

This Sunday's texts:

Acts 6:1-9; 7:2a, 51-60

1 Peter 2:2-10

John 14:1-14

**Purpose and Power**

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The Gospel reading for today is from the Gospel of John, chapter 14, verses 1 through 14:

[Jesus said] "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will also come back and take you to be with me that you may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going." Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we don't know where you're going, so how can we know the way?" Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you really know Me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know Him and have seen Him." Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Jesus answered, "Don't you know Me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father and that the Father is in Me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in Me, who is doing His work. Believe Me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in Me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask Me for anything in my name and I will do it."

This is the Word of our Lord. Good morning! Today, we're continuing our Resurrection Power series, the series that's following up Easter, during the Easter season, where we are focusing on the power of the resurrection of Jesus and what that means for us as we live in Him. It's a series that's a follow-up to the previous one we did during Lent, a Lifestyle of Grace, and in a way, we consider it a companion series - two sides of the same coin.

Ephesians 2:8-10 provides a great picture for us of what we've been trying to do through this Lifestyle of Grace and Resurrection Power series. Verses 8 through 9 say this, "For it is by Grace you have been saved, through faith – and

this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast." It's a great summary of the Lifestyle of Grace series. And moving on, Ephesians 2:10 is a great summary of the Resurrection Power series that we're in right now, "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." We're saved by God's grace and saved for God's purpose. Today we are looking at the purpose and power of God at work in His Church.

As we get into it today, I'm excited to revisit my pet project as a preacher. This will happen often. Perhaps you know. I love to deal with Church Words. I even made a slide for it. You're going to see this slide fairly often in my preaching. Church Words are words that we use in a Christian setting or in a broader Christian culture, that we often know how to use in a sentence, but if you had to sit down and write a dictionary definition, you might have a hard time doing. I actually have to admit that I'm embarrassed that I haven't gotten to this one yet. It probably should have been the first because it is the churchiest church word of all.

That word is "Church" Church is a church word. So what is it? It's the community of Christ followers who find their identity and purpose in Him. It's the people who have been saved and claimed by Christ, baptized into His family, and made citizens and ambassadors of the Kingdom of God. The Church is the people. It's not the building. We don't go to Church. It's not even these worship services. Yet I find it easy to default to that kind of geographical language. When I get ready to go to work on a Wednesday morning, I'll tell my kids, "All right, I'm going to church." I guess I'm sending mixed messages. The reality is that the Church is not a place. The church is us. If this sanctuary was gone next Sunday and we were still here, we would not be any less the Church than we are today.

In Jesus' Church, everyone is filled with and gifted by God's Holy Spirit. Each and every one of us was created with a purpose, to have a life of meaning and significance. Our 1 Peter 2 text says that we are "a royal priesthood"<sup>1</sup> set apart by God for the purpose of declaring His praise. I love how the New Living Translation words this verse. It says, "You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God."

Each and every one of us is called and empowered to a life of purpose to show the goodness of God to others. I think this may come as a shock to some of you and completely unsurprising to others. Did you know that in the Church Pastor Jim and I are not special? We're not special. Your pastors are not on some

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Peter 2:9

other [higher] tier. There is no two-tier system in the Church, where there are a group of people who are the producers and everyone else is a consumer. That is not how God empowers his Church. Rather as a priesthood of all believers, the work of the church is not by the *pastors* for *you*, but it is by *us* for the *world*. That's the big idea I hope you hear today. God works through all of us, for His purpose and by His power for the sake of the world. As members of the body of Christ, here at St Timothy's, Pastor Jim and I want you to know that we do not consider you consumers of products that we produce. We are partners in ministry, the ministry that God calls us to as a congregation, to use our gifts to represent Christ in the Silicon Valley, in our homes, neighborhoods, workplaces, and schools, to make disciples of Jesus, to show the goodness of God, the God who called us out of the darkness and into His glorious light.

Now our text from Acts today gives us a great snapshot of how the Church thrives when people use their unique gifts and work in the power of the Holy Spirit to do God's purpose. In Acts, as the Church began to grow, following the day of Pentecost, there arose a need, a bit of a growing pain for the church. They needed people of wisdom and fairness to oversee the distribution of food to widows because people were being overlooked on the basis of their cultural background. In response to this need, the answer wasn't "We should ask the pastor to do it." The question they asked rather was how God has equipped us to handle this. They identified people within the community with unique gifts for this specific ministry opportunity and then they charged them with it. As God's people use their gifts to take care of the poor and marginalized and proclaim the Good News of Jesus, people come to faith and the church grows. The church thrives when we all use our gifts to serve God and others.

So that's the question for us today. What kind of purpose? What kind of ministry? What good works does God have in store for your life? How can he work in and through your life, through our lives together to make a difference in this world? How can you know? There are a few ways that we see in our Acts text today. The first is this. Do you see any unmet needs around you? In that early Church, they looked around and they saw that, within their own ranks, there was a discrepancy of justice. The Greek-speaking widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food, in favor of the Hebrew-speaking widows.

For us, we ask the question. What are the unmet needs around us? How do we see opportunities to serve where there is a need? You look around you. You can talk about it in your Grow Group. You can talk about it with your family or

your close Christian friends. Do you see any unmet needs in the Church or in the world around you, in the community beyond the Church?

There's the next question. You ask how has God gifted you. The early Church needed people who were respected in the community and were wise, people who are filled with the Holy Spirit to navigate a touchy issue. So how has God gifted you? How might you put those gifts to use for His kingdom and for His glory? Lastly, you can ask others because discernment is not a solo effort. Sometimes our brothers and sisters in Christ see things in ourselves that we don't see ourselves. I don't know how many of you know this, but I had never in my life considered going into full-time ministry until one of the St Tim's members, who was my small group leader in high school, asked me if I had. I never considered it until Don Thompson said, "Joe, have you considered going into ministry?" Other people can speak into our lives and help us see the things that sometimes we don't see in ourselves. So ask others what gifts they see in you. Ask others to pray for you and with you as you consider how God can and will work through you to make an impact in the Church and in the world beyond the Church.

In all of that, whatever you do, remember that you do not do it alone. You don't do it by your own power or your own strength. It's the spirit of God alive and active at work in the Church that does it. Whatever God calls you to, He will equip you for.

The truth is that God very often calls us to things that are outside of our comfort zone. If no one ever left their comfort zone in this world, nothing would ever change. But God is in the business of calling people out of their comfort zone, to step out of the boat and onto the waters, out of Egypt and into the wilderness, away from their father's house and towards the Promised Land. He's in the business of calling people out of their comfort zone and into something more, something greater. So perhaps something being out of your comfort zone is just an opportunity to trust God, step out in faith, and see His mighty hand at work in your life.

As I close today, I want to leave you with one final thought, one last encouragement. As you lean into God's purpose for your life, as you serve Him, as you serve the Church, and as you love the world beyond the Church, ask for the boldness, the confidence, and the wisdom to proclaim the name of Jesus Christ because the call of the Church is not to be a group of people who just do nice things. We're here to show and tell the world that there is new life, abundant life, and eternal life offered as the free gift of God to all who put their faith in Jesus Christ, the One who conquered death.

I find it interesting in Acts that Stephen was chosen for the ministry of food distribution to widows and yet the next thing we see happen is that he is out proclaiming and preaching the name of Jesus. Church, we serve others and use our gifts. Do not be shy about speaking the name of Jesus. In Acts, it wasn't the kindness of the Church that transformed lives. It was the resurrected Christ. As we live into God's purpose for us, as individuals and as St Timothy's Lutheran Church in San Jose, California, I believe that by the power of the Holy Spirit, we will see the same happen here today.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, You pour out your Holy Spirit on your people and You say that You will work in and through us to do even greater things. Give us confidence to trust that the same power that resurrected Christ from the dead is alive and at work in us and among us. Lord, let us not fall into the folly of low expectations. Lord, because You are a God of power, a God of might, a God of love and You said that, as we are obedient to You, as we trust in You, your Spirit works through us, to draw others to You and to proclaim Your glory. Lord, thank you for making us your family, your children, and your Church. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.