

“The Continuing Ministry Of Jesus”

10 January 2021 - Led by Rev. Sam Mawhinney

Welcome & Call To Worship

Hymn of Preparation: IPH 439 Resurrection Hymn (See, What A Morning)

Prayers of Adoration & Confession

Reading: Acts 1:1-12

Sermon:

I. Why Acts? Why Now?

I have been asked why Acts and why now? My answer: because it is about mission, the mission of the Church; and it's about a new beginning, a fresh start, which I believe will be the scenario for ARPC in the post-Covid period. However, as I prepared, I was deeply struck by the fact that Doctor Luke's second book is about the continuing ministry of Jesus (v.1), implied by his statement, *“in my former book (the gospel of Luke), Theophilus (a high-ranking Roman official), I wrote about all that Jesus **began** to do and teach”*. So, the book of Acts is about the continuing ministry of Jesus. This is, of course, possible because He is alive! The numerous post-death and resurrection appearances of Jesus to the apostles are highlighted in v.3 - He gave many convincing proofs that He was alive. It is only because Jesus is alive that Luke can say, “what Jesus began to do and teach”; it makes sense because He lives. It is particularly important we note this truth, lodge it in our minds and hearts and believe that Jesus lives. It is the basis of everything the Church does, it is the bedrock of our mission. Sin and death have been conquered. We have hope in Jesus because He was victorious over death and is alive. Praise the Lord!

Jesus then commissions the apostles (v.4), giving them this command: *“do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptised with water, but in a few days, you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit.”*

How was the work of Jesus to continue? The Apostles were the ones to continue the work through the gifting and power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus continues His work, and the Apostles are commissioned to do that work. The foundation of the Church was laid through them, what we refer to as the Apostolic Church. ARPC continues the ongoing ministry of Jesus, for we build on the apostolic foundation and the previous years of this congregation's ministry, since the mid-1800's from our location here in the centre of Dublin City. We are tasked now, in light of the disruption of Covid and the truth of the Acts of the Apostles, to reconsider, reevaluate, and refresh the commission we inherited from Jesus and the Holy Spirit through the Apostles and from the generations gone past. As we look ahead, we stand on giants' shoulders with the mandate Jesus gave the Apostles.

Why Acts, why now? Jesus is alive, there is an ongoing work to be done which has been passed onto us via the Apostles. However, behind the question, “Why Acts and why now?” is the truth: we are in lockdown, severely restricted and not even able to meet, strongly advised to stay home. Surely it makes little sense to look at the Acts of the Apostles. That is a good question, and my answer is that we have, like the Apostles, been given a time to wait until we can meet again. For them, it was a period of waiting 40 days (v.3) + 10 (v.4) (seven

weeks+1 day) until the gift of the Holy Spirit was given at Pentecost. So, we can use this time positively to reflect and prepare for the ongoing mission of ARPC post-lockdown. Wait, prepare and prayer. *"They all joined together constantly in prayer"* (v.14). This evening, we call all the members to prayer from 7-8 pm, and join us on Zoom if you are able. We are preparing for mission and asking for the power of the Holy Spirit to come afresh.

II. The Mission Of The Church (v.6-8)

If we go back to the week before Jesus died on the cross, when He was with the disciples in Jerusalem (we looked in detail at that week in Ch.13-17 of John's gospel), Jesus spent the week teaching them in a mixture of practical demonstrations like the washing of their feet, through discourse over the Passover meal, answering their questions, and praying for them. Now post-resurrection, Jesus continues to teach them on the theme of the Kingdom of God and the Holy Spirit. Jesus the Messiah would establish the Kingdom of God and the Holy Spirit would be poured out. That was a major message of the prophets, and this would be accompanied by signs and blessings of the rule of God and would make the rule of God a reality for His people. We have often noted the disciples (like us) were slow to learn and pick up the true meaning of all that Jesus taught. Luke records the Apostles' response to this teaching in the question they ask (v.6): *"Lord, are you at this time going to restore the Kingdom to Israel?"* They were right to link the coming of the Holy Spirit with the coming of the Kingdom of God, but they misunderstood the Kingdom's nature. Calvin commented, *"there are as many errors in this question as words."* Let us look at what the Apostles thought the Kingdom of God was and consider Jesus' response in v.6-8.

I should preface this by saying that Christians disagree over the significance of the State of Israel in relationship to the kingdom of God. The Apostles thought the Kingdom of God equated to a political, geographical, and national one located in the state of Israel. The reformed view is that Jesus fulfilled all the Old Testament prophecies completely in His life and ministry concerning the offspring of Abraham, the promised land, and the coming of the kingdom, and it is our contention that Jesus' answer here bears that out.

In verses 7-8, Jesus says the Kingdom of God was a *spiritual* kingdom not a political, or geographical one. The Holy Spirit launches it as He comes upon them, the Apostles and all those who believed and followed Jesus; it was a kingdom set up in the hearts of men and women. Subsequently, it is spread by witnesses, not by violence or soldiers. Such geographical and political thinking about Israel is common and the Apostles original thought was in this direction. But Jesus said the Kingdom of God is a spiritual kingdom with the Holy Spirit ruling in the hearts and minds of His followers. Therefore it is the role of the church to **proclaim** Jesus' rule through the Holy Spirit in the heart of every person.

The kingdom of God is not only for a particular nationality of people; it is an international community, including every tribe and tongue. Jesus tells them this, because it is to **spread**, reaching to the very ends of the earth. The Acts of the Apostles starts in Jerusalem (Ch.1-7), spreads under persecution (Ch.8) to Samaria through the evangelism of Philip, and charts the reach of the Kingdom to Gentiles and the ends of the known world (Ch.9-28). The Kingdom of God is not for one group or nationality of people but for everyone, rich and poor, male and female, young and old, and every nation and tribe. Therefore, we reach out to all people.

The Kingdom of God has come, but its expansion will be gradual until Jesus comes back again. At some time, most, if not all, of us think about what Jesus calls here :the times and

dates" (v.7), the so-called end times. Many preachers and groups claim to know the times and spend huge amounts of time and energy predicting and speaking about these times. Jesus says here that knowledge is not for you to know, it is not our concern. What *is* of concern is unpacked in v.8: "But you will receive power to be witnesses" of Jesus in ever expanding circles to the ends of the earth until Jesus comes back again. Therefore, the function of the Church is not to endlessly focus on the coming of the end, but to persevere until the end with the mission of the expansion of the Kingdom.

Jesus prioritises teaching the Apostles about the Kingdom of God, the reign of God in people's hearts, its reach to every person in every country, and to their perseverance in that task until He comes again. He started; they are to continue as they proclaim Jesus, starting at home and ever expanding the circle of their witness.

III. The Transition

In any athletics meeting, the final relay sprints are exciting; and, of course, the crucial period in the race is the baton change over. It appears that Jesus has said all He wanted, and He now takes His leave. The instruction is to wait until the coming of the Holy Spirit - the baton will be passed on and Jesus' ministry will continue.

We get the sense that the changeover shocked the Apostles and they are left somewhat dazed. Jesus is taken up (by God) and He is hid from their eyes - we call this the ascension. Like the other unusual and miraculous aspects of Jesus' life, many people really struggle with this reality and it is most commonly metaphorized or ridiculed, imagining something like Marvel's Iron Man. Luke's account tells us it was both sudden and shocking, and yet the careful research of Dr Luke is transmitted to us as something they testified to as eyewitnesses. In v.9-11, five times we are told they *saw* Jesus ascend. So, we proclaim it as an historical event; but what is its purpose?

It marks the end of Jesus' earthly ministry. When Peter preaches about Jesus for the first time, he tells the gospel story from the time of John the Baptist until the time when Jesus "was taken up from us" (v.22). Up until this time, Jesus had been coming and going, as we noted in v.3, over the period of 40 days, but now He is never seen again. He doesn't come back and won't until the time set by His Father for the final realisation, or consummation, of the Kingdom. The point of the ascension, therefore, is to mark the end of Jesus' ministry on earth and to focus attention on the coming of the Holy Spirit as promised. It appears that this departure and ascension had the desired effect and the Apostles return to Jerusalem to wait for the Holy Spirit to come (v.12).

Its purpose is also to remind the Apostles (and us) that they are not to be focused on Jesus in the sky: "Why do you stand here looking into the sky?" the men dressed in white (angels) tell them. He will come again, in the same way, not meaning like a tape played back, but it will be a personal, visible, and glorious return that the whole world will see. So, the Apostles walk home and begin a period of waiting for the Holy Spirit to come. Jesus has gone, taken up to heaven, and they have been commissioned to carry on His work on earth until He returns.

The Apostles have passed that baton onto the Church of Jesus Christ and therefore to ARPC as a part of the Apostolic Church. That means we are not to be "End Time" preachers, speculating about His return, or only focused on Jesus in heaven. Rather, we are to be His witnesses on earth, continuing the ministry of Jesus, proclaiming and displaying

the rule of Jesus in the Kingdom of God by the power of the Holy Spirit. That should be the focus of our prayers in this period of waiting. And this task is given to the church as a whole, not just a few individuals, a commission that must include the south inner city of Dublin, the area in which this church building is situated.

We believe Jesus is alive and has passed on His ministry to the Apostles and the Church. We pray in expectation of the Holy Spirit and His power to help us.

Praise: Yet Not I, But Through Christ In Me

Prayers for Others: Annie Patton

Announcements

Closing Hymn: Hear The Call Of The Kingdom

Benediction: Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or imagine, according to the power at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:20-21)

Discussion & Application:

“The book of Acts is about the continuing ministry of Jesus.” What is the nature of His ministry?

What is your own understanding about the Kingdom of God? How does this compare with Jesus’ teaching about the Kingdom of God?

What can you be praying for in this period of waiting and lockdown?