

Interactive Bulletin 5.24.26

GATHERING

Prelude

Rejoice, He is Risen arr. Cathy Moglebust
FPC Bell Choir

Welcome

Call to Worship

Leader: The Word of God is not chained! From Jerusalem to Rome, and to the very ends of the earth, the light of Christ breaks through.

All: The salvation of God has been sent to all people, and it is for everyone who will listen.

Leader: Paul proclaimed the kingdom of God with all boldness and without hindrance, even from within his chains.

All: Let us open our hearts to receive the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ today.

Leader: Come, let us worship the living God who welcomes all who seek Him!

All: Praise be to God, whose grace knows no boundaries!

Gathering Song: Holy, Holy, Holy

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!

Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee;

Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty! God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore Thee,

Casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;

Cherubim and seraphim, falling down before Thee, Who wert and art and evermore shalt be.

Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hide Thee,

Though the eye of sinfulness Thy glory may not see,

Only Thou art holy, there is none beside Thee, perfect in power, in love and purity.

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!

All Thy works shall praise Thy name in earth and sky and sea;

Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty! God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

Reginald Heber and John Bacchus Dykes, 1826***

PRAISING

Prayer of Adoration

Almighty and Everlasting God, Creator of the ends of the earth, we praise You for Your unhindered and unstoppable Word. Even when Your servants are bound, Your gospel remains free. We adore You for Your faithfulness across generations and geography, reaching from ancient Rome to this very sanctuary today. Thank You for the boldness of the apostles, for the hospitality of the early church, and for the sovereign grace that opens blind eyes and softens dull hearts. Gather us now into Your presence, fill us with Your Holy Spirit, and reveal Your glory to us through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Song of Adoration: My Soul Will Wait

When the enemy surrounds, and my heart grows faint within,

When the darkness overwhelms, and my fears are pressing in,

I will trust in You, O Lord; in the silence I will wait. I will stand upon Your Word.

You're my solid rock and my salvation, my steadfast hope that won't be shaken,
My soul will wait, my soul will wait for You.

You're my stronghold and my shield in the midst of every threat.
Though the wicked never yield, they will vanish like a breath.
Yes, I know the outcome's sure; Satan's evil plans will fail. In Your power I'm secure.

You're my solid rock and my salvation, my steadfast hope that won't be shaken,
My soul will wait, my soul will wait for You.
You're my comfort when I feel forsaken, my refuge and my sure foundation,
My soul will wait, my soul will wait for You.

This is love I can't explain, this is mercy unreserved.
Through Your sacrifice so great, I have peace that's undeserved.
For the battle has been won, and I fear no shame or loss; now the sting of death is gone.

You're my solid rock and my salvation, my steadfast hope that won't be shaken,
My soul will wait, my soul will wait for You.
You're my comfort when I feel forsaken, my refuge and my sure foundation,
My soul will wait, my soul will wait for You.

Keaton Bunting and Bob Kauflin**

BELONGING

Kids on the Steps

Call to Confession: Lord I Need You

Lord, I come, I confess
Bowing here, I find my rest
Without You, I fall apart
You're the One that guides my heart

*Lord, I need You, oh, I need You
Every hour I need You
My one defense, my righteousness
Oh God, how I need You*

Where sin runs deep, Your grace is more
Where grace is found is where You are
Where You are, Lord, I am free
Holiness is Christ in me. *Refrain*

Teach my song to rise to You
When temptation comes my way
When I cannot stand, I'll fall on You
Jesus, You're my hope and stay. *Refrain*

Matt Maher**

Prayer of Confession & Assurance of Forgiveness

Merciful God, we confess that our hearts are often dull and our ears are slow to hear Your truth. Like those who turned away from Paul's testimony, we too can be skeptical, defensive, or indifferent to Your call. We confess that we often let our own "chains"—our fears, our comforts, and our prejudices—hinder us from welcoming others or sharing the good news of Your Kingdom. We have

stayed silent when we should have spoken with boldness. We have built walls where You have called us to open doors. Forgive our lack of faith, our stubborn resistance, and our failure to live as Your unhindered witnesses. Renew us by Your grace, open our eyes to see Your salvation, and turn our hearts toward You.

(A moment of silent personal confession is kept)

Amen.

Assurance of Forgiveness

Leader: Hear the good news! The salvation of God has been sent to the world, and all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved. Through Jesus Christ, our chains are broken, our sins are forgiven, and we are set free to live in righteousness and peace.

Hear and believe the promise of the gospel:

All: In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven! Thanks be to God.

STEWADING

Invitation to Offering

Musical Offering

Breath on Me, Breath of God arr. Sandra Eithun
FPC Bell Choir

FORMING

Sermon: Acts 21–28 (28: 16–31)

The Good News Unhindered

-How appropriate it is, Friends, that today, on this Pentecost Sunday, after 21 weeks together in the Acts of the Apostles, we come to the end of Luke's two-volume story.

It's worth asking what kind of story we've been reading all these months. Because at first glance, Acts can look like the story of the early church's success. The acts of the apostles. Sermons are preached. A movement grows. New communities form to share everything in common. Former outsiders and enemies are welcomed. Churches are planted. The gospel spreads across the Mediterranean world.

But that's not fully how Luke tells the story. Again and again, the movement of the good news of Jesus seems fragile, frustrated, endangered, even doomed. The apostles are threatened. Stephen is murdered. Saul terrorizes believers. The church argues over who really belongs. Doors close. Paul and Silas sit in prison. Riots erupt in Thessalonica. The marketplace mostly dismisses Paul's preaching. Along the way, there are wounds, failures, delays, persecutions, arguments, estrangements, and chains.

And yet the story keeps moving. The gospel catches fire in hearts and communities.

Why? Because Acts is not ultimately the story of competent religious people building a successful institution. It's a mistitled book. Not really about 'the acts of the apostles.' Instead it's the story of the Spirit poured out at Pentecost. It's the story of the Spirit of Christ continuing the life of Jesus through persons learning to trust his grace alive more than power, fear, or control.

So we've called our series 'Acts of the Spirit: Becoming like Jesus.' And when we step back, that's what we've seen. New communities of persons becoming like Christ in prayerful dependence. In courageous witness. In radical generosity. Communities becoming like Christ in crossing boundaries toward unexpected people. In refusing to keep gates. In suffering without bitterness. In engaging culture with sympathy and conviction. In loving others more than status or self-protection.

We've seen persons coming alive together in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. And we've seen that becoming like Jesus does not lead his people around suffering, but through it, to a wise, mature, joyful hope in spite of obstacles and pain.

-Today we come to the last eight chapters. Acts 21–28 comes after Paul's three missionary journeys from the Ancient Near East to cities in present day Turkey and Greece. The theme of this final section is the unstoppable movement of the gospel through suffering, opposition, and empire. It tells the story of not just Paul's calling, but our own: to persevere in trust to the end. What it affirms is that

Not mobs. Not courts. Not chains. Not storms. Not Caesar.

Nothing will stop the good news of Jesus!

-Let's pray: Lord, on this day of Pentecost, we ask that you would pour out your Spirit on us, that with Paul we might be part of the good news: enduring in faith through every obstacle, trusting the risen Lord, and bearing witness to his hope. Amen.

-OK. So. As Ron shared with us last week, as Paul returns from his third missionary journey, he keeps running into groups of believers that warn him by the Spirit that in Jerusalem he will meet with something ominous.

20:22 And now, as a captive to the Spirit [of Jesus],' he tells the Ephesian elders, 'I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there,²³ except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and persecutions are waiting for me. ²⁴ But I do not count my life of any value to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the good news of God's grace.

Paul has come to entrust his life to the Lord, and to the purpose of bearing witness to what matters most: a fresh start that leads to life in the never-failing love of God.

So Paul sets his face toward Jerusalem. He knows danger awaits him, but he goes anyway. His journey increasingly becomes like the Lord's: a determined, faithful, joyful pilgrimage of tears through suffering.

As I tell the story, you may wish to consider what mobs, courts, chains, storms, or Ceasars we ourselves are facing as those struggling to believe and point to good news.

Here's what happens...

Once Paul reaches Jerusalem, a rumor spreads that he's turned against the Jewish people and the law. The city erupts. A crowd seizes him in the Temple courts, drags him outside, and beats him. Chaos swallows the streets. And it looks like this Jesus movement will end there – in violence and misunderstanding. But even from the Temple steps, bruised and chained, Paul wants only to proclaim Jesus. He shares his own story of hope with those who want to hurt him. This obstacle becomes an opportunity. This mob becomes a mission field. The Spirit of Christ is within Paul. Even mobs will not stop the gospel.

After being arrested and speaking to the hostile crowd, Paul is put in Roman protective custody. And that night, the Lord Jesus Christ appears to him, saying: 'Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.' Over the next chapters (both of his life and of the Book of Acts), Paul is shuffled from hearing to hearing. He's a political problem no one knows how to solve. Before governors, lawyers, councils, and kings, the accusations pile up. Yet for Paul every courtroom becomes a pulpit. Before the Roman Governor Felix (in Acts 24), before Felix's successor, Festus, (in Acts 25), before Rome's Jewish puppet King Herod Agrippa II (in Acts 25–26), Paul keeps sharing the hope of the resurrection of Jesus. Of a king whose love and authority will live forever. He addresses these rulers not like powerful authorities, but like vulnerable persons who themselves are desperate to discover their true identity and freedom in God's grace. Sound familiar? The empire thinks it's interrogating Paul. But Luke quietly shows the opposite: the gospel is interrogating the empire. The Spirit of Christ is within Paul. Even courts will not stop the gospel.

So Paul has to spend years guarded and forgotten. Remember the story of Joseph sold into slavery, seemingly forgotten in Pharaoh's dungeon? How the Scripture keeps whispering in these seemingly God forsaken circumstances, that 'God was with

Joseph'/? Officials leave Paul imprisoned because releasing him would be politically inconvenient. But Paul never seems imprisoned of soul. Visitors come and go. Life-changing conversations happen. And hope that God could be so close, caring, humble, just and lifechanging spreads. Even locked away, Paul remains strangely free. The gospel does not depend on open doors. Even as God was with Joseph, the Spirit of Christ is with Paul. Even chains will not stop the gospel.

At one point, when it seems that the governor will make a play to turn him over to the Jewish leaders who want him dead, Paul makes use of his Roman citizenship to appeal to the emperor. He holds on to his Holy-Spiritual sense that his calling to end well means embodying Jesus to the very heart of the empire. How he finishes this race will be determined overseas. A centurion lead him and other prisoners onto a ship. But during the voyage to Rome, the sea turns violent. The sailors panic. Cargo has to be thrown overboard. For days the crew cannot see sun or stars. Everyone assumes death is coming. Yet in the middle of terror, it's Paul the prisoner who stands calm among them. Sound familiar? Loving his jailors as he has before, Paul encourages them not to lose heart. And when the ship splinters apart on the rocks, every single person survives. Even the wind and waves cannot silence the mission of God. The Spirit of Christ is with Paul. Even shipwrecking storms will not stop the gospel.

At last Paul's captors arrive with him in Rome. And Rome is really the shadow hanging over this whole story – the symbol of ultimate power. Armies, governors, prisons, laws, the emperor. Surely this is where the Jesus movement will meet its limit. But Acts ends not with some decree by Caesar, but with Paul under house arrest proclaiming 'the kingdom of God' openly and without hindrance. The final image is almost defiant: the gospel has reached the heart of the empire, and it is still moving outward. The Spirit of Christ is alive within Paul. And even Caesar will not stop the gospel. The emperor is only a fleeting mist. Does anyone even know which Caesar in a procession of worldly brutes this was? The emperor gets no last word. Jesus does.

The good news is still moving. The humble, gracious Lord is alive! Not mobs. Not courts. Not chains. Not storms. Not even Caesar.

Nothing will stop the gospel because the gospel was never dependent on favorable circumstances. It spreads in Acts through persons so grounded in the gracious love of the crucified and risen Christ that even obstacles and suffering become places of peace, opportunities for witness.

And so the Book of Acts ends strangely. There's no final victory scene. No resolution to Paul's trial. No neat conclusion. Just Paul under house arrest in Rome, welcoming all, teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ, and proclaiming the kingdom of God (quote) 'with all boldness and without hindrance.'

That's Luke's final word over the whole gospel story: 'unhindered.'

Fear hinders. Violence hinders. Empires hinder. Exhaustion and discouragement hinder. But good news: the grace of God Alive in Jesus keeps moving outward anyway – through prayerful people; wounded people; generous people; courageous, humble, healing people becoming like Jesus by the Spirit.

-Friends, what are the obstacles to the gospel for us and for our time? What mobs, courts, chains, storms, or Ceasar? What could threaten to undo our hope?

[...Dispiriting loneliness. Hyper-individualism. Tyranny of busyness. Institutional distrust. Selective empathy. Angering algorithms. Digital overload. Absence of common facts and values. Addiction to dopamine. Political mean-spiritedness. Pain caused by the Church. Moral relativism. Apathy. Tyranny of the crowd. Decline of liberal arts education. The lies of social media. (Mobs. Courts. Chains. Storms. Caesar.)]

-I'm struck by Paul's simple freedom in every daunting situation. You may wish to find this passage in the fourth chapter of his letter to the Church in Philippi and tape it on the dashboard of your car or post it above your bathroom mirror. Paul writes this: 11...I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation.... 13 I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength. (Philippians 4.11-13)

The Book of Acts closes without closing. The gospel has reached Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and now the symbolic center of the empire and ends of the earth. Nothing has stopped it. And now Luke invites us to enter the story. We are Acts 29 waiting on the day Christ's kingdom comes on earth. Now we're invited to step into the gospel story and trust. Now we're invited to believe beyond the

edges of what we can see. To rest in hope and pray thanksgiving in every setback. To celebrate the unstoppable movement of the good news of Jesus through suffering, opposition, and empire. From Jerusalem, to Judea and Samaria, to the Mediterranean, to Rome, and now to the heart of Missoula, Montana, as we seek together to surprise our city with Christ's astonishing love.

Even as we encounter our own mobs, courts, chains, storms and Caesar, we are – you and I are - invited by this story to shout out the secret of being content in any and every situation: We can do all things through Christ who gives us strength.

Amen? Amen. Hallelujah? Hallelujah!!!

The hymn 'It Is Well with My Soul' was written by Horatio Spafford. He wrote the song in the 1870s out of staggering personal loss.

Spafford was a successful lawyer and Presbyterian elder in Chicago. He was a friend of evangelist Dwight L. Moody. But within a few years, tragedy overwhelmed his family. In 1871, much of his real estate investment was destroyed in the Great Chicago Fire.

Around the same time, his young son died of scarlet fever.

Two years later, in 1873, Spafford planned a trip to Europe with his family. Delayed by business, he sent his wife Anna and their four daughters ahead by ship aboard the SS Ville du Havre while he planned to follow later. During the Atlantic crossing, the ship collided with another vessel and sank rapidly. More than 200 people died.

Anna survived. Their four daughters did not.

When Anna reached Wales, she sent Horatio a brief telegram that famously read: 'Saved alone.' Spafford immediately boarded a ship to cross the Atlantic to be with his grieving wife. During the voyage the captain informed him when they were passing near the place where his daughters had died. It was there, in the midst of grief and unanswered questions, that Spafford began writing the words that became this hymn:

When peace like a river attendeth my way,
when sorrows like sea billows roll...
Whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say
It is well, it is well, with my soul

What makes this hymn so enduring is that it is not a denial of dispiriting loss and fearsome circumstance. The song names sorrow honestly. But it roots peace in Christ, hope in Christ, joy in Christ, somewhere deeper than circumstances. The gospel endures through tears. Our hope overcomes. The kingdom is coming.

Friends, once again, we can do all things through Christ alive, the Lord of Love, who gives us strength. Let's sing our hope...

[Sing It is Well]

Song of Response: It Is Well With My Soul

When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll,
whatever my lot, You have taught me to say, it is well, it is well with my soul!

*Refrain: It is well (it is well) with my soul (with my soul).
It is well, it is well with my soul!*

Tho' Satan should buffet, tho' trials should come, let this blest assurance control;
That Christ hath regarded my helpless estate, and hath shed His own blood for my soul. *Refrain*

My sin, oh the bliss, of this glorious thought! My sin, not in part, but the whole,
is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more: praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul! *Refrain*
you

O Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight, the clouds be rolled back as a scroll;
the trump shall resound and the Lord shall descend; even so, it is well with my soul. *Refrain*

Prayers of the People

Response after each petition: Hear Our Prayer

Gracious God, You have called us to be witnesses of Your kingdom to the very ends of the earth. We lift up our prayers to You today, confident that nothing can separate us from Your love or hinder Your sovereign will.

We pray for Your Church universal and for this congregation. Fill us with the holy boldness of the Apostle Paul. Remove any barriers of fear or apathy that keep us from sharing the gospel. Grant us the gift of hospitality, that we may welcome all who come to us with open arms and open hearts. Lord, in Your mercy,

All: Hear our prayer.

We pray for the nations of the world and for all who govern. Where there is conflict, bring Your peace. Where there is oppression, bring Your liberation. We pray especially for Christians facing persecution, censorship, or hardship for the sake of the gospel. Reassure them of Your presence, protect their lives, and allow their witness to bear fruit even in dark places. Lord, in Your mercy,

All: Hear our prayer.

We pray for our local community and our neighbors. We ask that You would soften hearts that have grown dull or cynical to Your love. Comfort those who are lonely, sick, or grieving. Give us eyes to see the needs around us and hands ready to serve, proclaiming Your kingdom not only in word but in deed. Lord, in Your mercy,

All: Hear our prayer.

Gathering these prayers, and those unspoken in our hearts, we offer them to You in the name of the one who taught us to pray, saying:

The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For Yours is the kingdom and the power, and the glory forever. Amen**

SENDING

Sending Song: We Labor Unto Glory

My God, my God, where e'er I go — glory.
Where I reap and where I sow — glory.
When my hand it grips the thorn — glory
In the still and in the storm — glory, glory.

*Refrain: Oh, we labor unto glory
When heaven and earth are one,
Oh, we labor unto glory
Until God's kingdom comes.*

The sun it shines and then goes down — glory.
Rain, it pours and beats the ground — glory.
Dust, it blows and ends my days — glory.
Hearts they burn beneath Your gaze — glory, glory. *Refrain.*

My heart, my hands, they're kingdom bound — glory.
Where thorns no longer curse the ground — glory.
Trim the wick and light the flame — glory.
My work, it will not be in vain — glory, glory. *Refrain.*

**Craig Harris, Paul Zach, Isaac Wardell

Benediction

Leading in Worship This Morning:

Liturgist: Martha Ripley

Kids on the Steps: Melinda Hickey

Sermon: Dan Cravy

Musicians: Noah Hill, Joselyn Thomsen, Annie Hill, Chris Caldwell

Sound and Video Techs: Zane Reneau, Pat Scott, Dan McCaffery

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