

What Now?

I hope you were able to attend the Holy Spirit Conference with Tim and Rochelle Enloe. Thanks for supporting these services with your attendance and prayers. People were baptized in the Holy Spirit, others took new steps in being used in the gifts of the Spirit, I heard at least one testimony of healing. It was an anointed time, and then what a special evening as 21 people were baptized in water on Wednesday. It was a wonderful week. Which leads to the question and message this morning. After all that happened this week: What now?

We spent eight weeks talking about the Acts 1 church, living in expectation of what Jesus had said to them, especially with regard to the gift of the Holy Spirit. **“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.” Acts 1:4** Sure enough, a couple of weeks later, on the day of Pentecost, they were baptized in the Holy Spirit as Luke tells us in Acts 2. They waited as Jesus said, in expectation. They received this gift of Spirit baptism but for the disciples in Acts 2 and for all of us today after the meetings this week, after an encounter with the Holy Spirit, What now? What’s the purpose?

Let me quickly say, there are many benefits to receiving the baptism in the Holy Spirit with the initial physical evidence of speaking in other tongues. Jesus said we would receive power with Spirit baptism. This is spiritual power to be like Jesus and to do what he commands, spiritual power to be his witnesses. Other benefits: We experience Jesus in a deeper fashion, the word of God comes alive, our spiritual understanding is deepened, we have power to overcome sin, an entrance to the gifts and ministry of the Holy Spirit, the intercession of the Holy Spirit through prayer in a heavenly language, the building up of our faith praying in the Spirit, the list can go on in terms of the personal benefits of Spirit baptism. However, Jesus said, **“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.” Acts 1:8**

In answer to the question, “What now?” Jesus indicates the primary answer, the primary reason for the baptism in the Holy Spirit is to make us witnesses. Power to be his witnesses. I want to look a little deeper at that this morning. What do you think of when you think of being a witness? I think of “Hi, I’m Phil and I go to the church down the street. I wonder if you have a minute that I could tell you about Jesus?” That is witnessing I suppose and that’s fine, but that’s not necessarily what Jesus had in mind, or at least not all he had in mind. Allow me to let you in

on a little secret. The root of the Greek word Luke used for witness (*martus*) or witnesses is the word from which we get our English word martyr. “And you shall be martyrs.” It kind of changes the impact, doesn’t it?

A martyr is someone who dies or is killed for their belief. A martyr gives their life for a cause, a belief, for another. The word originally came from a Greek legal term for someone giving testimony in a court of law. Over time, as Christians were put on trial for their faith, giving testimony of Jesus as Messiah, Savior and risen Lord in the face of torture and death, the word came to mean one who gave witness to Jesus in the highest possible way, by their death.

Jesus said you shall be witnesses/martyrs. It’s not inconsistent with what Jesus had already taught. **“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.” Luke 9:23-24** With the Holy Spirit’s power and help, we choose Jesus over self, we die to our desires and live for Him. We do this understanding what he desires for us is the best, it’s the path to life, completion, joy, satisfaction. What he desires for us is what we were really meant to be. “I know best” usually leads to disappointment and disaster but following Jesus and surrendering your life to him, “losing your life for him” leads to salvation and peace. Becoming a witness for Jesus is not frightening, it’s fulfilling, liberating. We don’t have to fear becoming a martyr because we’ve already been dying to self every day and are being made alive in Christ by the Holy Spirit. So what does it look like for us to be His witnesses?

His witnesses embody the message and character of Jesus. It’s more than telling the message, we bear the message in ourselves, in our own life. Jesus came to save, to give new life, to bring hope, salvation, transformation (among other things) and we are to bear that message in our lives. You know the saying falsely attributed to St. Francis, “Preach the gospel. When necessary use words.” The truth is, you have to use words. The point is to make sure your words and your deeds match up. If your words say “Jesus is Lord” but you live like the devil, you aren’t His witness! His witness embodies his message and character. Paul says God called and predestined us “to be conformed to the likeness of his Son.” We are to be image bearers of Jesus. People are supposed to look at us and see Jesus through our words and our deeds. Paul said we were to be living epistles (letters), known and read by everyone. **“You show that you are a letter from Christ...written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.” 2 Corinthians 3:3**

What we say, how we live and act, how we respond and behave every minute of every day, should bear witness to Jesus. If people are reading your life like a letter from Jesus, what is he saying through you? I shudder to think what message they receive from my life sometimes! Jesus is saying, “You shall receive power and you will be image bearers of me, of my character, my gospel.” Once again, it’s not about living for ourselves, pleasing ourselves, it’s about others. It’s about Jesus and bearing his image and message and character so that others can know him.

Jesus promised power so we could go to all the world and proclaim Jesus because he doesn’t want anyone to perish or to be lost. He wants everyone to know Him and the joy of his salvation and the forgiveness of sins. The baptism in the Holy Spirit and spiritual empowerment is about others. I want to make sure we get this. It isn’t just about spiritual power for us. This isn’t so you could check the box of spiritual experiences or so you could speak in tongues, it is power to go and serve and win others. Even the spiritual gifts given to the church that Tim Enloe taught about on Monday and Tuesday night, the spiritual gifts of 1 Corinthians 12-14 were given “for the common good.” They weren’t given to prove someone’s spiritual maturity because they are used in some spiritual gift. Instead, the gifts of the Spirit are given for the common good, to build up, encourage, exhort, edify others. It’s about serving, it’s about others. That’s the nature and character of Jesus and that’s the image we are to bear by the help and power of the Holy Spirit, serving, giving ourselves for others. Remember Jesus said, “**The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.**” **Mark 10:45**

What does it mean for us to be his witnesses? **His witnesses represent Jesus, His kingdom and its values.** In a world where people are blind to God’s truth, ignorant of His word, in a system and culture that places profit and possessions over people, that rewards and celebrates greed and blind ambition, that prefers strength over wisdom, appearance over substance, ability over character, a culture where the ends justify any and all means, we, the followers of Jesus, represent a King and a Kingdom with an entirely different set of values. We live as representatives, citizens of Heaven’s Kingdom serving Heaven’s King. Our king chooses to serve rather than to be served. Our king, though in very nature God, for us and for our salvation, chose to make himself nothing, took on the very nature of a servant, humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross. We are his representatives. We are to live like him, by his values, according to his standards.

Have you seen people take the oath of citizenship as Americans? ***"I hereby declare, on oath, that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty, of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen; that I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I will bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by the law; that I will perform noncombatant service in the Armed Forces of the United States when required by the law; that I will perform work of national importance under civilian direction when required by the law; and that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; so help me God."***

As Jesus' witnesses, we pledge our allegiance to Him and to his Kingdom and its' values. We *absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty, of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen.* We used to live for and serve ourselves, the world, the devil, our appetite. We lived by the distorted, messed up values of the world, but Jesus saved us and delivered us from a kingdom of darkness and death into his kingdom of light and life. It's time we renounced the past, renounced sin and our allegiance to anything and anyone other than Jesus. It's time to live for Him and live by his values. By the power of the Holy Spirit we represent our new King and His Kingdom as His witnesses. We love our enemies and pray for them instead of cursing them and wishing them evil. We bear witness to Jesus and his kingdom as we forgive those who wrong us or persecute us; we are his witnesses as we joyfully carry someone's burden, someone we really don't like all that much, but we carry their burden the second mile. We represent Jesus as we give to the needy, feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, visit the prisoner, defend the widow and the orphan, fight for the oppressed. The word of God is the constitution to which we pledge allegiance. We represent his kingdom, a kingdom of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Our life, lived by the power of the Holy Spirit, points to Jesus, represents him and his kingdom and lets everyone know that we are citizens of another kingdom. We don't live like the rest of this world. The world walks in darkness but we are children of the kingdom of light! Let your light shine as his representative.

The Power of the Spirit is given so we can be witnesses. What does that mean? We are bearers of Jesus' image and character, representatives of his kingdom and its values and finally,

His witnesses proclaim Jesus and His message. We tell the story. It's what Peter did immediately after being baptized in the Holy Spirit in Acts 2. A huge crowd gathered and Peter stood before them, emboldened by the power of the Holy Spirit and began to proclaim Jesus to them. Moments before they were avoiding the authorities that had arrested Jesus and had him crucified. Now, just as Jesus promised, empowered by the Holy Spirit, they stood together as His witnesses to proclaim the gospel. Peter told them Jesus had been sent by God, confirmed to be the Messiah by the signs and wonders he had performed among them. Without hesitation Peter said, "you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead..." Peter continued to testify of Jesus, telling the people that he and the disciples had seen and been with the risen Christ. With new spiritual understanding of the Scripture, Peter preached and the people were convicted in their hearts and asked what they could do. Peter told them **"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."**

Acts 2:38 Three thousand people heard and accepted his message that day and were saved and baptized.

Peter simply stood up and told what he knew about Jesus. It was the gospel. It was Jesus' story and it was Peter's story as well. It's what he has called us to do as his witnesses. Don't be afraid to tell others. "Here is my story in light of His greater story. Here is what Jesus has done for me. Here is how his saving grace changed my life. Here is what I know" and as we tell His story, he does the rest. He confirms his word, his story, with power, with signs and wonders, with changed lives, with miracles, with healing, with peace.

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, a witness is one who is willing to take up his cross and lay down his life for Jesus. A witness is one who embodies the message and character of Jesus, who represents his kingdom and its' values and who proclaims Jesus and his message. This is the what now? for all of us. This is what we've been called and empowered to do. It's the reason he has poured His Spirit upon us, so we can take Jesus and his good news to our world. We are the letter from Christ being read by the whole world. How are we doing with His message? How are we doing as His witnesses? Obey. Serve. Go. While there is time!

If the letter from Christ that others are reading in your life doesn't look like it should, if the words and the life don't match, why not take care of that and surrender your life to Jesus today!