

To the Ends of the Earth

This morning we're going to continue to look at the book of Acts and the instructions the disciples received in Acts 1:8, **"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 Last Sunday as we celebrated Pentecost Sunday we saw this began to happen. **"When the day of Pentecost came... They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them."** Acts 2:1,3-4 The Holy Spirit came on them and gave them the power to stand up before the Jews staying in Jerusalem and gave witness to the fact that Jesus was the Son of God – was crucified, risen, and ascended to the right hand of the Father. As we said last Sunday as a result of this witness 3,000 people were added to the church that day as they repented of their sins and found forgiveness through Jesus Christ. But, the instruction given in chapter 1 verse 8 was not to be His witness in Jerusalem *only*, but also in Judea and Samaria. There's more to the story! Following the day of Pentecost these new believers began to meet together to have fellowship, and they devoted themselves to the teaching of the word. They would pray together and worship together and they helped meet the needs of those around them. This meeting the needs of others became such a big undertaking that in Acts 6 they decided to find 7 men who could help oversee the benevolence ministry so that the apostles could continue preaching and praying for the sick. One of these men they chose was named Stephen. **Stephen was "a man full of God's grace and power, [who] did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people."** Acts 6:8 As a result there was much opposition to him by the religious and political leaders of the day and they eventually had him arrested and stoned to death. He is considered the first martyr of the Christian faith. His death stopped him from preaching, but it didn't stop the message of Jesus from being preached. In fact, it caused the story of Jesus to spread even further. **"On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria."** Acts 8:1

The carrying out of the instructions to be witnesses next in Judea and Samaria begins to happen. **“Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there.” Acts 8:4-5** Next we see that the gospel message begins to be proclaimed to, wait for it, even Gentiles – people like us! – in Acts 10. From there it went further, **“Now those who had been scattered by the persecution with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.” Acts 11:19-21** And, the story of Jesus continued to spread as the Apostle Paul got saved and filled with the Spirit and sent out on missionary journeys as far as European countries such as Greece, Macedonia, Italy, and Malta. And the beginning of the fulfillment of the final instruction, to be His witness to the ends of the earth, was put into action. I say the beginning, because the instruction, the mandate to be His witness is still being given in our generation as well. The Apostle Paul said that, **“We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.” 2 Corinthians 5:20** Those instructions are still for you and me. **Jesus said, “this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” Matthew 24:14** The end has not come, there are still people who have not yet heard the gospel, we’re still living in the last days, our generation must continue to fulfill the final instruction to be a witness of the story of Jesus – crucified, risen, ascended, to the ends of the earth.

From the days of Acts through the years of the early church, down through the middle ages, to the Renaissance there has been a consistent witness through the church of the gospel of Jesus. Then in 1914 a group of people who had experienced the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in America came together to form a fellowship of churches, The Assemblies of God. The organizing and the sending of missionaries into all the world was one of the primary reasons they decided to form. They committed themselves to "the greatest evangelism that the world has ever seen."

As a result of the emphasis on missions that our fellowship – fun fact, the Assembly of God portion of our name – Carbondale Assembly of God – connects us to some 365,000 other like minded Assemblies of God churches globally. Within our own church this desire to fulfill those final instructions was encouraged by Pastor Eric Johnson, he was Swedish man, who came to pastor Carbondale for just a short time in the 1940's before heading to Africa as a missionary. Missions became part of the DNA of our church. My generation grew up under Pastor Phil who grew this church into one of the top missions giving churches in the Assemblies of God. He put such a high priority on missions and missionaries and giving so that others could go to the ends of the earth that this church then sent out missionaries like myself, Liz, Josh, and Laurel. When the Lord called us to go we didn't hesitate because missions was part of who we were in part because of this church.

So, how do we continue to be a place that fulfills the mandated instructions to be His witness to the ends of the earth? How do we continue to be people who have a mindset that says we'll give so that others can go? How do we continue to carry the burden to pray for the lost in our world and those who are being witnesses in places all over the globe? Well, Paul, the first missionary wrote to the people who lived in Philippi and said, **"I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me." Philippians 4:10** We have to constantly renew our concern. We should be concerned about missions because it's part of who we are. As the body of Christ, as Carbondale, as individuals, and we can't neglect this vital part. We need to renew our concern to Pray, Give, and Go. Let's look further at those 3 things.

1. Pray

In Matthew 9 Jesus is going through the country preaching and teaching and healing people. The Bible says that **"When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.'" Matthew 9:36-38** The KJV says "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the Harvest." Just after this in the very next verse Jesus will give power and authority to his disciples and send them out to preach the gospel and heal the sick

and cast out demons, but in this passage we just read in chapter 9 the disciples aren't the ones that go. Rather than send them out Jesus instructs them to pray to God for more workers. There will always be hurting people, always there will be people who need a witness – who have never heard – and on our own – as 1 individual – we can't tell the whole world – we must continually be praying for more workers. I firmly believe that missionaries serving around the world are there partly because someone was praying for the Lord of the harvest to send workers to that part of the world to be his witness, and that missionary is the answer to the prayer. 37 years ago missionaries Gary and Wilma Davidson headed to Ireland – 7 years later their small newly formed group of believers began meeting in St. Marks Church. 230 years prior, that building was built as a Church of Ireland parish. But, in 1971 it ceased to be a church building and was purchased and used by Trinity College for exams and lectures. For the next 16 years a few people gathered together in their home to pray that a Christian witness would once again be in that building. They prayed to the Lord of the Harvest, and shortly after that Gary received a call to go to Ireland, and shortly after that they started a church, and a year later the prayers of that handful of people were answered. It would be years before Gary and Wilma knew that story, but how amazing is it the way that the Lord answered those prayers and established his church. St. Marks church continues to grow and be a beacon of light in a dark city for the last 30 years. Pray the Lord of the harvest to send out workers! And, He did!

10 years ago a couple in Georgia who were in their late 60's felt God lay a burden on their heart for the people of Montenegro – a small country in Europe where the Assemblies of God have no missionary presence and there are only a handful of churches. For 10 years this couple prayed that God would send missionaries there. During those 10 years there was a young man and a young woman who graduated high school, went to Bible college, met each other, talked about their call to missions, got married, prayed together, and if their support comes in they'll arrive in Montenegro next month to be the first AG missionaries there. That couple in Georgia found out, contacted them, and began supporting them monthly. I believe they are

headed there as a direct result of a retired couples commitment to pray for what God put in their heart.

That's what it looks like to "renew your concern" to pray. Is there something or someone that I should be praying for? Once missionaries go, we continue to pray. We continue to hold them up in prayer as they are on the front lines doing battle. They go to dangerous places, to spiritually dark places, to difficult places all because God has called them to go. When missionaries come here they always ask us to pray. It's why they pass out those cards with their pictures on them – they're hoping that you'll pray for them. That you'll call their name out to the Lord asking for protection, for wisdom, for opportunities to preach and proclaim Jesus, for needs to be met. They're counting on your prayers.

When we pray we're obeying what Jesus asked of his disciples 2000 years ago, and I believe it's what he's still asking of us today. Jesus knew that before He could send them out to be His hands and feet in chapter 10 He would need to teach them how to look at a crowd and not see differences, not see enemies, not see barriers, but rather, to see hurting, helpless, harassed, and lost people in need of a Savior. Jesus needed them to learn to see with eyes of compassion this broken world that He was sending them to, and that would only be learned through prayer. Your worldview changes when you pray for the lost in this world, and Jesus knew that.

We renew our concern by praying for workers, praying for the work of their hands, praying for the lost.

2. Giving

In 2 Corinthians 8 the church in Macedonia sets a precedent for how churches are, even today, to support missionaries. The missionary in chapter 8 is the Apostle Paul. **"And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people...But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in**

the love we have kindled in you —see that you also excel in this grace of giving.” 2 Corinthians 8:1-4, 7

We see another example of churches giving and blessing missionary efforts in Philippians 4, they had apparently sent aid to him while he was in Thessalonica and had shared in his troubles.

Just as we pray that God will send missionaries we also pray that He will equip missionaries with the finances they'll need to be productive. It is still the privilege of the church today, just as it was for the church in Macedonia, to share in missionary service through giving. Churches like ours, with a rich DNA of missions giving, must constantly renew our concern to help missionaries both get to the country where they are to serve and have the funds to remain there. Every month Carbondale sends money to help roughly 100 individual missionary units serving on every continent in the world. That monthly support comes from you giving monies, over and above your tithe, to missions each month. Then when a missionary comes and speaks to us we take up an offering because they also need cash money – to buy plane tickets, to have money to do ministry with, to secure housing when they arrive in their new country, the list goes on and on. My dad taught me that there was nothing more important than giving to missions. So, can I tell you this morning that giving in those missionary offerings – and there are typically 1-2 opportunities each month – are so important. They are counting on that money. It's important. It matters. We renew our concern for missions by giving in those offerings. We want to excel even more in the grace of giving!

Years ago I heard a Pastor from Ohio named Hugh Rosenberg talk about sacrificially giving to missions. That's the type of giving modeled to us in that passage from 2 Corinthians. The Macedonians gave in the midst of a trial – not a booming economy or a bumper year – they were in extreme poverty. It was difficult to give, but it appears they all gave. They gave what they were able, but some gave beyond what they actually had – that's called giving by faith. That faith giving is what I heard Pastor Rosenberg talk about. He had lived his life believing that giving your money to missions was the best way to spend your money. So much so that he gave more money each month to missions than anything else he spent money on – house payment, car payment, bills, entertainment, - his missions commitment was the

highest expenditure he had each month. And, he taught his children to live this out as well. I was in my 20's, a missionary myself, and was already giving to missions each month, but I thought how could I ever get to that place myself. I knew what my monthly bills were, and as a missionary it's a rather fixed income. Yet, I was so challenged. I made a commitment that day though that I would start somewhere and I would never let my cable/internet bill be more than what I gave to the Lord and missions. It's my goal that at some point in my life what I give each month to missions will be the biggest payment out of my checking account. Currently, the mortgage is the only thing that stands in my way of achieving this. The reason I tell you this is because a decade ago when I sat and listened to someone else talk about the blessings of God that came when he chose to increase his missions giving I was challenged. I can tell you today that my needs have been met, I've never gone without something I needed and I firmly believe it has to do with that commitment to give to missions. You cannot out give God.

We've been talking about money in the Homecoming service on Wednesdays, and have referenced this passage both weeks. **Jesus said, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."**

Matthew 6:19-21 Giving to missions stores up all kinds of treasure in heaven – people saved, lives changed, missionaries fulfilling the call on their life – it all counts! On the other hand, I could spend all my money on things that can be stolen or will rot or be eaten by moths. For me that's an easy choice of where I want to put my money and the kind of treasure I want to have.

We renew our concern by checking our bank balance and asking God to speak to our hearts, and by giving – sacrificially – out of our poverty – in generosity.

3. Go

There's still a commission given to all of us to **"Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."**

Matthew 28:19-20 We must go. The story of Jesus must continue to be preached to every generation. We must go because there are people who need to hear. We must go because Jesus is still looking for obedient people who will respond to this commission. And, I believe there are still people in this congregation who God wants to call to be fulltime missionaries. There are people here today that God will speak to about going on a missions trip for 10 days. The question is how will you respond? There is a world waiting to hear the good news of Jesus. It started in Acts 2 and the story just keeps going – first to Jerusalem and the Jews that were there for Pentecost, then to Judea and to Samaria and to Gentiles and to Europe and to Africa and to Asia and eventually to America and then to each generation and now to every man, woman, and child, and to the ends of the earth. It's up to us to keep this thing going. It's up to us to see a hurting, lost world through eyes of compassion and renew our concern to help by praying for workers, praying for the lost to know Jesus, to give so that others can go, so that others can hear, and to actually be the ones to GO as well. It's you, it's me, it's the church renewing our concern daily. That's how the story of Jesus continues to be spread to the ends of the earth. What is God speaking to your heart today? How is He challenging you in this moment? To pray? To give? To go? All of the above? I don't know, but my prayer is that you'll take time to seek the Lord and ask Him how He plans to use you to fulfill His instructions to be His witness to the ends of the earth.

Can we take a moment right now?

Pray