

WE'RE HERE FOR LIFE

A Sermon on Acts 1:1-14

by Rev. Russell B. Smith

It was the height of the cold war. The tension between the Soviet Union and the United States was obvious. The Soviet Union had launched the Sputnik satellite in 1957, and now both the Soviets and the United States were actively engaged in putting humans into orbit. In this charged tit-for-tat atmosphere, where both nations were focused on outdoing the other, President John F. Kennedy shattered expectations by saying "We are going to put a man on the moon." He didn't just say, "We're going to build a great rocket ship." He didn't say "We're going to have more people in space than the Soviets." Rather, he articulated in positive language an absurd dream: an American walking on the face of the moon. In his 1962 speech at Rice University, John F. Kennedy said, "We choose to go to the moon. We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things — *not* because they are easy, but because they are hard." This dream was not realized until 1969, six years after Kennedy's death.

Earlier this morning, Jim Lytle laid out before you a need—An immediate need that needs to be addressed so we can preserve this historic facility. Jim and a team of very talented people have been working diligently to address this need. I felt this need important enough to break away from our study of the gospel of John so we can have a broader context. If this capital campaign were just about the ceiling in the fellowship hall, I wouldn't do this. Instead, this campaign is just the first step in creating a ministry center. This campaign is the first phase of a multi-phase project that will make this entire facility useful for our ministry as the body of Christ. Therefore, our passage centers our attention on our ministry as the church.

As we look at this passage, realize that it takes place after the resurrection, but before Pentecost. We get the real sense in the passage that the disciples were expecting Jesus to complete his kingdom right then. But as always, Jesus does the unexpected. He leaves the disciples, letting them know "you're going to build my church." From this passage today then we can discern some important points about our calling to build the body of Christ: We're Called for service; We're Equipped for witness; We're Empowered for the impossible. That having been said, let's dig into the text.

First, you will note that we are called for service. Look at verses 1-4. Notice in verse two, he gives instruction to the apostles that he has chosen. You may think "Big deal, Jesus went and hand-picked his apostles." But don't miss out on the fact that Jesus has chosen each person that is in his flock. Yes, these apostles were chosen for a special ministry, but all believers are chosen by God, they are called to be disciples. In John chapter 10, Jesus likens himself to a shepherd -- beginning in verse 2 "The man who enters by the gate is the

shepherd of his sheep. The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.”

So God’s people are specially called, but notice some things about this calling. This is not an occasion to boast in our position. No, the calling is to *work*. Notice that verse 2 says he was giving them instructions. He had a job for them to do. He isn’t calling them to lounge about feeling complacent. Ephesians 2:10 says: “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” When Jesus calls you as a disciple, he calls you to a particular work. He’s got a job for you. And it is a job that is worked out within the body of Christ. Thus we can look at the church as an equipping and training station to prepare the saints for ministry.

Not only are we called to service, but we are equipped for witness. Look at verses 4-8. Notice the twofold mention of the Holy Spirit. Notice the designation of the Holy Spirit as the gift of God. And notice what the Holy Spirit does for us in verse 8 “... you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses...” The Holy Spirit empowers us to witness. When we think of power, we think of the capacity to compel people to do what you want them to do, but here power is defined differently. It is the capacity to do that for which we were made: witness to God’s glory. What does this mean? Witnessing entails two things. Telling truth and doing truth. Every time we proclaim the biblical message, we tell the truth. Every time we express love to a neighbor, we do the truth. Only the church empowered by the Holy Spirit can do those things. Without the Holy Spirit we become a debate club, not truth tellers. Without the Holy Spirit we become a charity agency, not truth doers. With the Holy Spirit, we are equipped to witness through our words and deeds the transforming power of Jesus Christ. Thus, when people come here to this ministry center to be equipped, they don’t just learn information or practice skills. Rather, the Holy Spirit takes their words and deeds and uses them to express Christ’s glory to a watching world.

Not only are we called to service and equipped for witness, but we’re empowered for the impossible. Look at the challenge Jesus laid out before this tiny band of disciples. Witnesses in Jerusalem. Judea and Samaria. And to the ends of the earth. Jesus wasn’t just giving strategic and manageable goals. He was asking for the whole enchilada. The local city, the surrounding region, and the whole world. This is the task that is ahead of us. Jesus calls us to witness to Cincinnati, the tri-state area, and the entire world. This is an impossible task, but it is our calling as the church, it is what we’ve been equipped for through the Holy Spirit.

Now notice where the disciples are at the end of our passage in verse 14. They are all together, one heart and one mind, and they’re in prayer before God’s throne. How does God unleash the power to do the impossible? When God’s

people unite and they go before the throne. When we're in prayer before the throne, we're in an attitude of humility. When we go to the throne we say "we can't handle this God -- we put it in your hands." And that's where God wants us to be, ever dependent on him. When I get in trouble, it's when I rely on my own competence rather than God's abundance. This is a hard one for me, because I want everything to be manageable and under my control, but God doesn't call us to that -- he calls us to unite together and to rely on Him. It's an incredible irony: when we recognize our own weakness, God empowers us for the impossible.

Called to service, equipped to witness, empowered for the impossible. You know, back in 1996, there were 30 people in these pews. 30 people with no full time pastor in an old building in a downtown area surrounded by an unsightly parking garage. By all rights they should have locked the doors and said "well, it's been a nice run" and dispersed. But they didn't do that. Instead they said "We're called for service; We're equipped for witness; We're empowered for the impossible. Therefore, We're Here for life." And God showed up. He honored those precious few by bringing more. Doors began to open, barriers began to fall, special gifted people like Ted Kalsbeek came on the scene. And each of these new people caught the spirit "We're Here for life." Today, Jim Lytle announced a capital campaign to raise funds for a project that declares to this city "We're here for life." But it doesn't stop with fixing the ceiling. No. You see we're called to serve, equipped to witness and empowered for the impossible. Our challenge, I believe, is to maximize this facility for the use of the kingdom. Our challenge is utilize this facility 7 days a week in order to advance the kingdom. Our challenge is to once again make the 2nd floor usable for ministry. Our challenge is for our ministry to overflow from this facility to the neighborhoods of Cincinnati and around the world. By taking up the challenge, we boldly proclaim to a watching world, "We're here for life!

We're here for abundant life. We're here for a life of meaning and purpose. We're here for life that only Jesus can offer. Come be with us; live amongst us for a while and learn what it means to be a disciple!"

When you receive your commitment brochure in the mail, carefully consider it. Pray over it. Challenge yourselves. And when you settle on your pledge realize that you add your voice to the chorus, "We're called to service; we're equipped for witness; we're empowered for the impossible; therefore, we're here for life." You think about that. Amen.