

**FROM COWARDS TO CO-WORKERS****Acts 2**

**Intro:** When I was at Manheim Brethren in Christ Church, one of positions I filled in my role as Associate Pastor was that of Youth Director of the large youth ministry there. One of the young men in that youth group was a quiet, seemingly gentle, and kind young man. And he was.

His name was Lance, and he loved hockey. He loved it so much and pursued it with such enthusiasm, that he became a professional hockey player after he graduated from High School in the early 90s. He never made it to the big time in the National Hockey League, but he played on five minor league teams around the USA and also for Augustana University in Alberta. Word was, that even if there was no one else on the ice, Lance could start a fight. This quiet, seemingly gentle and kind young man was a hockey enforcer. I Googled his name on Friday and found a few photos from his hockey career along with a video on YouTube of one of his fights on the ice when he was playing for the Jackson Hole Grizzlies, and I marveled at how our Brethren in Christ boy could throw punches. He certainly turned into something else on the ice. By the way, he has settled down to a respectable job as owner of a heating company in Red Deer, Alberta.

It's amazing how different people can be from what they appear. A timid five year old steps into Kindergarten in August, and 9 months later graduates to First Grade brimming with more confidence and courage than we ever thought.

His disciples, who had been travelling with Jesus for three years, had pretty much realized he was far more than just an exceptional rabbi – he was the Messiah. With the realization had come a confidence that they were in line for some cushy jobs in his Messianic administration. And then Jesus was arrested, tried, and executed and their confidence turned into terror. They cowered around Jerusalem or returned to Galilee hoping they would not be seen as accomplices.

But Jesus rose from the dead. You can't keep a good man down. And he gathered up his disciples and ministered to them, giving them those finishing touches that we talked about last week before he ascended to the Heavenly Father. One of the things he told them right before he rose into the clouds was that they were to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the gift God would send. That brings us to our text for this week and next – Acts 2 in its entirety. Today will cover the first 37 verse and next week the remainder.

Let's read vv. 1-13 (Not on the screen)

So they waited with anticipation in Jerusalem. *When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place.* Acts 2:1. According to Acts 1:15 the number was about 120 of them. The 11 remaining disciples (Judas had killed himself for betraying Jesus), Judas's replacement and the remainder were faithful followers of Jesus. It doesn't say where they were other than it was a house. It must have been a big one to accommodate 120 bodies. Regardless, it was a large number of people, anticipating. What, they didn't know. But one thing, they did know, as former cowering Jesus followers, togetherness is strength in numbers. And in their anticipation they would soon find that . . .

**Great things happen when God's people gather together**

- Notice how in the first four verses of chapter 2, the emphasis is on "all" and "each one". As they obediently gathered together in one place, the Holy Spirit arrived from heaven with a sound that was like a mighty rushing wind. They were there all together and the entire house where they were sitting together was filled with what appeared as tongues of fire that rested on each one of them. As they were together the Holy Spirit arrived and filled each of them. All of them. Each one of them. They were gathered and the Spirit arrived.
- This is bald and bold reminder to us that gathering together is of utmost importance. Being apart from one another over this past year has taught us how much we need one another. It's wonderful that we can gather online and we were so blest when it was the only way that we could participate. God blesses any time his people gather in his name and in any way, but nothing is a substitute for being together in one place. We need to continue together. There is strength in numbers and co-workers work best together.
- Notice how these formerly fearful followers, became bold preachers of the Good News. It's a picture of how . . .

**The Holy Spirit enables us to hear the message God has for each and every one of us.**

- Verse 4 tells us *they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance*. ALL of them. Fishermen, Tax Collectors, rebel fanatics, house wives, former prostitutes, Pharisees. Anyone who had been a Christ Follower before was now a Spirit filled preacher. And the cool thing is, everyone who heard them, knew what they were saying.
- Because it was the one of the biggest, and for many, the favorite festivals in the Jewish year, many Jews were in Jerusalem. The population of Jerusalem is estimated at the time to have been about 50,000. But for Passover, which was 50 days prior, and now even to a greater extent, for Pentecost, that number swelled to hundreds of thousands as people gathered to celebrate the harvest. Because sea travel was safer as it was closer to summer, there were people in Jerusalem from all over the known world. They were the Jews of the diaspora - people who were the descendants of Jewish people who had migrated all over the known world, from Northern Africa, from Mesopotamia, from Spain and Asia Minor and Greece. They were all there. Of course they could converse in Hebrew and Aramaic, the languages of their forefathers, but now with the arrival of the Holy Spirit, they each heard someone talking in the language of their adopted homelands. This grabbed their attention for sure.
- These were Galileans. Fishermen! They weren't learned! Their education was probably barely enough for them to be able to read the scripture from time to time in the synagogue. And they certainly hadn't traveled far, so they weren't language experts. But they were gifted by the Holy Spirit to speak in languages that were not their own. That's what the Holy Spirit does. He transforms quiet people into preachers. He transforms selfish people into generous people. And in the case of these Jesus Followers he had transformed them from cowards into coworkers.
- One of the best examples of this was Peter, who stood up, with his 11 fellow disciples surrounding him, and he began to preach. We've already seen it, but let me say it again. . .

#### **The Holy Spirit transforms the most unlikely into the most effective**

- We know that Peter was bold. But now it was real. Look at vv. 14-36
- Peter blustered along for three years with Jesus saying whatever came to his mind. Sometimes we even get the idea that he might not have been the sharpest tool in the drawer – but that's incorrect and unfair. We do know that in the course of a few days, he promised to defend Jesus to the death, actually drew his sword to do exactly that, and then profanely denied that he even knew who Jesus was. He went from courageous to coward in just a few hours. But Jesus restored him as recorded in John 21 and here the Holy Spirit transforms a fisherman into a preacher. His cowardice is gone.
- And look at his message. He begins with the prophecy from Joel 2. In the last days, the Spirit will be poured out. We think we're in the last days, but the last days began at Pentecost and they are still going. No longer will the message come from prophets alone but from sons and daughter, young men will see visions, old men will dream dreams. It is inclusive, . . . *it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.* Acts 2:21.
- He goes on to show that the signs and wonders that Jesus did, and his death and resurrection at the hands of God's enemies were all orchestrated by God as he carried out his perfect salvation plan.
- Peter goes on to cite David from several of his Psalms showing that God keeps his promises. He promised David that a descendant would be on his throne, and here was Jesus, not just a descendant, but the very Messiah who is on that throne. The king is King Jesus. Going on Peter refers to David's tomb which wasn't far from where this was happening, He pointed David's tomb had David's remains in it, but Jesus's tomb had no one in it. Jesus had risen from the dead and at the side of God the Father in heaven. Commentator Albert Winn writes that Peter gives the hope that was never present in the Old Testament where there was little hope of life after death. Prior to Jesus's resurrection the standard belief was that the dead maintained a shadowy existence in Sheol. Winn points out that Sheol is not to be confused with the later idea of hell, the place of fire and torment. Sheol was merely the graveland, the place of weakness and shadows and meaninglessness. It was true hopelessness and emptiness. Peter's bold message is that with the Holy Spirit comes infinite meaning.
- Peter ends his sermon with *Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.* Acts 2:36. He laid the truth on the line – it wasn't

just the Romans who killed Jesus – yes it was their cross – but they were just a cog on the wheel. It wasn't just the jealous and hateful Jewish leaders who cried killed Jesus with their bloodthirsty cries of CRUCIFY HIM! CRUCIFY HIM!!!! They were just a cog in the wheel. The truth is, all of sinful humanity was complicit in killing Jesus. And he did die. He died for all of his killers. For all of humanity. Romans, Jews, you, me! Everyone! And he made a way for hope and purpose and meaning. And he sent the Holy Spirit to seal the deal in the process of making cowards into co-workers.

- And that is where we will end for today – and pick up next week to finish the message. Amen