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# STAYIN' ALIVE

The Spirit is Moving

Acts 1:6-11

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Being a follower of Jesus today has a lot in common with the experience of the first disciples. We're welcomed as disciples by grace, not because we earned it or because we're better than average, but because Jesus calls us. We learn and practice the way of Jesus in the company of other disciples, never alone. We meet Jesus around the table of grace where we're reminded that we're loved and forgiven. The pathway of following Jesus isn't always clear, but it's a road we walk because Jesus' love compels us. We share all of that in common with Jesus' first disciples. But there is one significant difference between us and them: those first disciples could see Jesus and we can't. But here's the surprising thing: according to Jesus, that's to our advantage. Jesus once said, "It's better that I go away so that the Spirit can come."

Today we're beginning a summer worship series entitled "Stayin' Alive." As far as I know, this series has nothing to do with disco. Instead, it is designed to answer this question: How can we come alive to the ongoing mission of Jesus in the world as spirit-filled disciples? Throughout this series we're going to explore what it means to be on mission as disciples, who the Spirit is and how we learn to move with the Spirit in daily life. And I can't think of a better place within the biblical story to begin this series than the story of Jesus' ascension in Acts 1:6-11. Let's read the story together [New Living Translation].

Today, as an introduction to this series I want to focus on two interconnected things: The mission we've been given as disciples and as the Body of Christ, and the Holy Spirit who is the power that fuels us for the mission. Let's dive in.

I love the fact that Jesus' disciples were not super heroes. Truth is, they were a little dimwitted. And that gives me hope that someone like me can be a disciple, too! Even after three years of following Jesus, even after witnessing both Jesus' death and resurrection, the disciples still didn't understand what Jesus came to do. They asked Jesus when he was going to get rid of the Romans and make Israel great again. They thought that was Jesus' mission. But they were wrong. Jesus has a much bigger mission in mind. And that mission is connected to God's dream for this world. It's a big

dream. It's bold and beautiful and counter-cultural.

It's a dream in which all people know that they are loved and forgiven.

It's a dream in which there is justice for all, so that all people can thrive.

It's a dream in which broken lives and broken relationships are made whole, and all people live in peace.

And this beautiful dream has a name. It's called The Kingdom of God. Jesus' mission was to announce God's dream to the world, and through this life, death and resurrection to begin the process of making it a reality. But then he passed that mission on to his disciples. Their mission was to continue the process of making God's dream a reality.

And I suspect that little fact, that Jesus expected the disciples to continue his mission in the world, scared those first disciples right out of their sandals. How could ordinary fishermen and tax collectors make God's dream a reality? Would they meet the same violent end that Jesus met? Those are big, scary questions! But that's why Jesus reminded the disciples that they wouldn't be doing it alone. They would be empowered by the Spirit.

But enough about the disciples back then. Let's talk about disciples today. You and me. Us. The Church. The Body of Christ. We've been given the very same mission to accomplish as those first disciples – to make God's dream for this world a reality. "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." God has called and equipped us for this mission. We are called to resist the pervasive lie of our culture that life is about us, to refuse to settle for such a small vision of what we're here for. We're called to rise up, together, and give ourselves away for something so much more meaningful, because Jesus promised that in giving ourselves away for the sake of the mission, we would truly find ourselves. That's where real life will be found! Our mission as disciples and as the Body of Christ together, is to be a part of the continual unfolding of God's dream into reality in our homes, our schools, our neighborhoods, our workplaces and our world. Wow!

And like those first disciples, we may be intimidated by this mission. We may think we don't have what it takes. We may fear that others will think us odd, or that it would be too uncomfortable to let go of our old way of living to embrace the new way of Jesus. But that's why Jesus promises that we won't do this mission on our own. Jesus has given us the Spirit. Let me ask you: if Jesus, the risen Lord, came and stood beside you and said, "Come on, we'll do this mission together" would you feel more confident?

Of course you would! But Jesus has done better than that. He's given us his Spirit, within each one of us, present with us everywhere, all the time. And the Spirit is the power that fuels us for the mission we've been given.

But here, I think, is the challenge: it's easy to have a clear picture of Jesus in our minds, but it's not so easy to envision the Spirit. The Spirit can seem a bit confusing and mysterious to us. And since the Spirit is going to be the main character in the story of Jesus' mission accomplished through us, it might help to get just a little clarity about the Spirit as we start this series. Scripture most often talks about the Spirit in metaphors, symbols that tell us something important about the Spirit. I want to share three of those metaphors with you today: breath, wind and fire. Please note, that's different than Earth, Wind and Fire!

Let's start with breath. Way back in the creation story in Genesis God formed human beings from the dust of the ground, but to bring them to life the story says that he breathed his breath into them. That breath is God's Spirit. It is the Spirit of God that enlivens us as God breathes his Spirit into us. In fact, in both Hebrew and Greek, the original languages of the Bible, the word for "spirit" also means "breath."

Have you ever felt inspired, internally moved and motivated? I think about the Concert of Praise we experienced with the Gospel singer, Robert Robinson, back in May. The whole experience was so inspiring. It moved me to praise God. That's inspiration! But here's the deal – the word "inspire" literally means to breathe in. We are an inspired people because God has breathed his Spirit into us. And that Spirit moves us, motivates us. Whenever we are moved to faith, to entrust ourselves to God's love, that is the Spirit at work in us. Whenever we are moved to hope, even in the darkest and most difficult moments of life, that is the Spirit at work in us. And whenever we are moved to love God and our neighbor, that is the Spirit at work within us. We are an inspired people, a God-breathed people!

The second metaphor for the Spirit is fire. There are lots of implications of this metaphor, but I just want to focus on one today. In Acts 2 we read the story of Pentecost, the day that God sent his Spirit upon the disciples. And in that story it says that the Spirit came like "tongues of fire" onto each disciple and in that moment they began to bear witness, to tell the story of Jesus for others to hear. In other words, the Spirit is the power of our witness to Jesus in the world. What does that have to do with fire? [I'll use visual aids here] We're all like candles, and the Spirit "lights us up" with faith and love. And when we tell our faith-story with our words, and bear witness to our faith through our actions, sometimes the Spirit uses us to "light up" someone else. The "flame of faith" is passed from person to person through the Spirit. That's why Scripture calls us to "fan the

flames of our faith," so that we might burn bright and light up the world with faith, hope and love.

The flame of my faith came from three fraternity brothers when I was in college. There was something about the way they lived that drew me like a moth to a flame. There was a depth, a kindness, a peace about them that I wanted in my own life. And when I asked them each about it, they told me the story of their faith in Jesus. And those conversations lit me up! I "caught" the faith from them, as they passed the flame of their faith to me. And I've been grateful ever since.

The third metaphor for the Spirit is wind. In the Gospel of John, Jesus said that the Spirit is like the wind – you can hear it and feel it, but you can't see it, nor do you know where it comes from. Talking about the Spirit as a wind is most helpful when we think about ourselves like a sailboat. Without wind, a sailboat is dead in the water. But with the wind the sailboat moves with speed and grace. Each of us, and all of us together, are like sailboats. On our own, we're dead in the water. We can try and paddle our way to accomplish God's mission, but we won't get far and we'll wind up exhausted. But when we harness the power of the Spirit, we move with speed and grace to accomplish the mission Jesus gave us. Our job as disciples is to learn how to set the sail of our life together to catch the wind of the Spirit. And that's exactly what we'll be talking about throughout this series.

Maybe you came here today thinking that you were just coming to church. Maybe you came today thinking, "I'm just a member of an institution called Prince of Peace." If so, I hope you've been blown out of the water today. Seriously! Now matter how you came here today, I hope you will leave today knowing and believing two things. You've been given a mission, a mission to make God's dream a reality right here and right now. It's why you were made. It's your deepest purpose in life. And second, you've been empowered for this mission – inspired, Spirit-filled and fueled.

Do you remember the old Mission Impossible show? In each episode Agent Jim Phelps would listen to a tape-recorded message giving him some seemingly impossible mission. And that tape always said, "Your mission, should you choose to accept it is..." and it changed every week. And, of course, the tape always self-destructed in five seconds. Well friends, I'm asking you today – will you accept the mission that you've been given? Without knowing all the details? Without any certainty of success? Only knowing that you will not do it alone or under your own power? Nothing will self-destruct if you say "no," but I promise you that your life will never be the same if you say "yes." Let's commit ourselves to Jesus' mission in prayer....