

PASTOR'S NOTES. The Missionary Mind, Part 1.

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

Acts 1:8 (NRSV)

I am not alone in saying this is a key memory verse in the Bible. These are words from Jesus to His disciples after He has died, come back from the dead, and is now about to ascend to heaven. It is also the place where what He has hinted to in the past (Luke 9:1-6, 10:1-12), He has now made official: to be a **disciple** (*student*) of Jesus is to lead one to become an **apostle** (*ambassador, one sent out*) for Jesus. And this is not just for a few people; we are all called to be disciples, and Paul calls his entire congregation ambassadors:

*“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, Who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. **We are therefore Christ's ambassadors**, as though God were making His appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.”*

2 Corinthians 5:17-20 (NIV)

When I say the Acts passage is a key memory verse, I mean that we should not only know it, but consider it in detail. Jesus breaks it down into four parts:

Jerusalem. When Jesus was speaking to his disciples (soon to be apostles), they were in Jerusalem. Jerusalem for them was their hometown, their own people. A lot of people shrink back from the idea of evangelism, or sharing their faith, or even talking about their faith, because they have this image that we are supposed to be going to strangers and convincing them to accept and believe in Christ. This is not what most of us are called to do, at least at first. Consider:

“As [Jesus] was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged Him that he might be with Him. But He refused, and said to him, ‘Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy He has shown you.’”

Mark 5:18-19 (NRSV)

We are witnesses first to those closest to us. Sometimes those are the hardest people to reach (even for Jesus – see Mark 6:1-5), but we are not called to do it alone (see Mark 6:7, Luke 10:1). As a church, we can support one another and do this together.

Judea. The area around Jerusalem was called Judea. This is where the disciples (soon to be apostles) would find the people they barely know, but are most like them. We go next to people who have a similar cultural background and lifestyle to us. And this is where the church over the last century has done its best work.

Samaria. It is striking that Jesus points out this land; it is their near neighbor, but a different culture and race than the Jews. (We may not be able to tell the difference between a Jew and a Samaritan, but they could.) Jesus was explicit that we are to expand our witness to

people who are different than us. This requires some good observation and listening. Paul puts it this way:

“To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law) so that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.”

1 Corinthians 9:20-23 (NRSV)

In earlier generations, the church was dedicated to reaching people who were different. We have evidence now that it took less than two hundred years after Christ for there to be Christians in China and Africa, even when one traveled mostly by walking. This witness takes more time and effort to cross barriers of language and culture, and most churches have been shrinking back from doing it.

The ends of the earth. Today most churches in all denominations are supporting mission work worldwide. But we easily forget that this is because of the dedication of others who paved the way, made the personal contacts, and often endured hardships to build those relationships. And in many of our denominations, the number of missionaries we are sending and supporting is far less than in the past. On the other hand, in churches like the United Methodist Church, the earlier missionary work and the current financial support that we send has helped Christians in many parts of Africa and Asia to do their own “Judea” work and the church is growing rapidly in those places.

Not all of us are called to be missionaries to other parts of the world. But I believe that all of us are called to be missionaries somewhere along this four-part scale. In the next part (or parts, I don’t know yet which), I will say more about how this directly relates to our current social and political situations.

After all, whatever the burning questions or the struggles of our world, I am still convinced that Christ is the answer. He has committed to us the ministry of reconciliation.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the name 'Kam' or similar, written in a cursive style.