

Kenny Silva – Sermon – “What are you waiting for?” 2/9/20

As most of you know, Suzanne and I moved our family up here in 2016 so that I could work on my Ph.D. at Trinity. Now, I'm well aware that us academic types tend to get in the pulpit and make things a bit more complicated than they need to be. And I suspect a few of you are worried about that.

So, allow me to dispel your fear by way of a simple illustration: This, ladies and gentleman, is a football. That's what Vince Lombardi told his Green Bay Packers on the first day of training camp in the Summer of 1961.

You see, just a few months prior, the Packers had squandered their 4th quarter lead to lose the NFL Championship to the Philadelphia Eagles. They were devastated, but these guys were professionals. So, they licked their wounds and showed up to training camp, ready to do whatever they needed to do to advance their game up to the next level.

Lombardi knew they were eager to get to work; but he also knew that the most dangerous thing he and his team could do was take the game for granted. So, he held up a football and led his team back to square one.

Brothers and sisters, we've suffered our own kind of loss, haven't we? This is our first Sunday after Lee's retirement. And let's all be honest with one another; it's a little weird. It's ok. We can admit that. But even in spite of this awkward newness, I've gotten the strong sense from many of you that we're ready to move forward and see what God has for us.

I love that, but one of the most dangerous things we can do is take all this for granted... to proceed as though we've got this church thing all figured out, and that all we have to do is find a new senior pastor who'll pick up our playbook and run the same old drills.

The blessing of a transitional season like this one is a moment to pause... to take a long, hard look at ourselves in the presence of God and ask what He has for us. None of us knows exactly what that is just yet. I know I don't. It's not like I've come to this job with a laundry list of things to change over the next several months. That's not what we need right now.

What I do know is this: this season we've entered into is our time not just to figure out who we are as a church, but who we're *supposed* to be. In many ways, that work has already begun. You've heard from the transition team over the past few months. You're going to start hearing from us more as we invite you to give feedback and engage with the process of assessing our church's health and envisioning its future.

But the danger in all that is that we'd spend too much time gazing at our collective navel and not enough time asking important questions like: What does God's Word say about the church? How does Scripture want us to think about the way we do things? If Jesus visited our church, what would He commend? What would He condemn?

These are just a few of the questions we have to ask as we seek God's will for VCL. To help us do that, we're going to spend the next several months in the book of Acts. If you'll go ahead and open up to chapter 1, I'll say just a bit more about that.

Acts is really a wonderful book... It was written by Luke as a kind of sequel to his Gospel, and it tells the story of the early Church's explosion onto the world stage. Luke doesn't tell it from the viewpoint of a detached observer. Instead, he takes up His place in the story, and he wants us to find our place in it as well.

In Acts, we see the beginnings of the Father's mission to bring people from every tribe, tongue, nation and people group into Christ's Church through the power of the Holy Spirit. We see God at work in a powerful and public way.

But we also see the *people* of God and their role in that work. At times, we see them in their weakness and confusion. No blueprint to follow. No master plan for evangelism. No Rick Warren, or Bill Hybels to give them advice. All they had was the kindling of Jesus' teaching and the fire of the Holy Spirit.

In Acts, there are times when the apostles look like superheroes. Plenty of other times, though, they look like weaklings—beaten, imprisoned, left for dead. But it is precisely in and through their weakness that God establishes His Church.

I am confident that the same will be here: that in the coming months, God will show up in our weakness... that in our times of fear or confusion, He will guide us faithfully into a new chapter for our Church—one that will bring good to all our souls and glory to our Heavenly Father.

Acts 1:1–5 (ESV)

¹ In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, ² until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³ 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. ⁴ 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; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

Now, there's a lot we could say about this passage. Today, we're going to focus on three specific things: the presence of Jesus, the power of the Spirit, and the promise of the Father. Presence, Power, and Promise.

We might call these first few lines a prologue—an opening word meant to give you a sense of what's to come. As soon as we begin reading, though, Luke points us back to his Gospel. In vv. 1-2, Luke gives us a sweeping summary of that first book: it was about all that Jesus began to do and teach up until the moment He ascended into heaven.

Those two words—doing and teaching—are crucial here, because what Luke is saying is that His Gospel wasn't just about the words of Jesus. It was about His actions, too. For Luke, Jesus wasn't just a teacher of good spiritual principles. He wasn't a guru. No, He was the Savior of Israel come to work wonders among His people, to live a life of perfect righteousness, and to sacrifice Himself on the cross. The doing and teaching of Jesus hang together in what John Calvin called a "holy knot."

But as important as doing and teaching are, there's a third word I want us to focus on: that's the word **began**. Luke's Gospel wasn't about something static that happened back then, but a dynamic reality that *began* before Jesus was taken up into Heaven.

That raises an interesting question: if the Luke's Gospel gives us the beginning of Jesus' doing and teaching, where do we go to find its ending?

You might be tempted to look at the cross. *That's* where Jesus put a bow on His public ministry. But look again at verses 2 and 3. Jesus spends plenty of time commanding and teaching His disciples *after* His death and resurrection.

Ok, then, maybe it's the ascension. Jesus speaks His last word to the disciples, and *then* that's the end of His ministry. Well, let's think about the last few lines of Matthew.

In Matt 28:19-20, Jesus commissions His disciples: "19 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, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. **And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.**"

So, Jesus is *with* His disciples as they pick up His torch and go into the world. He continues to work and teach *through* them. He doesn't do that from a distance. Instead, it's as if He's right there walking beside Him.

And that's the point I think we're supposed to see here.

This Jesus whom the Jews crucified is alive. That guy they nailed to a cross got up out of His grave and spent 40 days proving that death could not hold Him. And, even though He was getting ready to ascend back into Heaven, that didn't change the fact that He would be fully alive and fully present with His disciples as they went out into the world.

But how does that work? To put it crudely, how can He be *with* His people down here if He's seated at the right hand of the Father *up there*?

You could say, well, duh, Jesus is God, God is everywhere, therefore Jesus is with us. That may make sense in the realm of abstract logic. But the logic of the Gospel pushes us in a different direction: it challenges us to conceive Jesus' presence not merely in terms of physical space but in terms personal relation.

Think about it this way: you can be physically close to a person like your spouse or a friend, yet relationally distant. Maybe you've had a fight or one of you forgot to wash the dishes... or you forgot to take out the trash... or you forgot to feed the kids breakfast.

The point is: physical and relational space don't exactly coincide.

Well, the same kind of thing happens between us and God. God is everywhere. In that sense, it's impossible to be far from God. Yet, we all kinda know what it means to say we're close to God or far from Him. So, when we think about Jesus' presence in and with us, we're actually called to think about something much better than mere physical closeness.

Jesus is *with* us the same way a loving mother is with her child. He's not just here; he's here *for* us.

Before we talk about the power He brings, I want to dwell for a moment on this point.

As Christians, we believe that Jesus is alive and that He is present and active in our midst. The founder of our faith did not simply die and leave us a set of teachings to follow. He rose from the dead and is intimately involved with us even today.

No other world religion can say that; as far as I know, they don't even try. The risen Mohammed is not present and active in Islam's midst. The risen Buddha is not actively interceding for his people and walking beside them in the run of their everyday lives.

This is the cornerstone of Christian faith: we died with Christ in His crucifixion and we rose with Him in His resurrection, and the life we now live is only possible because He is fully alive and fully present with us.

Why does that matter? What difference does that make?

- As you talk with your prodigal child this week, the risen Lord is with you.
- As you try to speak a word for Jesus in the break room at work, He's there.
- In the doctor's office, or when you're sitting with your financial planner, or when you're talking to your kid's teacher about their grades, when you're trying to figure out how in the world you're going to strike up a friendship with a neighbor who looks, thinks, and acts nothing like you...
- His hand is upon your shoulder. He's not left you. He's not forsaken you. He's not called you to figure this out on your own. He's with you.

He's with us, carrying on the doing and teaching He began so many years ago.

Alright, so now that we've talked about the presence of Jesus, it's time for us to consider the power of the Holy Spirit. Let's look again at verse 2.

Here, we see Jesus giving commands to His apostles **through the Holy Spirit**. Now, again, I don't want us to take anything for granted, so let me say this. The Holy Spirit isn't slang for good Christian vibes. The Spirit isn't a form of holy electricity that energizes our Christian living. As we learn from Scripture, the Holy Spirit is a person. In

fact, He's one of the persons of the Trinity—fully God in terms of the divine essence, yet distinct from the Father and Son in terms of their personal relationships.

So, what does it mean for Jesus to give commands through the Spirit? That's an interesting question, because we tend to associate the Spirit more with our learning than with Jesus' teaching. We know the Spirit helps us to keep His commands, but do we know that the Spirit helped Jesus to actually make them?

Consider what Luke's Gospel had to say about the Spirit's work in Jesus' life:

- In Luke 1, Jesus was conceived by the power of the Spirit.
- In Luke 3, John the Baptist said that Jesus would come to baptize people with the Spirit and fire.
- In Luke 4:1, the Spirit fills Jesus and sends Him into the wilderness.
- In Luke 4:18, Jesus says it's the Spirit who enables Him to carry out His ministry.
- In Luke 10, He rejoices in the Spirit.
- In Luke 11, He teaches his disciples to pray for the Spirit.
- In Luke 12, Jesus even says that a word against the Spirit is *worse* than a word against the Son.
- Right after that, He promises that the Spirit would come and give the disciples the words they needed to speak well about Jesus in the midst of opposition.

Long story short, the picture Luke paints of Jesus is bathed in the Holy Spirit.

That's what the people would've expected to learn about their Messiah. Ever since God made a covenant with David generations before, they waited for the day when a Messiah would come, full of the Holy Spirit and ready to reign forever. Do you know what Messiah means? It means the anointed one. Anointed with what? The Holy Spirit.

So, the Spirit is all over Jesus' life and ministry. He comes before Jesus; preparing the nation and even His mother's womb. He comes beside Jesus, empowering Him for ministry. The Spirit even comes behind Jesus, providing His disciples with that very same power.

So, when we get to v. 2 and we see Jesus commanding the apostles through the Holy Spirit and then we follow that up with vv. 4-5, where He orders them to wait, we very clearly get the sense that there's no way the disciples are going anywhere without the power the Spirit brings.

This brings us to our final word this morning: the Promise of the Father.

In vv. 4-5, Jesus tells the apostles to wait for the **promise** of the Father.

You see, John's baptism had been a sign of cleansing and preparation to show the people their need of forgiveness. But this baptism of the Holy Spirit points to a moment in history when God would not only forgive His people, but empower them for ministry.

Jesus' orders were clear; the disciples were not to move forward until the Spirit came. We don't just see that here in v 4; we also see it in Luke 24:49, where Jesus tells the disciples to wait until they were "clothed with power from on high."

That's the image here; in Christ, we wear the Spirit's power the same way Tony Stark dons his Iron Man armor.

Clothed with that divine power, we are unstoppable.

But unlike this genius-turned-superhero, the Spirit's power isn't just for the elite few. It does not come at the end of our Christian journey but the beginning. As Paul says in Romans 8, if Christ is in you, then so is His Spirit. You can't have one without the other.

That's the promise, that the Spirit would be poured out on *all* God's people.

In John 14-16, Jesus speaks at length about what that would look like.

The Spirit would come to...

- Dwell in God's people and help them (John 14:15)
- To be the agent of Christ's presence and the conduit between His life and theirs (John 14:19-21)
- To convict the world about sin and righteousness
- To bear witness about the glory and the grace of God.
- To take the things of God and declare them to His people.

That's what the Spirit would come to do.

Now, this promise wasn't something new that Jesus concocted; it was the expectation of all God's people ever since Moses said in Numbers 11:29, "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!"

We see that expectation taken up by prophets like Isaiah and Ezekiel, and especially in the prophet Joel. In fact, as we'll see in Acts 2, Peter declares the Spirit's coming upon His church to be *the* fulfillment of that prophetic expectation, and it was only possible because of the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ.

The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ, her Lord. Through the promised Holy Spirit, the Father is building upon that foundation, one believer at a time. That's not some high-minded ideal; it's a present reality. If we are in Christ, then the Spirit is in us... and He's creating in all of us a fit dwelling place for His glory. Right here, right now, in this room, that's what God is doing.

That leaves me with one question for us all: what are we waiting for?

Like the apostles, our beloved shepherd has left us, and we don't know exactly who or what the Lord has ahead of us. The thing is, though, we're not like the apostles—at least, not at this moment in their story. Pentecost has already happened. The Spirit has already come. The fact that we're gathered here together in this place, confessing Jesus as Lord, lifting our voices in praise, and listening expectantly to the preaching of God's Word is evidence that the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, has broken into our hearts and brought us together as a people. Jesus is alive; He's here with us right now through the power and of His Holy Spirit. The Father has kept His promise to us, and he's not about to go back on His Word.

So that brings me back around to that question: what are we waiting for, VCL?

The Spirit is upon us to preach good news to the poor and to proclaim gospel liberty to those held in the chains of sin. God is empowering us to minister sight to the blind and freedom to those who are struggling under the heavy burdens this fallen world places upon them. He has commissioned us to proclaim the favor of God through the mercy and grace of Jesus Christ. This is why we exist, to proclaim the excellencies of the God who called us out of darkness and into His marvelous light.

- Our Good Shepherd is fully alive and fully present with us in that work.
- He has given us the power to go and proclaim His name to the ends of the earth.
- We do that as a people of the Father's promise, the Ones on whom the Spirit has been poured out.

In this season of waiting, we can't forget these things. God has not left us. He has not forsaken us. He is all in with us, and I want to challenge everyone in this room to go all in with Him.

This is a football. This is a church. May this season of waiting be one in which we call upon the Lord and expect Him to show up in better ways than we could ever imagine.

“Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.” **(Hebrews 13:20–21, ESV)**