

August 9, 2020

Help Others Do the Same: Part 2

RENEWED Series

Acts 1:1-11

Pastor Josh Luse

This message, shared by Josh in English, followed by each thought in Spanish by Carlos Ramos.

We are so glad Carlos is here, and all of Iglesia Berea with us this morning. We are finishing the final message in our series that we entitled *RENEWED* this summer, and we continue to unpack what it means to follow Jesus. It's our vision for our church moving forward. It's something I'll actually put up on the screen here and you can read it with me silently as I read it aloud. The vision would be that we would be a people that are *coming together to know Jesus, become more like Him, and help others do the same*. Last week Ryan started unpacking this last part, *help others do the same*. He talked about those neighbors that are around us—the way that we love and care and get to know them. So I hope you took him up on that challenge to get to know a neighbor this last week, and be prepared for whoever God brings across your path. This week we want to continue to unpack what it means to help others do the same.

You know, when I was in high school, I took a trip to Wisconsin. As I was preparing to come back, I pulled up to a gas station and started filling up my car, then decided I would go in and get some snacks for the long drive home, when something caught my eye. This truck pulls up, and in the back, it's piled high with dead deer. I've never seen so many deer in my life. So I'm wondering if this guy just went on a rampage, or did he go hunting with a bunch of buddies and he was the only guy with a truck? Is he on a cleanup crew for the whole state of Wyoming for deer? This is back in the day when your phone didn't really have a camera and I didn't have my disposable camera with me, so as I'm walking in to pay for the gas and get some snacks, I was thinking “Who could I call and tell about this?” I walk back, get in my car and I start to drive away when I hear this “pfunt!”. I know what you're thinking. “He hit a deer too.” *(laughter)* I wish! Not really, I love deer. But I look in the mirror and the hose of the gas tank is hanging off my car. *(laughter)* Anybody else in here with me on that? You ever done that? So, I'm the only one. Okay, so I'm driving away and I'm thinking, “Oh, man, I've got to call somebody!” Well, first I took the gas hose off; then I worked it out with the gas station attendant. But then I called a friend to tell him what had happened! And I can only imagine what the person on the other side of the gas pump was thinking. I'm sure he called a friend and like, “You'll never guess what happened. I'm filling up with gas. This truck comes in piled high with deer, and then this guy takes off driving with the gas pump dragging behind him.” *(laughter)*

You know, I don't know what it is about us, that we're wired to want to share those stories and experiences with others. Why is it so easy to talk about that kind of experience but so challenging to talk about your experience with Jesus? We want to take a look at that today. If you have your Bible, we'll be in Acts, Chapter 1 this morning. In chapter 1, verse 1, it starts out by saying this:

In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. (*ESV, Acts 1:1-2)

Now it's helpful to know that the author of this book is Luke, and Luke's also written another book. That's what he's speaking of in the very first part of this verse—that book named Luke. But then he goes on to explain all that Luke was about in his first book. He says that his first book was about what **Jesus began to do and teach**. But then his second book doesn't stop with Jesus' story being done. In fact, verse two says **until**, and continues to show us what Jesus will continue to do. Now in your Bible, Acts may read *The Acts of the Apostles*. Actually, that's kind of an unfortunate subtitle because, as you see, He continues to work through the Holy Spirit. Luke has more to say about the Holy Spirit than any other biblical writer. So it would be a much more appropriate title to say “The Acts of the Apostles through Jesus,” or, “The Acts of the Holy Spirit through the Disciples.” The reality is that the main character of the story is still Jesus. So, verse 3 goes on to read like this:

He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

So He's going back and sharing a little bit about what happened. Jesus has suffered and died on the cross, and then He's talking about the 40 days that followed that. He says that Jesus **presented Himself alive** and with **many proofs**, and He started to tell his followers about **the kingdom of God**. Why many proofs? Because there is no way that I can share about Jesus if I don't believe that what He says is true. It's so encouraging for me to know that disciples struggled with doubt. Actually in Matthew, at the very end of the book, chapter 28, Jesus is giving this command to his followers. It's the statement about what He wants them to be about. In Matthew 28, verses 18 through 20 he says this: *And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

Jesus has died; He's risen again. He's given them a powerful command to go carry out. But look at the glimpse of who he is talking to just before this. Actually in verses 16 and 17 it says this: *“Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted.”* What? How could they doubt? Because they're human like you and me. But Jesus met them there and continued to show them convincing proof of Him being alive—that He was the Son of God. The reality is this: “Your beliefs impact your thoughts and your thoughts impact your behavior.” Did you get that? Your beliefs impact your thoughts and your thoughts impact your behavior. There's absolutely no way that I can go and share with others about Jesus Christ if I don't believe what He says is true. If Jesus is who He says He is, that changes who I know myself to be, and the way that I live. And Jesus is reforming how to live in their minds. This is what He talks about as **the kingdom of God**. Now it's helpful to know when they heard **kingdom**, they would have been thinking a king and land and citizens. So in their minds, they struggled to understand what Jesus was talking about. All through the Gospel of Luke, he shows us that they continue to think Jesus would overthrow Rome. But this isn't what Jesus was talking about. His was a new kind of kingdom, and He'll continue to unpack that in the next couple verses. Verses 4 and 5:

And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

What **promise** is He talking about? He's talking about the promise from Isaiah 32, the promise from Ezekiel 36, and the promise from Joel 2. That in the Messianic kingdom, God's presence would come, and it would take up residence in a new place. It would take up residence in His people, that He would dwell in them and He would transform their hearts. You say, “How is that even possible?” He talks about what He's spoken of and what the Father has promised. **John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.** Now *baptism* in the ancient language meant *submerged*. In a general sense they would use this in everyday language. They would baptize cloth into a dye. If they wanted their white cloths to become red, that red dye would saturate the cloth and it would change the color, and it would change the character of that cloth. And He's speaking towards that in the sense of the Holy Spirit. To be clear, this is different than the baptism He was talking about with John because, in that baptism, He was talking about a symbol for repentance. When you and I trust Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, and we follow Him in obedience in baptism, we're showing a symbol of what Jesus Christ has done for us—how our hearts have been transformed—and we identify with His death, burial and resurrection. There's nothing mystical in the water, nothing magical that happens. It's an opportunity to symbolize what Jesus has done in our lives. But when He's talking about **with the Holy Spirit** it's something different.

Now it's also helpful to note that in verses four and five, it mirrors something in Luke. If I had a two-volume work in the scroll technology, at the end of my scroll, I would put a bit of information that would overlap to the next scroll. In the same way—in the next scroll or in the next book—I would put some information from the last one. So, Luke chapter 24, verse 49 mirrors these two verses. Listen to the way that he says it there: “*And behold, I am sending the promise of My Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.*” So, in one sense He speaks of the Holy Spirit as being something that baptizes or something that saturates us—something that fills us. But in another way, He refers to it as the Holy Spirit *clothing* us. Another way to say it is, He *equips* us; He *enables* us. He enables us to do what? That's what He's about to start to unpack in verse 6:

So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”

Now there are two views on the question that they're asking. The first view would be that they still don't get it. They're thinking that Jesus, at this point, is going to overthrow Rome. It makes you start to wonder, “Is Jesus going to change his travel plans? He is about to ascend to heaven?” But they still don't get it and, “I'm gonna stay a while longer.” Right? They might not have understood. They might not have had a full grasp on what He was talking about. But the other view would say that they completely understood. They understood that God's promise was to bless Abraham and his family, and that He would bless the world through Abraham. And so they can't wait to start; they're ready to go. Either way, His answer is clear in verse 7:

He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.”

In other words, you don't need to know all the details. You don't need to know all the timing. But I have something I want you to do. Isn't it interesting how they ask him in verse six, **“Lord, at this time will You do something?”** And in verse eight he invites them to join Him, “No, no, at this time *you* get to do something with Me.” In verse 8 He says this:

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

He invites them to be a witness for Him. Now understand this: Witnessing is not about what you can do for Jesus. Witnessing is about what Jesus can do through you. Jesus is still the main character of the story. Did you get that? Witnessing is not about what you can do for Jesus; it's about what Jesus can do through you. If it were up to us to change the world, we'd all be in big trouble. If it were up to these disciples, we would be in trouble. John chapter 20 tells us they were hiding together behind locked doors. That was happening shortly after Jesus' crucifixion. They may not still understand the truth of everything Jesus is telling them. They're just ordinary people, and they're walking through very trying times. If it's up to them to transform the world, it's not gonna happen. If it's up to us to transform the world, it's not gonna happen. But it's not up to us. It's about God working through us.

There's a story a couple of chapters later in Acts chapter 4. I love it because it reminds us of this truth. Peter and John have just done some amazing things for people, and they continue to share about Jesus, just simply saying what they've seen and heard Jesus say. And in verse 13 of chapter 4, it says this: *Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished, and they recognized that they had been with Jesus.* The reason that they were transforming and changing people's hearts was because Jesus was working through them.

In verse 8 He tells us, **“You will receive power...”** The word for **power** is *dynamite*. It's not *your* power and your strength! It's the Holy Spirit's power working through you in order for you to be **witnesses**. Now a witness is simply *someone that tells the truth*. They tell the truth about what they've seen and experienced. If I'm called to be a witness in a courtroom, the judge doesn't ask me for my opinion; he doesn't ask me for some hearsay. The judge asks me to take a sworn oath to tell the truth about what I've seen and experienced, to tell the truth about what I've heard. This word witness has this legal ramification, and it also has a historical context. It tells us that those who were with Jesus witnessed Him. They believed with all of their hearts the proofs that He had told them, that He was the Son of God. And because of that, it changed and transformed them. What's so interesting is this word literally means *martyr*, a word that sounds very similar in English and Greek and in Spanish. And many of His followers would go on to become martyrs for Jesus Christ. They believed so much about what He had said to be true, that they would give their lives.

So I wonder what He wants us to do to be a witness? Tell what you know to be true of Jesus to others? Show what you know to be true of Jesus to others? This is the kingdom of God unfolding in this world. Some of you are saying, “I can never do that.” You’re right, you never can. But *He* can through you. Some of you are saying, “I’m not sure if I believe that.” I’m saying that you can know that it’s true. Some of you are saying, “I’m not sure I’d know what to say.” That’s okay, the Holy Spirit will work through you. You are simply a vehicle for Him to work through. But it takes your initiative to join Him in that.

In verse 4, **He ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem.** Why? Because there’s no way they could do this on their own strength. You can’t do it on your own. And then He goes on and He tells them the Holy Spirit will come not many days from now. When they asked him about times, He hasn’t given them information. Why? Because He’s asking them to just be ready, to live lives that are ready. They asked about His plans, asking in verse six about an agenda. He says, “Hey, it’s not about *your* agenda; it’s about God’s agenda.” And then He tells them, “It’s not about *your* strength; it’s about God’s strength.” If I want to be a witness for Jesus Christ, I need to be ready at all times. I need to put His agenda in place of mine, and I need His strength and power to speak and show His gospel. And it starts right here where we’re at. If you’re ready, you will have opportunities.

A few weeks ago my wife and I were on a date and we went to a restaurant outside of Lincoln. As we were sitting at our table having a conversation, we heard somebody say something—this woman at the table next to us—and she said, “What do you guys think?” We kind of looked at her like, “Are you talking to us?” She said, “Yeah, were you listening to our conversation?” We said, “No, we weren’t.” So she got up and came over and sat down at our table. Now we were in her conversation. She started to explain some of her views and the topics they had been talking about at her table. It was about some of the struggles that she had been seeing in our city and in our community. I could see right away that maybe there were some things we didn’t quite see eye-to-eye on, but my wife and I just started asking questions. She just assumed we were tracking on the same page. We started talking more and more, talking about our family. We found out she was engaged; she then introduces us to her fiancé and we started talking more. And at some point she said, “I don’t know how you could ever bring kids into this world.” And there was an opportunity! I just told her the reason why we chose to have kids, the reason why we believe God blessed us to have kids. I started telling her how Jesus had transformed my life, and I started telling her that I believed my goal was to tell these kids about Jesus Christ, and that He would continue to transform and renew this world through people—through ordinary people like me, through ordinary people like my kids. Well, at this point she goes and invites the rest of the table over. So now our table is full, and she says, “Guys, listen to Josh. He’s a Christian. And one of the guys instantly said, “I’m an atheist.” We continue to have a conversation. Now my plan for that night was a dinner with my wife. God’s plan for my night was an opportunity for the gospel. I’ve never given a group hug with strangers at another table before that night. I know that there’s COVID, but before we were leaving, they said, “Bring it in,” and we had a group hug.

It’s not in my strength that I’m a witness. It’s God’s power working through us, and it starts where we’re at first. It starts in your neighborhood. It starts in your school. It starts at your work. It starts in your family. God wants us to start here first. He actually lays out a map for the spread of His gospel. The book of Acts continues to unveil this. In verse eight He says, **“You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”** If you

look at it on a map, you see in the middle of this map is the city of Jerusalem. This is where the disciples were. This is where not many days from now the Holy Spirit would meet them. He would fill them and empower them in the midst of trying and difficult times to share about what they had seen and heard from Jesus. But Jesus didn't want it to stop there. He wanted them to expand the region of Judea, and He didn't want it to stop there. He wanted to expand up north to that difficult neighboring community of Samaria. But He didn't want to stop there. He wanted it to go all around the world. Witnessing starts with you in your life. It's a first-hand experience with Jesus. So the question I would ask you first is, "Do you know Jesus? Do you understand what He's done for you? Are you becoming more like Him?" If this is true, then why would you not want to go and share this with others, those right around you? Because it starts here first. Guys, God has chosen the places where we've lived. He has given us an incredible opportunity in this city.

Every year we have international students who travel from all around the world to this place for our university. The world comes here. Lincoln has over half of the refugee population of Nebraska living in our city. We have all sorts of nations represented through our immigrant population. God has brought the world here. He wants us to reach those right around us. He wants us to continue to expand into the city, and then into this state, and then around the world.

In February, just before the pandemic hit, a team from this church actually went to Nicaragua on a missions' trip. (Something I just found out is Carlos is from Nicaragua.) Last year we gave you a challenge for the city in Nicaragua where we wanted to join with a church that was at work there. You took up that challenge because we wanted to both show and tell the gospel. We wanted to tangibly meet the needs of the people there—some of the real physical needs—partnering with the churches in those areas. And some of you have sacrificially given towards that every month. But we also wanted to tell, to share the good news that Jesus has changed our lives, so we continue to partner with those churches for that purpose. When you think about the kingdom of God present in this world, what pictures come to mind? For me the picture looks a lot like the video we're about to see. Take a look at this. (Video of the trip to Nicaragua)

When I was little, I used to be scared that God would ask me to be a missionary. I was scared He would take me somewhere I didn't want to go. But now I can't think of anything else I'd rather do—to join in sharing the hope of the gospel. It starts here first, and then we take it around the world. Verses 9 -11 go on to say this:

And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

Jesus continues with His plan. He ascends up to heaven to His throne. He sends His Spirit down to His people, and He continues to carry out His plan to this day to use ordinary, normal people like you and me, to be His witnesses in the places where we are and in the places where He leads us, through what we say and what we do. I heard it said best this way: "When someone who doesn't know Jesus watches your life and sees your actions—how you treat people around you, the things you talk about, the way you spend your money, the way you have fun, the way you spend your

time, and the way that you respond to your sin—will they be struck with how glorious Jesus is and what amazing salvation He offers?” As Jesus ascends, His disciples sit there waiting and looking. He sends some angels to gently correct them. “What are you waiting for? He will come again, but until then, He’s given you a job to be His witnesses.” Bob Goff said, *“I used to be afraid of failing. That’s something that really mattered to me. But now I’m more afraid of succeeding at things that don’t matter.”*

God is doing incredible things all around us, and He’s invited us to join Him, to *come together to be a people that actually know Jesus, that really become like Him, and then go and help others do the same.* Would you pray with me?

Jesus, thank You so much for who You are. Thank You that You are God, that You are seated on Your throne, that Your kingdom is here. Thank You that You are working with us to accomplish Your will. Thank You that You invite us to join You. Thank You that we don’t do it on our own, that You’ve given us Your strength and Your power. Thank You that you guide us. Thank You that you’ve given proof that You are real. Thank You that we get to join You in this restoration, in this kingdom life that starts here now and goes on into eternity. Father, thank You that You will come again, that You will renew all things to Yourself, that Your kingdom will come in its fullness. And, God, until that time, help us be about Your work through Your strength. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

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Introduction

This is the final week of this session of Online Connect Groups. On Sunday Josh led us into a larger picture of the final section of our vision statement: Coming together, to know Jesus, become more like Him, and **help others do the same.**

This week's message focused on the idea of being a witness to the current reality of God's kingdom. Am I willing to share with others the life that I share with Jesus?

Getting to Know Each Other *(Suggested time: 30 min)*

Begin your group time by learning more about each other. Open up and have some fun!

→ What is your favorite season of the year? Why do you love that season?

→ How will your schedule change this fall, if at all?

Getting Started

Begin to transition into group discussion.

- 1) Invite someone to open the group in prayer. Here are a few potential prayer items:
 - a. God to reveal His truth and love for the group
 - b. Openness to each other and God's voice
 - c. Friendships to deepen and grow
- 2) Invite someone else to read Acts 1:1-11 to the group.

Study Questions *(Suggested time: 40 min)*

Please complete these questions before your group meets.

- 1) What part of Josh's sermon has stuck with you this week? Was there anything that seemed unclear or that that you'd like to learn more about?

- 2) In Acts 1:3, we're told that Jesus appeared to the disciples over a period of 40 days and spoke to them about "things concerning the kingdom of God." The kingdom of God can be a confusing topic in scripture, but it was the primary message of Jesus. In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus refers to it 32 times as the kingdom of heaven. In other gospels it comes up 65 times, referred to as the kingdom of God. In the book of Acts, Peter, Stephen and Paul took it as their entire mission to preach the good news of the kingdom and salvation in the name of Jesus.
 - a. How would you describe the kingdom of God?

 - b. Josh mentioned that the people of Jesus' time would have been thinking of a physical kingdom including an actual king, land, and citizens of the kingdom. **Read Mark 1:14-15** and **Luke 17:20-21**. How do these ideas and verses change the way you think about the kingdom of God?

 - c. **Read Matthew 6:31-33**. Dallas Willard has written, "The simplest way to think about the kingdom of God is God in action for us and with us." How would you describe what it means to "seek first the kingdom of God?"

- 3) In Acts 1:8, Jesus tells the apostles that they will be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the remotest part of the earth.
 - a. What did it mean for the apostles to be a witness? To what were they witnessing? (Hint: **Read 1 John 1:1-3**)

- b. What does it mean for us to be a witness today? Are there any differences between how the apostles were witnesses and how we are witnesses? If so, what are the differences?

- 4) Last week focused on the idea of our local opportunity to witness and participate in God's kingdom. This week it was broadened to our global opportunity to witness and participate in God's kingdom.
 - a. What are opportunities you see in your life to witness and participate in God's kingdom locally?

 - b. Are you involved in being a witness and participating in God's kingdom globally? If so, how? If not, how could you get involved?

PRO TIP: If you would like to learn more about opportunities to witness or participate in God's kingdom in Lincoln and around the world, contact outreach@lincolnberean.org or checkout this Facebook Group: www.facebook.com/groups/lincolnbereanlocal

Prayer *(Suggested time: 10 min)*

Take a few moments to prepare a prayer request. Consider the areas you need to grow, receive help or show love.

A significant part of "coming together" is being open and honest with our fears, hopes and dreams. Sharing these things can be scary, but it also invites others to share in your life!

