

Acts 1:6-8
The Concentric Circles of Our Witness
Jonathan Romig
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Sometimes I think the church is a little like a fairytale princess. The story of Rapunzel is a story about a girl with long blonde hair. When she is a baby she is stolen away from her parents by an evil witch. This evil witch keeps her in a tall tower hidden away in the forest. Rapunzel grows older and her blonde hair grows longer. It grows so long the only way in or out of the tower is by climbing her hair. So for Rapunzel it seems almost impossible to escape. And not to mention what the scary witch might do if she tries.

She spends her days singing and waiting and dreaming. She wonders what life is like outside the tower but she never escapes. She is afraid what might happen if she flees. She hopes one day her prince, her king, will come. He will rescue her and give her a glorious kingdom. But until then she waits and keeps herself busy till his arrival. Sometimes I think the church is a little like a fairytale princess.

We feel locked away from the world tempted by the evil one. And we know that one day our king will come to rescue us. But we try not to venture out into the world till then. We forget that our king has a task for us to do before he comes. That our king will one day rescue us from the evil one. But he first calls us to take a leap of faith and leave the tower. He calls us to share the good news about him with the world. We want the kingdom without sharing it. We want heaven but we want it in our tower.

In our text today the disciples are a little like Rapunzel. They want the king to come and give them victory. But they don't want to leave the tower to brave the forest. But of course the king has other plans. Let's read about the king's plans in Acts 1:6-8.

Here in Acts the disciples know they are supposed to brave the forest. Jesus has already commissioned them to go out and preach the gospel to the world. Instead they want the rewards of the kingdom before they've worked for the king. Do we make this same mistake today? Do we also want the rewards of the kingdom before we've worked for the king?

When it comes to Jesus, we can want his world without his witness. (v. 6) The disciples wanted the kingdom before obeying the king. Here at the mount of olives we hear Jesus' last words to the disciples. It's at the end of his forty days of witness and he is about to ascend into heaven. Instead of worshiping their risen king, they start to question him. The ESV says "they asked him" but it's more like "they questioned him." They questioned him repeatedly about reinstating the kingdom to Israel. The New Testament tells us it's good to desire the kingdom of God. But that wasn't their desire. They wanted a kingdom of man. They wanted Jesus to set himself up as the ruler of the nation state of Israel.

If he had just risen from the dead, surely this is the perfect time to become king. They probably imagined the Sanhedrin's faces if Jesus walked into the temple alive. Then after that he could take over Judea, Samaria, and one day Rome. But Jesus has different plans for his kingdom. Jesus wanted his kingdom to come about through their witness. He had already commanded them in Luke 24 to be his witnesses. But they were more interested in reigning over the world. That's why Jesus will remind them in v. 8 that the witness comes first. The disciples wanted the kingdom before obeying the king.

The disciples didn't get it but maybe we do. Maybe we know we're supposed to be witnesses. But if we believe it, do we actually practice it?

When it comes to Jesus, we can want his world without his witness. Growing up I used to spend hours laying on the trampoline. I would gaze up into the clouds and wonder when Jesus was coming back. I would imagine all of the cool things I would see and do after his return. But those daydreams rarely got me to share about Jesus. I still love to daydream about Christ's return. But if all we ever do is daydream then we're actually disobeying. It's a wonderful thing to look forward to Christ's return. But we are to do more than bounce up and down in anticipation.

We need to take both a vertical and horizontal approach. We need to keep our eyes and heart on Christ's return. But we need to share the good news with those around us. Our neighbors need to hear about the kingdom. They need to hear God's offer of salvation. So that they too can join Christ in his kingdom. The final day is coming and it's coming soon. So when it comes to Jesus, don't want his world without his witness.

When the disciples ask Jesus about the kingdom, Jesus answers by talking about the Father. What does God have to do with the disciples' desire for kingdom power?

When it comes to God, we can want his power without his purpose. (v. 7) Sometimes we want God's power for our own purposes. In verse seven Jesus says no. He says no because of the nature of their question. They might not realize it but they are asking for too much power. They are asking for the time of Christ's return. And even Jesus didn't know that information (Matt 24:36). So to have that knowledge would actually place them over Jesus. Jesus knows that his disciples can't handle God's power. But do we understand that we can't handle God's power?

We can make the same mistake as the disciples. We too ask for God's power and blessings in our lives. But we deny his rule over our lives. How often do we want our prayers answered? But not take the time to get to know Christ through our prayers? How often do we want to convert sinners for Christ? But are unwilling to eat and drink with sinners (Mark 2:14-17)? How often do we want prosperity and wealth? But secretly know it's more about us than God? Sometimes we want God's power for our own purposes.

I worked at a tourist shop in Estes Park called Indian Village. I worked there for over eleven summers and sometimes I got to train other employees. Sometimes I would train them to do easy or challenging tasks. But sometimes I would train them to do frustrating tasks. It wasn't that the job itself was frustrating. But that the way we did the job was frustrating. I'm sure many of you understand what that is like.

One of these frustrating tasks was how we watered our baby cacti. Someone decided it was a good idea to sell live cactus on fridge magnets. I guess that's one way to keep your husband out of the fridge. But to keep these cactus alive you had to soak them in a pig pan of water. I explained this to a new employee and she thought I was ridiculous. Wouldn't it be much faster to just spray the cacti with water and move on? Yes but that plan would kill the cactus. The better plan, though more frustrating, would keep the cactus alive.

When God calls us to preach the gospel he knows it won't be easy. I bet the disciples were pretty frustrated with Jesus about his plans. Why couldn't he just set himself up as king and begin his rule? Yes but if that

were the plan there would be no church. Sometimes God's way is more frustrating but it's always better. Jesus submitted to his father's purposes. And Scripture calls us to do the same.

But what if God's purposes aren't so pleasant? What if between now and Christ's return we run into difficulties?

We can experience God's power and purposes but it won't be easy. Throughout the rest of Acts we read about trial and persecution. Peter, John, Paul and other apostles preach the gospel to the ancient world. They meet beatings and floggings and most die a martyr's death. It takes courage to seek God's purposes. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer said in *The Cost of Discipleship*. "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." To obey God is to invite difficulties. The kingdom was founded on rejection and persecution. And Christ will continue to build it that way. One day Christ will return triumphantly. But till then God calls us to be his witnesses. We can experience God's power and purposes but it won't be easy.

So what have we learned so far? When it comes to Jesus, we can want his world without his witness. And when it comes to God, we can want his power without his purpose. But when God came to us, he empowered us to witness to his world.

When God came to us, he empowered us to witness to his world. (v. 8) God empowers you to witness to his world. Verse eight says, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you." Here Jesus is predicting Pentecost in Acts 2 which we will hear about next week. He is promising the apostles they will receive the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit will enable them to perform miracles and to preach the gospel. People will respond and come to know Christ as their savior.

But the next line says, "and you will be my witnesses..." This is not a prophecy but a future imperative. Jesus is commanding his disciples to be his witnesses. It's like when your mom says, "You will take out the trash." That's when you know you better take out the trash. Because your mom is not prophesying but telling you what to do.

Acts 1:7-8 is the great commission in Acts. We see Jesus sending out the disciples in light of his father's authority. But he doesn't send them out alone because he promises them the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will enable the disciples and all believers to be Jesus' witness. As believers today we receive this same spirit when we put our faith in Christ. This means that you have the same spirit-filled witness of God inside you. We can't do any better than having the Spirit speak through us. God empowers you to witness to his world.

But what does it mean to witness to the world? Who are we to witness to? Our witness is to be local, global, and lingual. Verse eight finishes, "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." These cities and regions are the concentric circles of our witness. Our witness is to be local, global, and lingual.

First, our witness is to be local. Jesus says "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria." Sometimes we think missionaries have to go overseas. But Jesus tells his disciples to start in their back yard. They are to share the gospel where they live. And although the disciples might like Jerusalem and Judea. The Bible is clear they weren't fond of Samaria. The Samaritans were just foreign enough to be

unwelcome. And yet God wanted them to share the gospel with everyone around them. And God wants us to share the gospel with everyone around us.

Maybe Christ is calling you to share the gospel with one of your coworkers. Maybe he's calling you to talk to one of your neighbors or family members. Maybe he's calling you to share the gospel with someone you don't like. I know it feels uncomfortable but the disciples would have felt uncomfortable too. They were from Galilee—neither upper class Jerusalem or lower-class Samaritan. And yet God empowered them to be his witness to his world. And God empowers you to witness to his world. First, our witness is to be local.

Second, our witness is to be global. Acts 1:8 is a geographic outline for the book of Acts. First Peter preaches the gospel in Jerusalem, Judea, and north in Samaria. And then Paul preaches the gospel in Asia, Greece, and as far away as Rome. Some think “the end of the earth” actually refers to Rome. But I think “end of the earth” means the whole world. If the mission field ended in Rome we'd be off the hook.

If we look back to Isaiah 49:6 we read what “the end of the earth” means. The NASB reads, “He says, “It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations So that My salvation may reach *to the end of the earth.*” “The end of the earth” refers to the entire globe. God always planned to take the gospel message to the whole world. Keeping the gospel for Israel, Samaria, or even Rome isn't big enough. Every inch of this world needs to hear about Jesus. God empowers you to witness to his world. Second, our witness is to be global.

Third, our witness is to be lingual. We are to share with people that speak our language and those that don't. The different regions represented in verse eight speak different dialects or languages. This is why the Jews recognized Peter at Jesus' trial. He sounded Galilean, which was different than everyone else. The Samaritans would have spoken their own dialect. And Paul preached the gospel in a variety of languages.

We also are to make sure every type of people hears the gospel in their language. That doesn't mean that Immanuel has to send out missionaries to every people group. But we should be thinking about what peoples have yet to hear the good news. And we as a church should be working toward reaching them the best way we can. God empowers you, as a church and individually, to witness to his world. Third, our witness is to be lingual.

Last Sunday Immanuel Church commissioned a team to go to France. I know there are other teams going out as well this summer. But since my wife is on the France team we'll talk about them. This Wednesday I got to say goodbye to them at the church. But before they left they read through their team covenant. Now I know Pastor Dana has talked about the team's covenant before. But this was the first time that I got to hear it firsthand. And what struck me about it was their intentional emphasis on the gospel. They knew it wasn't going to be easy to share Christ in a foreign country. And they knew they were going to run into language barriers. But they wanted to share the gospel anyways. Their witness is both global and lingual. But what about your witness Immanuel? You as a church has done your international part in sending them. But what about the local part of Acts 1:8? Is each of you going to be a local witness this summer? God empowers you to witness to his world. The Holy Spirit has made you ready. Think about it and pray about it. See who God brings to mind and have a conversation about Christ. God empowers you to witness to his world.

Sometimes I think the church is a little like a fairytale princess. Disney retells the story of Rapunzel in the movie Tangled. There comes a part in the movie where Rapunzel finally works up the courage to leave the tower. She slides down her long hair and she touches grass for the first time. Then she goes running into the forest singing about how great life is. But then she panics because she really has left the tower.

At first she joyfully exclaims, “I can’t believe I did this.” And then she instantly regrets it and says, “I can’t believe I did this!” One moment she feels wonderful and the next moment she feels horrible. In one instant it’s the best day ever and in the next she’s sobbing. This is probably what it will feel like for us to leave the tower. At one moment we will be excited to take part in what God is doing. And then in the next instant we’ll feel like we’re messing everything up. But it’s better to be out of the tower obeying the king. Then to be in the tower waiting for something to happen.

And when we do get out of the tower to preach the gospel. God promises us we’re not on our own. We don’t have to be afraid of the evil one or messing up. Because the Holy Spirit has made you ready to share the good news. God empowers you to witness to his world.

“May the God of peace be with you all. Amen.” Romans 15:33