

Our Family Week 2 The Assignment

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We're in the book of acts and we're talking about specifically acts chapter one, verse eight. This is where Luke records Jesus's words. And words that kind of set the stage for the entire book of acts as well as the rest of history. So Jesus says this you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

Now, this is more than just a geography lesson. Jesus isn't giving his disciples travel tips and suggesting they may be old. Pack an overnight bag. He's outlining the ripple effect of the gospel, and it starts in Jerusalem, the very heart of their faith. This is where the Jewish heart is at. In Jerusalem. And then Jesus says it's going to move through Judea, all the surrounding areas, and then he even says it's going to move to Samaria.

Now, Samaritans and Jews did not get along. So here's some neighbors that they don't really like. And Jesus says, yep, even there, you're going to be my witness. And then finally Jesus goes worldwide and says to the end of the earth. Now this passage is not about location. It's about inclusion. Luke is showing us that the message of Jesus isn't bound by borders or politics or race or status, or on and on, right? But it's for everyone. God's people, God's chosen people in this time are challenged to understand, their understanding of who's in and who's out. The circle is growing.

So as we think about Jesus's command found in the book of acts, as we think about it today, we can think about it as God's invitation to join the movement. It's not about standing still in one place, comfortable with who's in already, but it's about grabbing some chalk, drawing the circle as big as we can make it.

Because in God's kingdom, there's always room for more. There's no limit to this circle. In fact, we can't even draw a circle big enough. So Jesus tells his followers to be witnesses to tell your story. And we talked about this last week about what's your story and how is Jesus impacted your life? Because if you can't articulate your story, then you don't have anything to tell you.

You can't be a witness for Jesus. If you can't say, here's why I follow Jesus. Now, I thought about this, about my own story, in my own headline, as I called it last week, and I thought about it from the court aspect, like, what if I was called to be a witness to Jesus on the court and in the courtroom?

I was thinking about it. For the disciples, they've just had 40 days with Jesus who showed them many signs and many wonders, that he was alive. So this story for them is a firsthand account. They saw Jesus, they heard Jesus. They touched the resurrect Jesus. They weren't just repeating someone else's words.

They were sharing their own experiences with Jesus. So what about us? Where do we fit in this? Do we just get a story of a story? Is our faith like a game of telephone? Where. Where the message gets more jumbled as it goes on throughout time and yes, in some cases this is true. We've certainly seen where this is true in our life, where Jesus's words gets distorted, sometimes even being used as weapons against people.

But the answer is also no, because Jesus is still alive today. Jesus didn't just disappear up here to his disciples and then disappear through the through into history. He sent the Holy Spirit to continue revealing himself to us, so that we may not physically see him in the way that the disciples did. But we can still encounter Jesus in powerful and life changing ways.

We experience Jesus through Scripture, through the words and the actions that we read, and these things that come alive and change our hearts. We experience Jesus in prayer when we sense his presence and his peace and guidance. We experience Jesus in the body of Christ, the church where we encounter other believers who, serve and who are kind and who are generous, and who encourage and, us throughout our, our time.

So we experience Jesus in the transformation of our own lives. When we see our fears fade away and replaced with faith, when we feel our burdens lifted, when we feel our hearts have been changed in ways that we could never imagine or think that we could accomplish on our own. Jesus isn't just a story passed down. Jesus is present with us.

Jesus is moving in our world today, and he is calling us to be witnesses and not just of the words that we've heard, but of the living, breathing reality of Jesus's power in our lives today. So last week I gave you this, faith acronym to kind of encourage you to come up with your own story. And so here's kind of what I went through some of what I went through this week when I was thinking about my own story, and I was thinking about the foundation part.

The foundation is, is that I first heard about Jesus growing up in the church. I went as a very young child, and I heard stories about Jesus, and I sang songs about Jesus. And I went through confirmation classes and I knew at that time I knew I wanted to be a follower of Jesus for the rest of my life.

I liked what Jesus was saying. I liked what Jesus was doing, and I and I knew that. And I got married and we had kids. And then I brought my kids to church so that they could hear the stories and sing songs about Jesus, too. And I would say that it was probably not until my late 20s, maybe even my early 30s.

I was already working in the church, but that's when I actually felt a relationship with Jesus, and it felt different than it had my. For my whole entire life of being a follower of Jesus, I encountered Jesus in my life in a whole new way, and I and I was experienced something bigger than myself, and I started to be a little less selfish.

I started to be a little more connected with God. That's my foundation. And when I think about the attributes of Jesus, the ones that stand out to me most of is Jesus as forgiver, Jesus as include or, you know, accepting of everyone. I think about Jesus as my rock and my foundation. When life gets shaky, I know that I have Jesus.

Then when I think about the impact on my life, I think about something profound that happened in my life. And it was, and it went from me thinking, okay, this is this faith that I, that I'm professing that I've professed, professed my whole entire life. It's not about me being a good person so I can get into heaven.

I realized it was about, being a good person because I wanted to be more like Jesus. And for me, that was like this huge distinction, because I mess up. I mess up all of the time. And if going to Heaven is based on my track record of being kind and forgiving and loving and not judgmental, I don't think I would qualify.

I don't think I'd get in. I don't think I love my enemy like Jesus tells me to love my enemy, but I realize that I get to be like Jesus. And when I do that, I show others that Jesus can change their story too. And there is something special about that. And I think of transformation as that continue journey of a choice.

Every single day I wake up with the choice. I have a choice to follow Jesus or not. I get to choose that kind of joy, a kind of joy that's unexplainable and I can make the world a better place because I choose to follow Jesus. Because I choose to become more like Jesus in my life. And that brings me peace, knowing that I don't have to explain all of the mysteries of the world because I have the rock.

Now, if I was going to come up with, a simple headline that was just say, okay, here's what it's about, I would, my headline would be this hope the one thing the world can't take. And then this is my story. My story is this I follow Jesus because it's a path of hope for greater than the hopelessness of the world.

Through Jesus and my faith in Jesus, I found absolute joy and purpose, found peace knowing that I don't have to earn heaven. But I get to choose to be a part of God's kingdom that impacts my life. It impacts other people's life, all of creation, both now and forever. That's my headline. That's my story. And what's your story?

Why do you follow Jesus? And if you've thought about this, this last week, or if you want to think about it this this week, I would love to hear your stories. I want you to share those stories with me, because I think it can be powerful for us to hear each other's stories. I encourage you to email me or text the church number with your story.

I follow Jesus because. And you can include your name or not. That is up to you. Either one is great because we have these stories. If we take time to have our stories, we need to share our stories. And when Jesus first called his first few disciples, Andrew was among one of the very first.

And here's what Andrew did with his story of Jesus. So John chapter one, verses 40 through 42, one of the two disciples who heard what John said and followed Jesus was Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter. He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, we have found the Messiah, which is translated Christ. Andrew led him to Jesus, and Jesus looked at him and said, you are Simon, son of John.

You will be called Cephus, which is translated Peter or the Rock. So, like Andrew, we start with our family. Now, how you define family is up to you. That might look like the family that you were born into. It might look like the family that you were adopted into. It might look like your significant other or your children.

It may mean your church family or your life group, but there is power. When we share our stories together and we're united in the tie that binds us. An old song that we used to sing in the church. So

we think about Jesus, and he's told his disciples to go and be my witnesses. But then what happened? What did the disciples do from there?

So Acts chapter one, backing up to verse seven again, Jesus replied, it isn't for you to know the times or seasons that you're that the father has set by his own authority. Rather, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all of Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

After Jesus said these things as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight while he was going away. And as they were staring toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood next to them, and they said, Galileans, why are you standing here looking toward heaven? This Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way that you saw him go into heaven.

I like that these two men are just calling him out like Jesus just told you to go do something. Why are you standing here? I think Jesus, the two men sometimes need to come to us too, right? Right. Jesus told you to do something. Why are you not doing it? Okay, continuing on, then they returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day journey away.

When they entered the city, they went to the upstairs room where they were staying Peter, John, James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James, Alpheus, his son Simon the Zealot, and Judas, James's son, all were united in their devotion to prayer, along with some women, including Mary, the mother of Jesus and his brothers. During this time, the family of believers was a company of about 120 persons.

So here we have what the disciples did. The disciples gathered together with their family. They were united and devoted in prayer. And as we, as we talked last weekend and I said, effective evangelism or effective, being a witness for Jesus requires three things a trinity of loving God, of loving the unchurched and loving within the church.

We need those three relationships God, the church, and the unchurched. Now this this last weekend, I traveled to Florida for a conference, and I spent time at this conference with people from different Protestant denominations, as well as leaders from the Catholic Church and leaders from the Jewish faith. It was incredible to be in a room filled with others from various faith traditions, all gathered from different, with different backgrounds.

We were gathered and we were talking and we were discussing, and we were not emphasizing our differences because there's a few of them, but instead we were focused on one thing that we all had in common, and that was seeking justice in our world, is that. And that's what God calls us to do the oppressed and the poor.

That is what Jesus came to free. And here we were in this room together. It was amazing. My favorite parts were, hearing scripture interpreted by a rabbi, hearing the Jewish perspective on the New Testament scriptures. I loved also, discussing the New Testament scriptures with a Jewish woman who sat at my table and, some of these scriptures she had never heard before.

And hearing her perspective on it was incredible, incredible. And because we often forget as Christians that this very context, the scriptures were written from a Jewish perspective. The book of

Acts reflects that written to the Jews. And as a reminder, Jesus didn't come to make a new religion. He didn't say, I'm, I'm going to leave my Jewish faith behind, and I'm going to I'm going to be a Christian.

Now, that's not what Jesus intended. So Luke, the author of acts understood this deeply, this Jewish tradition. And at the conference, it was emphasized that in Judaism, faith isn't just about belief, it's about practice. When Luke records Jesus saying, you will be my witnesses, it's not just about telling people about Jesus. It's about putting faith into practice so that others can see Jesus through us.

The rabbi at the conference, he expanded and he said, the Jewish faith is about living in a way that reflects God's character. It's not focused on getting to heaven one day, but on faithfully embodying God's ways in the here and now. Faith just isn't about belief. It's about action. When we think about even just, taking action in the very smallest of circles that we have, our family or the people very closest to us, what does that look like?

What does it look like to not just believe in Jesus, but to actually take action? Our families most likely already know that we go to church. Our families most likely know that we believe in Jesus. But do they see that belief lived out in how we treat them? Are we the same at home as we are at church?

Are we the same at work as we are at church? It is a known fact that it is often easiest for us to take out our stress on the people closest to us, on the people that we love the most, because those people that are closest to us, that home feels like a safe place. I remember when one of my sons was in school and he just started his first couple years of school, and every day he would come home and he would just melt down, like for an extended period of time.

And my husband and I, we assumed that he must be like this at school. But he wasn't right. He held it together at school all day long, and then he let it out at the place that he felt safe. That's what children do. But as we grow as followers of Christ, as we mature as followers of Christ, we begin to change.

Faith works like this if we only hold it together while we're at church, but at home we're impatient or we're unkind or we're disengaged. We're missing the heart of witnessing. To witness is to make visible what is otherwise invisible. It's showing what Jesus looks like through our actions in everyday moments. It's not about the big, the big serving or the big grand gestures that we might do.

It's the everyday moments. It's how we respond with patience, how we listen with care, how we practice forgiveness and grace. Witnessing can and should be telling our stories with our words, but it should also be more than that. It should be with our actions as well. Now, because the world is removed from Jesus's life on earth, we have to think about, okay, what is it that the disciples witnessed Jesus do?

Jesus healed? Jesus listened. Jesus spoke wisdom through asking a lot of questions, through parables. Jesus stood with the oppressed and the poor, standing up against injustices in the world. That's what we need to do. Take actions. Now, I want to end with just some practical ways that we can be witnesses in our homes. That's where it starts and we can speak with kindness.

Seems like an evil, easy, obvious one to do. But how we talk to our family, especially in moments of frustration, shapes their understanding of God's love.

Our family knows that we follow Jesus. How we speak to them shapes how they understand what God's love looks like. Has powerful stuff right there. We can model grace. When a spouse or child or sibling or friend messes up, our responses can reflect the mercy that that Jesus has shown to us. Praise God for, for Jesus's mercy on me when I've messed up and I get to show that to others.

Be consistent. Let your faith be steady, not just a Sunday morning thing. You can do that by showing up and being present in worship, reading scripture, listening to worship music, giving gratitude toward God every single day. Talk about God naturally with your family and live out what you believe. Apologize when needed. We mess up.

We don't always get it right. We don't. We don't always get it right. Even though we want to love our neighbor, we want to show our family kindness. We don't always do it. So saying I was wrong or I'm sorry for the way I've treated you teaches and shows humility and models Christ's love. And lastly, serve together as a family or as a life group or a family group.

Find ways to love others as a family, whether it's volunteering or writing encouraging notes or simply checking in on a neighbor, witnessing starts at home. Let your life make Jesus real to your family because the best testimony isn't just words. It's a life that reveals Christ, love in action. Let's pray.

Gracious God, we do take time to give thanks to you. To say we are grateful for. For the ways that you, the things that you have done for us. The grace and mercy that you have given to us. We don't deserve it, but you give it freely. And God, we are sorry for the ways that we have not shown grace and mercy to others.

God. We are to model that for others. The mercy and grace is supposed to spill out from you into us and then into the world and God, we don't always get it right. But God, there are people who need to hear your story. The story how you sent your son Jesus to die for us, that we could be lifted of that burden, that we could find a true and deep love and peace and hope in the world. God help us be brave witnesses in our world. Help us to start with our family and go to the end of the earth, because that is what you have called us to do. And God, we say all of his in Jesus's name, Amen.