

**Acts 1:6-14**

<sup>6</sup>So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” <sup>7</sup>He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup>But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” <sup>9</sup>When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. <sup>10</sup>While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. <sup>11</sup>They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.” <sup>12</sup>Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day’s journey away. <sup>13</sup>When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. <sup>14</sup>All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

*Spirit of Glory, Spirit of God, bless us with a word of life this day to restore, support, and strengthen us as we seek to be one with you. Amen.*

The book of Acts chronicles the birth and growth of the church. Most scholars believe that Acts was written by the same person who wrote the gospel of Luke. According to Acts, the church grew very rapidly and began to spread far beyond Jerusalem. As a side note, it was in Antioch (off the northeastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea) that Jesus’ followers were first called “Christians” (see Acts 11:25-26).

Our passage opens with the disciples wondering if the time had come for the restoration of the Kingdom of Israel. It is likely that they were thinking of the glory days of Israel’s king David. David was a warrior king who led Israel in battle against her adversaries, defending Israel and making her strong and prosperous.

But by the first century the Jewish people were an oppressed people living under Roman domination. We can see how they must have longed for freedom, clinging to the messianic promise that God would raise up a new king to liberate them and make them a great nation again. Many looked to Jesus hoping that he was the one to redeem Israel and be the one to vanquish their oppressors. Many had hoped that Jesus, as the new king David, would be the one coming with power to conquer and save.

This was the Jewish messianic expectation. They longed for a new David, a king who would rule with power. Would Jesus be that king?

When the disciples asked Jesus if this would be the time for the restoration of the kingdom of Israel, they must have been disappointed when Jesus put them off and changed the subject. ‘Don’t worry about times or periods; that’s God’s business. However, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you.’ ‘What does that mean?’ they must have wondered.

What I’d like to suggest here is that the disciples were thinking about one kind of power, and Jesus was talking about a completely different kind of power.

It seems to me that the disciples were thinking of a type of power that can be seen in the children’s game, “king of the hill.” All you needed for this game was a small hill or mound; even a large stump would do. One person would stand at the top of the mound, or hill, or stump, and claim to be *king of the hill*. Immediately everyone else would then try to take his place pushing and shoving to unseat the lofty one.

Of course anyone who became the new king of the hill would immediately be challenged and forced to defend his position. And on it goes. I don’t remember ever seeing girls play this game. As I remember, girl’s games tended to be more collaborative. “King of the hill” is an adversarial game, and it doesn’t take much imagination to see where it might lead. The bell to end recess might just be the saving grace, with nobody having to go to the school nurse, or principal’s office.

*King of the hill* is a metaphor for power being used against others. It is power used to defend one’s own status, and therefore it is power used selfishly. This is clearly not what Jesus had in mind! The kind of power Jesus had in mind needs a different metaphor. Let me suggest “washing feet” as a more fitting image. (The story of Jesus washing his disciple’s feet is found in the gospel according to John.)

Washing feet is a metaphor for service. It was the servant’s job to wash the feet of guests. Jesus was being very deliberate about washing his disciple’s feet, because he wanted them to see that they become one with him when they take the servant role.

Jesus said, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you...” What kind of power was Jesus talking about? Unlike “king of the hill” power that seems to run in circles (why can’t we put an end to war), the power gifted by the Holy Spirit leads to new life; it goes somewhere; it creates something new, it invites rebirth. When we see loving acts of compassion, when we witness moments of forgiveness and reconciliation, we know that the power of the Holy Spirit is at work.

I would venture to say that our mission trip to Guatemala City is an act of compassion because we will show the children in the Safe Passage program that we care about them; that we have traveled a long way to see them and be with them and to share our love with them. We do this by the power of the Holy Spirit, which, yes, is the power of love.

In our world there is no shortage of suffering. And one of our biggest questions is: Why does God allow suffering? If God loves us, why does God allow us to suffer? This is truly one of the great mysteries in our quest to understand God. It appears that God does not take away our suffering. Perhaps suffering is one of the ways we come to truly know God!

But could we imagine that God empowers *us* by the Holy Spirit to be present to those who suffer? Perhaps that is the way God is present to our suffering; by coming to us in a friend or neighbor who visits and sits with us in our suffering and grief.

Funerals are so important because they give us an opportunity to be present to each other in times of intense grieving. We all grieve in different ways, and grieving takes its own time. Still, we will all need other people to help us through our grief; and can we imagine that’s how the Holy Spirit comes to us, in the guise of a compassionate friend.

Jesus said, “And you will be my witnesses...” Jesus didn’t come to conquer the world as a king David might, rather, Jesus came to conquer hearts through the indwelling power of God. Thus it is through the love of God that we are empowered to be witnesses for the realm of God as revealed in the life of Jesus. The power we are given is the power to be witnesses of this love.

“You will receive power,” Jesus said. It will be power to love; power to forgive; power to bless; power to heal; power to endure; power to be compassionate; power to listen to a sister or brother’s pain, loneliness, or doubt; yes, even power to wash feet.

The power of the Holy Spirit is servant power, power focused on others rather than ourselves. Yet when we focus our energy, love, and compassion on others, we are blessed in ways beyond our imagining; indeed, we are touched by the love of God which makes all things new.

God’s love is in us. God’s power is in us just waiting to be released. It is real power to change the world. It is the only power that can change the world! It begins here with us. Amen.