

Pray ... and Expect to Be Used
Acts 2:1-12

Picture with me what's been going on since Jesus told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the gift that had been promised. It started with Jesus leaving, which had them all confused and anxious. Most people think that the disciples were standing there on the Mount of Olives looking up because Jesus just kind of levitated into a cloud and disappeared. That's pretty cool and all, but my guess is that they were standing there wondering, "Now what? Jesus tells us to change the world, to rock the world with hope, and then leaves." It takes a couple of angels to awaken them out of their anxious stupor and set them on the right track.

So, they head across the Kidron Valley to Jerusalem, find a dark room to hide in and wait, right? NO, that's not what happened. In the waiting, they were busy. The disciples are expecting something awesome and they know they have to be ready. So they shore up the leadership by finding a replacement for Judas. They gather the rest of the supporters, 120 in all, and pray. If they have learned anything at all from Jesus it's that Jesus always spent time with the Father before doing anything significant. They may not grasp what is about to happen, but they are expecting to be used. AND, they did not hide. They were active in the community. Let's remember that they were devout Jews. That means there were daily activities to be done, including the twice daily call to prayer.

In addition to the regular, daily routines the Feast of Shavuot (aka: the Feast of Weeks, aka: Pentecost) was approaching. Shavuot is one of the seven feasts ordained by God to the people of Israel when they were in the wilderness. This feast was historically significant for two reasons. (1) It is a celebration First Fruits, a giving to God the first portion of the harvest without knowing what the harvest would yield. This feast gave thanks to God for the harvest yet to come, trusting God for his abundant provision. How do we give? Do we give to God a tithe, a percentage of our "harvest" trusting God for his abundant provision?

(2) Celebrated exactly 50 days (Pentecost is Greek for 50 days) after the Passover, which celebrates God's deliverance from slavery in Egypt, Shavuot also observes the giving of the Law. Jewish tradition holds that God descended on Mount Sinai 50 days after the first Passover in Egypt to give the Law for the ordering of life and society as Israel became a new nation.

By the day of the feast, Jerusalem's population grew from 100,000 to over 1 million due to the fact that this was the second of three required trips to Jerusalem. Think about that. Jesus told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem which now has people from everywhere. Last week we noted that Jesus told his disciples they have a global mission; in other words, the good news of salvation in Jesus involves ever expanding territories – from the local community to the world. So on the day that God chooses to launch the church there are not only ten times as many people as normal, there are over 15 nations represented. And then it happened (*Read text here*).

Everyone heard it. It sounded like a rushing wind; but there was no wind, just a sound. A million people stop talking and look up trying to find out where the sound came from. And before they can resume talking again, they hear voices in all kinds of languages coming from one particular place. They are talking about God's great wonder, about a person named Jesus who died and rose again, about the forgiveness of sins, about peace that goes beyond human understanding, and about joy that knows no bounds.

Many have said that the disciples were in the upper room when this all took place. But the Bible only says that they were all in one place. I believe that one place where they were all together was uniquely designated by God. That place was right where everyone would be. Peter tells us that the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit happened about 9 o'clock in the morning. Can you guess where the disciples were? These God fearing, Jesus loving Jews were on the steps heading to the Temple ... for the 9am call to prayer. God placed them in just the right place at just the right time so that a million people could hear about God's great love – in their own language so

nothing could get lost in the translation. The people asked, “What does this mean?” and by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, the message goes out and 3000 people believe and accept Jesus as their Savior and Lord. What a way to start the church! What a way to begin to rock the world with hope!

Now, over two thousand years later, you may be asking the same question, “What does this mean - for me, for us.” God still wants to rock the world with hope. The mission that Jesus gave, he still gives. We have a story to tell, a love to show, a joy to share, and a hope to give. And, God is inviting you to *Out Live Your Life* to do it. In fact, unless we do, our community and our world will remain hopeless.

Just as God had strategically placed the disciples in Jerusalem on an historically significant day and poured out the Holy Spirit at a uniquely designated time, so God has placed you in this community, in your family, at your workplace, as a part of this church. If you will say, “I’m willing to Out Live My Life and rock my world with hope” then this is an historically significant day in the life of the church and to the world. And, yes, this is a uniquely designated time. The time is now because people around us in this community, in this state, in this nation, and in this world are losing what little hope they have. We have the only true hope. It is strong. It is based not on the things of this world, but in the one true God. It is made possible by the salvation that is found in Jesus Christ. It is founded in God’s love and the relationship he wants to have with us. And God never fails.

Yes church, it’s time. We are not called to be reclusive or hiding in the crowd. As God fearing, Jesus loving people, we should be in the middle of everything, expecting to be used. It’s time we do what the disciples did. We need to pray. I ask that you not only lift up your individual concerns but also our community and our church. I ask also that in addition to talking to God that you would listen to God.

But I believe there is one more thing we need to add to this call to pray. The disciples went to Jerusalem expecting God to do something awesome so they prayed and were ready when God empowered them. I ask that you expect to be used.

I saw a message on a church sign once that read, “If you’re praying for bushels, don’t bring a cup.” I like that. Far too often we pray for God to do awesome things, but don’t really expect them to happen or be used by God to do those awesome things. Pray for the bushels. God wants to give us bushels. But bring more than a cup.

Don’t pray for more young families and children in our church and then wait for it to happen; that’s bringing a cup. Pray, and then invite young families and children to church; that’s a peck. Better yet, pray, invite, and become a SS teacher, become a volunteer at the preschool and child care center, become a part of the ministries that focus on young families and children. Expect to be used; that’s a bushel.

Don’t ask God to give the church the necessary resources to be church and then put \$5 or \$10 in the offering; that’s a cup, maybe. Pray, give abundantly, trusting that the God of all resources will bless you abundantly more than you can imagine or think. Then give like God will! That’s a bushel. God resources his church by resourcing his children.

Don’t just pray for God to bless your neighbor with a job; that’s a cup. Befriend that neighbor; encourage that neighbor; bless that neighbor with resources; expect God to use you ... that’s a bushel.

Pray ... and expect to be used. That’s the way to be church! That’s that way to rock the world with hope! The great works of God begin with fervent prayer and expectant willingness. Are we praying and expecting God to do great works in us?

Pray, ending with the congregation singing the prayer “Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying”