's something we do together as the body of Christ. And then Jesus says, you all are my witnesses. You all, y'all are to witness about me and my work of saving the world. So what I'm empowering you to do is to go out and take the content and the message that I've outlined for you at the end of Luke's gospel. This is what Jesus says in Luke 24. He said to his apostles, he said, this is what is written, the Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations.

You are witnesses of these things. So this is the objective content of the church's corporate witness. The apostles were not going out and saying, I've had this subjective experience and I want to tell you about my personal testimony and let me share with you my private truth so that you can think about your private truth and whether or not you want to accept my private truth. That's not what the apostles were doing. The apostles were going out and we know that we've communicated and borne witness by the power of the Holy Spirit when we say the same kind of things the apostles said. They went out and they said, number one, Jesus is God's Messiah. He's his only chosen king of this world. Number two, he suffered and he died on a cross. Number three, he rose from the dead and he is alive today. And number four, if you repent, if you turn and you trust in Jesus as the true king and the rightful Lord of this world, your sins can be forgiven and you can be free. The church's witness is to collectively speak about the objective content of the gospel that Jesus has given us. So that when we are bearing witness in the power of the Spirit, we're saying things like we hear in the Acts of the Apostles like this, Acts chapter 4 verse 12, they say, salvation is found in no one else other than Jesus for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved. Or they say in Acts chapter 14, they say, you need to turn from your worthless idols, your counterfeit gods, and you need to begin to serve and worship the living and true God. And you see, the result of the church's spirit-empowered witness is that people were saying things like this in Acts chapter 17. They say, these men have turned the world upside down and they're saying that there's another king, there's another Lord, his name is Jesus. See, while you and I are not capital A apostles, we are very much like the ordinary and everyday Christian men and women that Jesus empowered with the Holy Spirit to be his witnesses, except that we don't have to go to the ends of the earth. We already live here at the ends of the earth.

He's put us here on the edge of the continent where east meets west, where all the nations have come together to live here in the Bay Area. He's put us here in 2026 when our social fabric is fraying and when our institutions are weakening and when people's counterfeit gods are no longer working for them and people are at one another's throats in culture wars. And he's put us here in this time and in this place where people are waking up with spiritual hunger and spiritual interest. And that same spirit that raised Christ from the dead is in us. The same spirit that came and pierced the hardened hearts of those who are listening to the apostles with the subjective content of the gospel, that spirit is still in us and that spirit is present in the church. And what Jesus wants to do is to carry on the apostles' witness through us to this generation. And so what we need to do is stay alert to all the unplanned and unexpected opportunities for witness because we know of all the things that the church could be doing, this surely is the one priority. This is the one job we've been given to do. Amen?

[25 : 35] Amen. Okay, so we're called to become educated by history and we're called to become empowered for witness. But the third thing I want to say is that we are, well, this passage is about enthronement in heaven. It talks about how Jesus has been enthroned in heaven. What happens next is one of the most truly puzzling things in the New Testament. It's one of the most visually unexpected miracles that the disciples have seen firsthand. And you can see it down in verse 9. It says, after Jesus said this, he was taken up before their very eyes and a cloud hid him from their sight. And the disciples are just staring like deer in headlights. They don't know what to do. They do not understand what is going on right now. And so verse 10, it says, they're looking intently up into the sky as he was going. And suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them and said, men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? The same Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven will come back in the same way you've seen him go into heaven. Right? So these angelic messengers of God, they come and they give a gentle rebuke to these disciples and they say, hey, snap out of it. He left and he's going to come back. But until then, there's work to do. So you got to get moving. And the apostles are puzzled.

You know, they're completely puzzled from day one about what the ascension is all about. And it's puzzling for us too. Why did this happen? And what difference does it make for our souls and our lives that Jesus is ascended into heaven? Well, I want to convince you right now that the ascension can, if you understand it, it can become an irreplaceable important resource for living your life in this world. And it's a resource that no other religion and no other philosophy of life holds out for us. And here it is. The ascension is not a change in altitude for Jesus. It's not like Jesus is now with God the Father in outer space somewhere. He didn't go out to the stars and the planets. This is not

interstellar. This is not Project Hail Mary. Great movies. But that's not what's happening right here. What's happening right here is a coronation. Right? Because when someone becomes king or queen, there's a ceremony in which authority is officially transferred. And if you've ever watched one of these ceremonies, the person literally walks up onto a podium. And then from there, they go up onto steps. And then from there, they go and they sit up on a throne on this higher chair. And when that happens, we say, well, she has ascended to her throne. And that word ascended gets across the fact that this is more than just about a change in elevation for the queen. No, she's not just physically higher than everyone else. She has a new relationship to everyone else. She has new powers and new privileges. She is going to go up on that throne. And from that throne, she's going to exercise her authority. And you see, when Jesus is rising up to heaven, he's tracing out physically what's actually happening cosmically and spiritually. He's going into God's dimension of reality, which intersects and overlaps with ours. And he's taking his place as the new king and the head of the human race. And he's going into that control room of the universe. And from there, he's going to run everything. From there, he's going to cause the kingdom of God to come from heaven down to earth. And this should, frankly, give each and every one of us a deep sigh of relief this morning.

This should give us a fresh burst of courage. Because if the Christian life, if the Christian mission is run by this person who's sitting on this throne, then we can trust him. We can trust him to get the job done. Right? If Jesus is seated on the throne, then I can trust that he is utterly competent.

[29 : 52] If he's sending us out to be his witnesses, then he's utterly competent to go and take the unconvinced and convince them. Jesus is absolutely able. If he has this kind of authority, he is absolutely able to take someone who's doubting and disbelieving and turn them into a disciple. That Jesus absolutely, if he said, I'm going to build my church, that that's exactly what he's going to do. He's going to build his church.

And he's, the apostle Paul puts it this way. Ephesians 1. He says, God raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age, but also in the one to come. What if we lived as if that were true? My life would look so different on a daily basis if I lived as if this were true, that he is far above all rule and authority, all power and dominion, and every name that is invoked. Some of you would like for me to preach more about our president. Some of you would like for me to preach more about the heads of state and current events. Why would I do that if I can preach about this?

He's on the throne. I want to talk about the one who's on the throne. Right? So, we talked about the fact that we need to become educated by history, and we're called to be empowered for witness, and we need to look up to the one who's enthroned in heaven, and finally, we need to be engaged in prayer, and I'll make this short.

Engaged in prayer. We can see in verse 12, it says, then the apostles, who were completely bewildered, but now they're returning to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, the Sabbath days walk from the city, and it says in verse 14, they all joined together constantly in prayer.

[31 : 51] They all joined together constantly in prayer. We didn't print the next verse, but it says there's 120 men and women there, probably about a group this size. And think about that.

Every person in that room has just been convinced over the course of 40 days by convincing proofs that Jesus is alive. Every person in that room knows that they've just been given the most important task in the history of the world.

That is, that you are going to be my witnesses to the ends of the earth. And every single person in that room has just seen Jesus enthroned with all authority in heaven and on earth.

And what they realize as they go into this prayer meeting is that they have the ear of the king. What they realize is that Jesus, even though he's in heaven, he's accessible to us here on earth through prayer.

You see, as long as Jesus existed in the world of space and time, he could only be at one spot in one moment. And so if you wanted to hear Jesus, if you wanted to relate to Jesus, if you wanted to experience Jesus, you had to go, and you had to be at that place, and you had to be there at that time.

[33 : 07] But you see, in the ascension, Jesus leaves the space-time continuum, and he passes into the presence of God, and he's elevated to the Father's throne.

And do you know what that means for you? Do you know what that means for your life this week, Monday through Saturday? It means that you have access to that throne.

And it means the ascension does not mean a loss for us. It doesn't mean a loss of the presence of Jesus. It doesn't mean that we've lost intimacy with Jesus.

It doesn't mean that we've lost the leadership of Jesus. It doesn't mean that we've lost the advocacy of Jesus. What the ascension means is the magnification and the infinite availability of all of these things to us all the time.

And that should make us excited. That's why the apostles are engaged in prayer to this risen king who's now ruling from heaven. And this takes all the pressure off of us.

[34 : 12] Right? We can relax. If this is true, we can smile and we can laugh because we know that the risen king is available to us all the time for loving communication and loving fellowship.

You know, you may wonder like, okay, how were these disciples praying for 10 days between the ascension and Pentecost, between the enthronement of Jesus and the giving of the Holy Spirit?

How were they praying? Well, it says in verse 14 that they were praying together. They were praying together in united prayer.

And if you don't have people that you pray together with, that should become your first priority this week to find people with whom you can pray together. And it says also that they were praying constantly, that they didn't give up.

They were praying in persevering prayer. And I imagine in this prayer meeting, they were remembering back to the teaching of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke, Luke chapter 11, where Jesus said, friends, ask and it will be given to you.

[35 : 33] And Jesus said, your Father in heaven will give the Holy Spirit to those who just go and ask him for it. And I imagine them on that basis praying like this, Lord, if we try to go out and be your witnesses, we are going to experience the utter futility of human effort apart from the mighty manifestation of your divine power.

If we just try to go out there on our own, it's not going to work. But you told us, Lord, you told us that you would clothe us with power from on high.

You told us that you would baptize us in the Holy Spirit. You told us that you would come and enable us to do things beyond our ability.

You told us that you would transcend our ability and that you would transform our inability. So Lord, we're praying that you would send us the Holy Spirit. We're praying, Holy Spirit, that you would come down among us.

We're praying, oh Lord, that you would give us more and more of your power. Is that how we pray? Have you prayed together with some other friends in this church like that recently?

[36 : 56] Have you prayed not just once, but continued in prayer constantly until God grants you what you ask? See, friends, the victory has already been won for us in the resurrection of Jesus.

The King has already taken His throne. The power of the Holy Spirit for our mission is available to us. But what we have to do is we have to take hold of that power.

We have to take hold of the Holy Spirit in prayer together. And I hope and pray that's what this next season ahead will be about. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.