

Welcome

Did you catch the Oscars this year? Even if you didn't, I'm sure you heard about THE SLAP. Don't worry. We're not going to talk about that today. I swear.

And if you don't know what I'm taking about, seriously, thank your lucky stars and you're still not going to know because we're seriously not talking about it.

I want to talk about another weird thing the Oscars did this year - introducing Fan categories. One of them was Favorite Movie and the other was Favorite Movie Moment. A bunch of Zach Snyder stuff won (mostly because his fanbase is, uh, *rabid*), but the one that I liked best was that moment from the end of Avengers: Endgame when all the portals open up and all the Avengers come pouring out. And then Captain America says, "Avengers: Assemble!"

Whew! Chills!

That's the best thing about all the Marvel movies - the team-ups! In fact, it's hard to find one of those movies or TV shows anymore where at least one or two other heroes don't show up (I mean, in the last Spider-Man movie, we had three *Spider-men*, not to mention Doctor Strange!).

We love stories about teams, about the reality that we're better together than we are apart. How many sports movies are about that rugged individual learning to care for their teammates? Or two enemies who come to realize their differences make the whole team stronger together?

As humans, we have an innate desire to connect. And that's what church is really supposed to be about. We don't usually think of it that way - we often think of church as a place where a bunch of individuals come to receive some help and then wander back to our individual lives.

But the church is a family, a body. A team. We're here for each other. God brought us together for the sake of each other. I can't be who God called me to be without you.

And vice-versa!

Message

Welcome to Easter-tide! Just last week, we gathered to celebrate Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Our series between the resurrection and Pentecost - the day we celebrate God's gift to us of the Holy Spirit - is called RECONNECTED. We're asking what it looks like to be plugged in - both to God and to the world to which God calls us.

What are the practices, attitudes and orientations God calls us to and gifts us with that enable us to be a church that engages and cares about the world around us?

For these questions, we're going to be in the book of Acts, which recounts the beginnings of the church. How did we go from a group of scared people who fled from the authorities when Jesus was arrested to a group that faced down persecution and fearlessly spread the good news of Jesus' resurrection to the world around us?

I hope we find a reflection of ourselves in those transformed disciples. I hope this series stretches our imagination about what is possible in our city, in our families, in our world today. How can we recover the same sort of bold faith we in those first followers in the wake of Jesus' resurrection?

I want to begin today by acknowledging the hugeness of the calling before us. We spent the Lenten season looking at some of the idols in our culture - individualism, capitalism, willful amnesia, family, race, gender and nationalism.

These are *big* problems. It's hard to imagine how a church can oppose these systemic evils on a systemic level. Like, it's nice to not be racist... but how do we create a more just government, or school system?

And even on individual levels, whether it's anxieties around our jobs or families or money or whatever, it can be really hard to imagine being a real agent of change. We feel like we're treading water, just barely getting by. To imagine having the capacity to do something different, even to *imagine* something different is exhausting.

In that, we're not terribly different from those first disciples. Can you imagine their situation? They were so sure that Jesus was the Messiah, there to destroy Rome and restore Israel's king. And then... he was executed by Rome. And then... he was raised from the dead, demonstrating that he *was* the Messiah, but not like any of them expected. And *then* he told them he was leaving them. Ascending to the throne of heaven, and that his whole mission was now *their* responsibility. It was their job to... change the world.

Turn with us to [Acts 1](#).

Acts is volume 2 of the Luke-Acts set. Written by the same author, the two books seek to sketch out the story of the Church. Luke is the story of Jesus, ending with his death, resurrection and ascension to the throne of heaven. Acts covers the ascension and then moves forward to show how those rag-tag disciples became a global good news movement.

Luke opens the story of Acts in that period between the resurrection and the giving of the Holy Spirit. As we read, I want you to put yourselves in their shoes - that mixture of fear, excitement, apprehension, curiosity. Wondering what's going to happen after Jesus leaves you:

During the forty days after he suffered and died, he appeared to the apostles from time to time, and he proved to them in many ways that he was actually alive. And he talked to them about the Kingdom of God.

Once when he was eating with them, he commanded them, “Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you the gift he promised, as I told you before. John baptized with water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” -- Acts 1:3–5 (NLT)

In the midst of all this teaching, preparing the disciples for what comes next, Jesus give them an instruction and a promise: Stay in Jerusalem until you receive the Holy Spirit.

On the one hand, I try to imagine how disturbing this was. Jesus was *leaving*. In the next verse, we learn that the disciples kept pestering him, asking when he was going to ‘free Israel and restore our kingdom.’ Which tells us that *even in the wake of the resurrection*, they didn’t get it yet. They were *still* expecting Jesus, full of resurrection glory, to kick out Rome and make them all kings.

Instead, Jesus leaves them, saying, “Stay here until something happens. You’ll know when it does.”

Whew.

Can we stop here for a moment and feel that?

How many of us have been promised a religion that fixes things if we’ll just believe hard enough? And the we have a Sunday like last week, we want to believe Jesus is just going to swoop in and fix everything.

And then we wake up on Monday and the world is pretty much the same. And we wonder... what was Easter all about?

So before we go too much further... before we celebrate the power of the Holy Spirit, could we just sing while we stand in that anxiety? The “wait... something’s coming” that we all know, we’ve all lived (and indeed maybe are in the midst of now).

BREAK

After his resurrection, Jesus spends forty days with his followers teaching them what his resurrection means. That’s a self-conscious reference to the time Israel spent in the wilderness after God liberated them from Egypt. A time they were learning to be God’s people.

After that forty days, he ascended to heaven and then...

...well and then, the disciples had their instructions. Return and wait. You’ll know when it’s time.

So what did they do? Well, they waited:

Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, a distance of half a mile. When they arrived, they went to the upstairs room of the house where they were staying.

Here are the names of those who were present: Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James (son of Alphaeus), Simon (the zealot), and Judas (son of James). They all met together and were constantly united in prayer, along with Mary the mother of Jesus, several other women, and the brothers of Jesus. -- Acts 1:12–14 NLT)

They met together and were constantly united in prayer.

That's a small statement with huge implications. Because they didn't know anything. They didn't have a timeline. They didn't have a roadmap. They had a pretty vague promise: God is sending the Holy Spirit. Wait till then.

Wait... a day? A week? A year? Three years?

It's *how* they wait I want to call your attention to: they met together regularly and remained united in prayer.

They had no idea what was next, but they knew what to do: they remained together. They worshiped together. They worked together to be present to God, so they would know when the Holy Spirit came.

If we're being honest, this is something we've struggled with probably since even before COVID, but certainly now.

We spent nearly 2 years getting out of the habit of worshipping together, of learning to enjoy the convenience of worship-on-demand.

And we're missing meeting together. Worshiping together. Waiting on Jesus, together.

We need each other, friends. And we need to be together in an attitude of worship. We need to celebrate who God is, together. We need to remind each other of Jesus' good story. We need to share our pains and our joys. We need to pray together. We need to learn to be one body together.

That doesn't happen once a month. It doesn't happen when we don't prioritize meeting together with purpose.

And friends, it matters.

Because God is up to something. Across the nation, people are finding church less and less relevant. From the abuse scandals to the way churches are silent about or complicit in white supremacy to the poisonous ways we manipulate and abuse people looking for help...

It's a lot. And people are *rightfully* rejecting an institution that doesn't look much like the Jesus we advertise.

But do you think that's stopping God? The God who, when the people had strayed from the Way, became human, endured death on the cross and then was raised from the dead... do you think the American church's faithlessness is stopping *that* God?

No. Now as then, God is up to something new. What?

I have no idea. I'm not in any better position than those disciples were.

But I can tell you that the same God who raised Jesus from the dead is still working new life. And we have some signs of that here.

We have a wonderful online congregation from all over the country who have found a place here. People who have experienced God in a new and fresh way through Catalyst.

The same is true of our congregation here - you live in Texas, and you could go just about anywhere else. But you're here because you know that God is up to something different.

You care about loving your neighbor - even those who don't look like you, believe like you, love like you.

You believe in a church that doesn't insist on our own way, but knows God's love is found among the meek, the gentle, the peacemakers.

You believe in lives transformed, made new by the impossible power of Jesus' resurrection.

And we know God is up to something.

So I want to invite you to commit with me this morning: let's meet together. Both in our worship space here on Sundays and in our c-groups.

What would happen if we made a real commitment over the next 40 days until Pentecost to prioritize each other?

To come to worship not just asking, "What does God have for me today?" but rather, "Who do I have the chance to be with today, bonded by the Holy Spirit?"

Friends, Jesus told his followers to wait and be ready. So they did what they needed to to be ready: they met and prayed together. So they would recognize the Spirit when she arrived.

Let's do the same. Let's commit to be together, to worship and pray together so we're ready when the Spirit moves!

Communion + Examen

We meet together at the table.

When in the last week have I prioritized my faith family?

What have I prioritized over my faith family in the last week?

What might be an obstacle to meeting with my faith family in this next week?

How can I be intentional about prioritizing my faith family in the next week?

Assignment + Blessing

Meet together!