

Sermon on Acts 1:8
CCRC, 2022 November 20
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You Shall Receive Power

Dear Friends of God,

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You shall 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.

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How have you experienced the power of the Holy Spirit to be Christ's witness?

An older member of a church I served would often tell me a story about how the Holy Spirit prompted him to witness. In his retirement he became a pastoral care volunteer at a local hospital. One time he went to the bedside of a patient and had a nice conversation. When it was time to go, he left. But as he was walking in the hallway, he thought he heard Jesus say, "Nice visit, but I didn't hear my name in that conversation." So he went back and asked the patient if he could talk about Jesus and pray with him. He said okay and they had a spiritual conversation and prayed afterwards. A day later that patient passed away.

I believe that the Holy Spirit gave him the power to be a witness to Christ that day and made an eternal difference in that person's life.

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That is what the Holy Spirit does. The Spirit prompts us to witness to Jesus. A witness is someone who tells the story of what he or she has seen or experienced. The Holy Spirit is the power that compels us, equips us, and directs us toward telling the story of Jesus and the difference he makes in our lives.

That's what happened to the disciples. That power came upon them on Pentecost and moved them to speak in different languages, to stand up in front of the people and to witness boldly to the resurrection of Jesus. The book of Acts is the story of how those disciples of Jesus went out and witnessed to the gospel of Jesus. Verse 8 can be seen as a table of contents of the book of Acts:

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- Acts 1-7 describes the witness of the gospel in Jerusalem.
- Acts 8-12 speaks of the gospel witness in Judea and Samaria.
- Acts 13-28 tells of the gospel going to the end of the earth.

For the disciples, witnessing in Jerusalem, where they executed Jesus, where religious power was centered and conflicted with Roman might, it was not an easy task. Nor was Judea, where Jesus had been rejected or Samaria where people tended to mix religious ideas into a mishmash and believed everything and nothing. Nor were the ends of the earth any easier. Why would the Gentile world want anything to do with that strange group of folks?

Yet, there they went, those empowered followers of Jesus. At home, in their familiar neighbourhoods, in more unfamiliar regions, and in strange places far from home they told about Jesus and his transforming power.

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It's still the same today. The Spirit still sends us to near and far, to familiar and different.

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I was inspired by this graphic from Resonate Global Mission. I like the axis lines that have us think in terms of geographical and cultural nearness and distance. If you'd like one, there is a pile at the Welcome Centre.

The Spirit is sending us to Jerusalem. Where is your Jerusalem? The place that is geographically close and culturally similar? This is ground zero, the place where your passion for God's mission starts. It's your home, your church, your family, your friends. This is where the Spirit deepens your passion for mission right where you are. This is where you learn how to speak of your faith and tell your faith story.

The Spirit is sending us to Judea. Where is your Judea? It's still among those who are culturally similar and geographically close. The ones who have the same education as you, the kind of job as you, who live in your neighbourhood and are involved in your school, your work, your library, your grocery store, your community centre. How is the Spirit sending you there to join what God is already doing?

The Spirit is sending us to Samaria. Where is your Samaria? It's among those who are close by but are culturally different. In multicultural Canada that could be right next door to you. It could be helping with the refugees we sponsor, or teaching English to new Canadians, or helping feed the homeless. We are going to hear from the Pennings who minister among the First Nations in Ontario. We are going to hear from the Timmermans who minister among Russian speaking people who live in the Golden Horseshoe. We partner with them and extend our reach with them.

The Spirit is sending us to the Ends of the Earth. Where is that? It's among those who are culturally different and geographically far. For too long I used to think that was what a missionary was. When I grew up in the church, we often had "missionaries" come and make a presentation on what they were doing in Africa, and we fasted on World Hunger Sunday so we could help the missionaries feed people in the developing world. We sent them money and our mission work was done for us. But now I know better. Not many of us are called to physically go to a different country to do long-term mission. That's why our churches work in partnerships with Resonate and World Renew. Through them we amplify our impact, investing in God's work everywhere, supporting the ones who have this call upon them.

The Holy Spirit is moving all of us to be part of his mission, witnessing to the story of life in Christ's name calling everyone locally and globally to experience that blessing. Mission isn't for someone else, someone who flies off to a distant land and comes back with batik dresses and gourd shakers. It's all for all of us. So the question is still appropriate today:

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How have you experienced the power of the Holy Spirit to be Christ's witness? Thank God for the new life that is flowing through God's people, flowing into you and me, and moving us to live into the kingdom of Christ close by and far away.

AMEN

Prayer

Sending God, thank you for your Holy Spirit who empowers us to take part in your mission in this world. As you send us to our Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the world, help us to deepen our passion for mission, to strengthen our capacity for mission, to extend our reach in mission and amplify our impact in mission. Bless us now as we hear from those we partner with in mission. Inspire, challenge, encourage and empower us on this day. In Christ, Amen

