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Text: Acts 1:8; 2:1-21
Theme: Be a Witness for Christ

Have you ever wondered what the disciples thought about after Jesus' ascension while they were waiting for the gift of the Holy Spirit? They probably focused on all the teachings of Jesus, all of the miracles, and all he did to save us: his perfect life, death and resurrection. Perhaps they even talked about the words that Jesus spoke on the day he ascended. Jesus had told them that they were going to be his witnesses. What did it mean that they were going to be witnesses for Christ? What does it mean for us today? What does it mean to be a witness for Christ while also being part of a Synod? As we consider our individual roles as witnesses for Christ it is also important to recognize that we are part of something much bigger. We are part of a group of Christians who walk together. As a Synod, we all confess the same faith in Christ. We all preach and teach the same message of the Bible. We preach the same message that the disciples shared on Pentecost. The same Holy Spirit who worked in the hearts of the disciples on Pentecost is still working in the hearts of believers today. This working of the Holy Spirit motivates us to be a witness for Christ. We are able to witness for Christ because the Holy Spirit has given us power. Because of that power we are able to proclaim the gospel to the world.

Part 1: We are given power by the Holy Spirit

When Jesus ascended, he assured the disciples that the power of the Holy Spirit was coming to them. As they waited for the next ten days, they thought about Jesus' words. What did he mean? What kind of power was he referring to? Jesus had said, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you."

He gave them this message because the disciples had asked, "Lord, at this time are you going to restore the kingdom of Israel?" Even after everything Jesus had done, after every thing the disciples had seen, after his death and resurrection, the disciples still thought that the Messiah was going to be the earthly king of Israel. Rather than rebuking them for their false ideas, Jesus simply told them what was in store for them. Jesus pointed them to the gift of the Holy Spirit and their future ministry.

The disciples showed that they still did not completely understand the Christ's work. They still had a weakness in their faith. Why did they not understand? How could they not see what was so plainly in front of them? The reason was that the power of the Holy Spirit had not yet come to them. They did not have the power within themselves to overcome false ideas about the Messiah. In spite of all they had seen and heard they were still those same men who ran away in the Garden of Gethsemane when the Savior was arrested. They still carried with them the false ideas of their Jewish culture. They did not yet have the power to overcome their fears or to overcome their misconceptions.

How are we like the disciples before the day of Pentecost? We are more similar to the disciples than we may like to admit. There are times that we do not understand our Lord's plan. We sometimes get misconceptions into our heads about the way the church and its work should be rather than focusing on God's plan for the church. There are also times that we have fears about proclaiming the Gospel. We wonder: Will I say the right thing? Will I embarrass myself? Will I walk away with more questions about my own faith? Will others reject the message that I give to them? Only the Holy Spirit can give us the power to overcome our fears. That power comes from the Word and the Sacraments.

The disciples received power when the Holy Spirit came to them on Pentecost. When the Holy Spirit miraculously made himself known with the tongues of fire and by giving the ability to speak in different languages, the Holy Spirit also gave the disciples confidence and understanding. They understood the work of Jesus clearly and they were no longer afraid to spread the Gospel. Peter is an example of the change worked by the Spirit. He stood up and spoke up for the group. He was no longer afraid. On Pentecost, the Spirit strengthened him so much that he proclaimed Christ clearly and confidently. The disciples carried the Gospel with them after Pentecost and proclaimed the message with power.

Our power also comes from the Holy Spirit. He comes to us through the Means of Grace and gives us strength for our faith. In Baptism, the water connected with the Word of God brings the power of the Spirit into our hearts. Throughout our lives, through the hearing and reading of the Word of God, the power continues to work in us as the truths of salvation build us up. In the Lord's Supper, as we receive the true body and blood of Jesus, as we hear the Words he spoke to his disciples, the Spirit strengthens us with forgiveness. Because of these Means of Grace, we are made bold and confident, our fears are removed and we can proclaim the gospel to others.

Part 2: We proclaim the gospel to the world

Because of the power that the Holy Spirit has given us, each one of us is able to proclaim the Gospel. It would be easy for us to give into our fears and remain silent. When we do remain silent, when we do give into those fears, we fall into sin. Our God wants us to speak up for the truths of his Word and yet we are sometimes so afraid of ridicule that we take the easy way out and don't say a word. Even though we do have fears, the Spirit continues to help us to overcome those fears. We can draw strength from the example of our Savior. We can see how he was never afraid to speak the truth. He knew that the Jewish religious leaders were looking for any excuse to trap him and eventually kill him and yet he continued to speak the truth. He spoke the truth all the way to the cross. He spoke the truth all the way until his ascension and he continues to speak that truth through us.

Each one of us is a missionary who shares the Gospel. As we go out into the community, as we visit with family and friends, as we go to the grocery store or to the mall, we witness by wearing our faith on our sleeve. Mothers and Fathers discipline their children out of Christian love rather than anger. Families say the common table prayer when eating together at a restaurant. At our workplaces we try to avoid gossip and rather stand up for others, taking their words and actions in the kindest possible way.

Look at Jesus. Everywhere he went he was performing ministry. He gave people food for their bodies as well as food for their souls. He healed many physical illnesses while showing that he was the cure for spiritual ailments. He always displayed that self-sacrificing attitude that put the welfare of others before himself. The Holy Spirit motivates us to live in the same way. Because of our faith, we are kind and generous to others. People see our Christian lives and hear our words. As a group of Christians here at Faith we proclaim the message of salvation in many ways. Our weekly services not only reach our members who come to church, they are also broadcast to our entire community. Our School and the education that we offer is a great way to reach out. Along with other WELS churches in the area we are working together to think of new ideas for how we can reach our community.

Being a part of a Synod, being part of the WELS, helps us to proclaim the Gospel to the entire world. Here at Faith, we contribute to the work of the Synod in several ways. We give financially to the work of the Synod through our Congregational Mission Offerings. The Synod uses these offerings for mission work both at home and around the world and they also help to train future pastors and teachers. We also give special offerings to help with work in the WELS. Just recently we gave 200 Bibles to Divine Savior Lutheran School in Doral, FL so that their students could have their own Bibles. We also give to the ministry of Amazing Grace Lutheran Church in South Carolina as part of the Mission Partners program. These are just a few examples of ways that we are helping to do WELS ministry work through our gifts.

As our Synod uses the gifts from congregations like ours, they are working to bring the Gospel to many people. As the WELS focuses on the spread of the Gospel, we are thinking of many ways that we can be witnesses for Christ. We ask ourselves many questions as we consider new ministries and new ways of reaching out. We ask: What will reaching out to new cultures mean for our current congregations? How do we reach out to the big cities in our world? Can we afford these new ministries? What kind of strategy will we use in countries like China where we cannot put a missionary on the ground?

We turn all of our plans over to the Lord and he helps us. The Spirit helps us to explore new ways of reaching out to different cultures and countries. Our synod has come up with many ways of reaching many people. In the video that we will watch at the end of the service, we will see an example of how the Pastoral Studies Institute is working to train leaders from among other cultures. We will see how this program has trained leaders in Hmong communities. Also, in countries like China we are getting access into the country through English as a Second Language programs. Our members who go there to teach English let their faith be a shining example. The WELS Multi-Language Publications is printing Bible materials in hundreds of different languages so that people all over the world can read and hear about the love of Christ. The Internet is being used to broadcast things such as a Spanish Worship service that people around the world can access. As a synod, we truly are proclaiming Christ to the entire world.

Conclusion

As we consider our roles as witnesses for Christ, it is good to realize that we are part of a large group of Christians who work together. We are working to reach the entire world. There are many people who need the message of forgiveness that is found in Christ. It seems like such a large task because there are so many people who need what we have. God blesses us with a Synod that is working diligently to spread the gospel of Christ. We can be built up by the fact that so many Christians are out there at this very moment proclaiming Christ. We have the same message that the Apostles preached. We are given power by the same Spirit that gave the disciples power on Pentecost. May all this encourage us to be a witness for Christ every day of our lives.