

You Are Sent, Vol. 1

Sermon #1 | Acts 1.1-8 – **We are a movement**

Hey I want to take a second at both locations and welcome BACK to Mercy Church all of our college students. Whether you are at Queens, Wingate, Johnson C. Smith, CPCC, or UNCC...wherever you are We love you guys and we are a better church when you are here. We believe the college years can be the most transformative in your whole life. The work God did in me through a campus ministry and through a local church during my 4 years in undergrad was nothing short of a very, very good revolution. There are over 100k college students in the Charlotte area and we consider it a part of our calling as a church to help you encounter God and his great love for you in Christ. I want to invite you to join us TODAY, after the second service, for a college lunch being held at our Independence Campus. Meet our college staff and hear a little about what is coming this you.

Today is a big day here at Mercy. We are kicking off a new sermon series, we are celebrating baptisms, and today between both of our campuses we are commissioning 44 new members of Mercy Church! I can't think of a better way to kick off this particular series because we are going to be walking through the book of Acts. The Story of the Beginning of the Church.

This is a very personally exciting time for me because God used the book of Acts to bring me back to himself and back to Church. He even used it to reveal to me the THING I was supposed to give my life to. See I had a good church

experience growing up that went really bad when I was about 13 years old. Our Church split over an argument that was pretty ugly. And I was angry and hurt. Because if this is what God's people were, no thank you.

But then in college I found a group of guys on campus, and a church. And while in that setting I just sat down and read the book of Acts. And I saw in Acts what the church was meant to be. Imperfect for sure. But unified & self-less. Hungry for God to move and humbly waiting on him to do so. Boldly obeying God as they were led by the Holy Spirit...making their whole lives about one name. The name of Jesus. And in this book you see an awakening. You see thousands of lives rescued and redeemed. It's inspiring. And I began in 2002 asking God to let me be a part of seeing this happen in my time. Let me see an awakening of your spirit. I WANT TO SEE GOD MOVE in such a way only God can get the credit.

And as Mercy Church cracks open this book...we are, I believe, looking into what an awakening of God looks like. It is deeply personal. Because awakenings happen one soul at a time. But it is also direction setting for our church. By seeing how the first church put their beliefs into practice, for sure we are going to look and see ok are we still, 21 centuries later, centered on these same things?

That's how awakenings happen. The original genius of some ancient thing gets rediscovered and then that old truth gets re-applied to the present situation. And I'm praying for an awakening in Charlotte but first I'm praying for an awakening here among us.

So we are going to talk about church. Even the word Church can be misleading...The bible uses the word “ekklesia” which means a gathering of people around an idea. It was equivalent to what we would call a “movement.”

BUT, the tragedy for us is that our English word CHURCH isn’t derived from that Greek word. We get it from the German word for church established in the middle ages called “kirche.” which meant “a sacred place where you gather for religious purposes.”

And that meaning fundamentally altered the way people viewed Church. Church became an institution you went to in order to receive religious services. **It went from being a movement of people you participate with, to being a PLACE you consume services AT.** And while God has brought awakenings to the church throughout history...every generation of Christians is in danger of this mission drift. **The Drift Danger facing every church: drifting from being a movement to being a place.**

But in opening these pages...the movement is back in front of us. Through this series my hope for Mercy Church is that we get inspired by what it means to be THE CHURCH **together.** That we will see the church as a movement...this multicultural, multi-generational, ever-expanding family. It’s a group of people unlike anything the world had ever seen before. Our title of our sermon today: **Acts 1.1-8: We are a movement.**

And listen the thing about...movements is...they move. The title we’ve put on this series of sermons is “You Are Sent.”

Those of you familiar with mercy church will recognize that language. It’s the last words we say over one another as we leave our gathering each week. And we do that as a reminder that we are a people, a movement. Sent TOGETHER BY GOD to show and tell of the love (& glory) of God.

- This is a big question in front of us in this series Mercy. **Will we be a Movement or a Place?** Will we be a deeply united family who is moving together under the leadership of God’s Spirit leads us to take the gospel to our city and world? Or will we a PLACE for religious services. Are we an event to attend? And what about you? Are you just coming to a place? Or are you a part of the movement? I know you want God to move in your life! That doesn’t happen by sitting and consuming each weekend. It starts there...but then God calls you into the movement. And it’s there, while you are in the middle of the movement with a group of people, that God does his greatest work in you.

Mercy there is so much for us here in this book. And the way this series will work is that we are going to break Acts into 3rds. We will cover the first 7 chapters over the next 9 weeks. And that will be Volume 1 of our journey through acts. Then the plan is to tackle Volumes 2 & 3 in 2020.

Ok let’s get into it. Acts 1 Verse 1. We’ll make it to verse 8 today. which will be what we focus on. We’ll walk through it one time to get an understanding of what it says, then we’ll sit down in verse 8. And I’ll show you those ancient core practices that keep individuals, and a church moving with God. And I’m showing you them because I believe they must be the defining markers of Mercy Church.

I wrote the first narrative, Theophilus,

Anytime you are reading your Bible its always helpful to know what you are reading. The author of "Acts" is a guy named Luke. Luke wrote the gospel according to...Luke. You need to see Luke and Acts as Parts 1 & 2 of the same book. That's how Luke put it together. Luke was a physician by trade and he traveled with Paul and became very close to him.

Theophilus, the guy he is writing to, seems to be a man of significant social standing and is open enough to hear about Christianity but doesn't appear to have completely believed yet.

about all that Jesus began to do and teach 2 until the day he was taken up, after he had given instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.

Let me say something here by way of observation. This word "began" is a pretty interesting word choice for Luke. English Nerds: Present tense infinitive verb imply that the action is still happening. And I read multiple scholars who believe that was Luke's way of saying...Jesus isn't finished... It's almost as if Luke is saying Jesus is still working even after he left.

As if He's telling Theophilus that Part 1...the gospel of Luke...was just the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Part 2 is about what Jesus would continue to do and to teach THROUGH his Holy Spirit that he promised to send them when he left. It's

gonna come up again in a second so let that thought linger for a moment...

3 After he had suffered, he also presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

Remember Luke is writing like a physician. He wants to present Theophilus the facts. In fact, at the start of the gospel of Luke he says:

3 It also seemed good to me, since I have carefully investigated everything from the very first, to write to you in an orderly sequence, most honorable Theophilus, 4 so that you may know the certainty of the things about which you have been instructed. -- Luke 1:3-4

3 After he had suffered, he also presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

40 days. During those 40 days Jesus was proving that his resurrection was real. When the disciples shouted "A GHOST!" Jesus said 'Nope, give me some fish.' Come touch my hands. He meets up with them on road to Emmaus. And All these proofs were for telling about the kingdom of God. This wasn't an apparition. It was Jesus alive. That's a big deal. He appeared to hundreds of witnesses. Once to 500 at one time. And many wrote it down. Luke wants Theophilus to know, contrary to what many think about Christianity today, this isn't some middle eastern myth concocted by a deranged ego maniac in his closet. It was witnessed and testified to by

multiple eye-witnesses. There is an abundance of evidence testifying to the historical reliability of the resurrection and that's important to Luke and important for us.

Because listen, Christianity *is* staked on a faith claim. **All** worldviews are faith claims. Even refusing to place faith in anything is itself a faith claim. But, **Christianity is a faith claim based on a historical event verified by an abundance of reliable evidence.** I would argue it is the most reasonable explanation you will ever find for why the world is the way it is.

4 While he was with them, he commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the Father's promise. "Which," he said, "you have heard me speak about; 5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit in a few days."

Remember how I said Luke nodded to Jesus continuing his work after he left through that word "began?" Well, here's why I said it. Because now **the main character** of Acts is introduced. The work of Jesus is going to be continued through God's Holy Spirit. We aren't going to get caught up in "baptism of the spirit" today because we are talking about the event where it happened next weekend ok. The main thing that is so important though is HOW this Holy Spirit is going to work.

Understanding this will the book of Acts make sense to you.¹ Christians believe there is one God that exists in 3 persons.

¹ Bock, Darrel L. *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 52-53. Ok so Bock

The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit. Jesus doesn't MORPH into the holy spirit like a caterpillar into a butterfly or something. Jesus ascends and then "in a few days" The Holy Spirit comes down to dwell inside of Jesus' followers. And according to John 16 the role of the Holy Spirit is to illuminate Christ to his people. He guides us in following Christ...brings to mind God's word which tells us how to obey Christ the King in any and all situations. So Christians say we are followers of Christ...led by the Holy Spirit. To change our desires to what God desires for us. To counsel us & guide us by bringing God's word to life for us. To unite us to other believers & to illuminate Christ to others THROUGH us. We are, in this sense, a people led by God's spirit. **And what becomes abundantly clear by this point in the bible is that God wants to be vitally present IN his people and he wants to do his work THROUGH his people. GOD wants to MOVE through US.**

Most versions of the bible refer to this book as the Acts of the Apostles. It is much more theologically accurate to call it the acts of The Holy Spirit through the apostles. In Acts people don't just hear about God, they are hearing **God** through the teachings and actions of the believers in the early church. And that matters to US because this story doesn't end with the apostles. When people hear from Christians about Jesus today, they are not just hearing us talk about him, they are hearing *Him* speak through us. Because the same spirit that was with them is the same one with us. That's going to be a theme in acts ok. And something I'm asking God to uncork in

didn't say "secret sauce" but I leaned on his commentary on Acts to help with several of the more challenging passages.

your life. That God is actually alive and working THROUGH YOU in the lives of others.

I want you to hear that the story of the church throughout history to right here in Charlotte 2019 is a story of the spirit of Jesus speaking and moving through people to transform lives through his power for his glory. And that power is resting now among the people of God and God has commissioned us to do something with it. Let's keep going...

6 So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, are you restoring the kingdom to Israel at this time?" They are saying Jesus we believe you are the Messiah. And according to the OT the Messiah, the savior, will establish himself as KING over all of earth. He's a good king who brings peace to earth and God's people who are oppressed now will be at peace and will walk in victory in his kingdom. Considering they've staked everything on Jesus being this king, considering the works he did, and considering he's just risen from the dead, it's a pretty natural question. It's Jesus answer that is a surprise. And his answer sets up the rest of the book.

7 He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses...in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Verse 8 is going to be our key verse for us this series. In fact, if I could summarize the book of Acts in one verse, it's Acts 1.8. It's the mission statement. And because this is so important I'm going to spend the rest of our time today right here. I want

to show you 3 defining markers of the church as a **movement**. I told you awakenings start when the church recovers the simple ancient truths and applies them to its present context. Everything we need to see God MOVE in our day is right here in verse 8. Let's go through it slowly. First Marker comes from our first word in verse 8. "You." The people who had chosen to follow him.

Their hearts and minds were captured by the gospel. Has it captured yours?

I read a book this week called "Why on earth did anyone become a Christian in the first 3 centuries?" And for the first 120 pages the author listed off, in excruciating detail, all of the consequences and risks that came with believing the gospel message there at the beginning.

- Because the majority of adherents were not social elites, there was no social status benefit to believing this message. You didn't become a Christian to move up in the world.
- Social consequences were severe because Christianity called for exclusive worship of ONE God in a culture where acceptance of all Gods was culturally expected. It was ok to worship Jesus as long as you also worshipped the gods of your family, of your profession, and of course you had to worship Caesar. And Christians *refused* to worship these Gods that were built into the social fabric.
- People are like "Hey man last week you drank a toast to the God of War. What's up with you this week? Why

aren't you honoring these gods you've honored your whole life?"

- In A.D. 64 Nero goes on an all-out genocide seeking to rid Rome of all Christians and murders them in ways to gruesome to recount here.
- My point is: Christians had EVERYTHING to lose and NOTHING in this world to GAIN. SO WHY Would they risk it all?

The way Larry Hurtado said it was simple and wonderful:

"Unless those who became Christians were seriously lacking in basic intelligence, we must presume that they judged that it was worth the consequences and costs."

Their conviction plain and simple was that Jesus died as a substitute payment for sinners.

- "He wasn't another prophet. He was God himself. And he is the only true God... We (humanity) **crucified him**, because we are a rebellious, traitor race of people, who would rather run our own lives than submit to God our Creator—but **in the universe's greatest irony**, our murder of him, his sacrificial death, was the payment God accepted for our sins if we would acknowledge that and receive it."²

They believed he resurrected bodily from the dead. You gotta understand they didn't really have a framework for this kind of religion. That their God would die a criminal's death in

weakness and humility? But then would resurrect from the grave. They believed it because they SAW IT. They saw HIM.

And they recognized if this was true...It was the greatest act of grace. The greatest message of mercy...ever. God dying to rescue his own children. And if true, it's also the most important message ever because it's our only hope of salvation.

- If there were other ways to God...surely Jesus wouldn't have had to die. When Jesus is in the Garden saying "father, let this cup pass from me" ...If there were any other way God would have said "Yes, certainly son. Just tell them to be good people and do more good things than bad things. Then you don't have to go through this." But he didn't because there isn't another way.
- Peter would summarize the Apostles' message in Acts 4:12 this way, "**Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.**" And they would take that message all over the world.

The only way to the father is through the son. And they saw deep TRUTH and deep BEAUTY in this sacrificial love and they believed it with everything they had.

Optional: I spend time here because our current generation is witnessing the quick death of cultural Christianity. A hollow Christianity where belief comes at little cost because the culture at large operates with the same values...is fading fast.

² Borrowed from J.D. Greear's sermon on Acts 1.8 preached in August of 2013 at the Summit Church. I love this summary of the atonement!

Want proof? Go out one Thursday with our college staff and talk to students and ask them if it is offensive to say Jesus is the only way to God.

And in some circles people are panicking because Christianity is losing adherents...No it isn't. **It's losing casual fans, not devoted followers.** Our cultural moment is giving us an incredible opportunity. It's drawing a line more clearly in the sand and saying...do you believe this? If so, it's going to cost you. But Great News...It's worth it. IT'S WORTH IT!! The Hope Christ gives you for life in this world and for life in eternity...it's worth it. The purpose Christ gives you in this life is greater than anything else you could give your life to. The Gospel says the God of the universe loves you and has offered you and the world salvation. Will you stake your reputation and your life on that being true? It's either true or it's not. One thing we must not be is casual fans. God moves through devoted followers not casual fans.

And listen, the way they showed they believed it – Baptism. They went into the water and came back up. Because that was what Christ told them to do. It was a symbol that they believed their salvation came from Jesus going into the grave for their sin and then rising from the dead. And We are going to celebrate Baptisms this weekend and then again in September. And many of you need to take that step of faith.

2. "You will receive Power when the Holy Spirit Comes upon You" - **They were surrendered to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Are you?**

Both verse 5 & again in verse 8 show two times where Jesus says the Holy Spirit will be the key to the effectiveness of their ministry from this point on. And each one of them will receive the promised holy spirit. And that promise extends right to us. Jesus says if we believe the gospel we have that holy spirit dwelling in us guiding us and empowering us for ministry. In fact, lets Read verse 8 again. but like this:

But [your name] will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on [your name], and [your name] will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

This was a dangerous claim. Those with a Jewish background would think this is blasphemous. The Spirit of God was reserved for the temple. If a person even went into the room where the presence of God was...they'd die. How can you DARE say The Spirit is inside of us?

- Jewish Friend – That's absurd. It would kill you.

But Jesus says when he saves you he puts the Holy Spirit inside of you. Which means the mighty power of God is with us and is here to lead us. In fact, we'll see in a couple of weeks how the spirit moves in different people different ways. He bestows spiritual "Gifts" so that we can each display the power of God in different ways. Some teaching, some evangelism, some service...but the point is we get to encounter God through one another! And this actually connects, obviously, right to the last part of verse 8

3. “you will be my witnesses to Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” **They were devoted to the mission. Are you?**

People surrendered to the leading of the holy spirit in the heart will testify with the mouth. Have you surrendered here (in the heart?) because if you have the evidence will be here (in your words). That happens over and over in Acts.

- **Acts 2:4**, *The Holy Spirit fills the Apostles at Pentecost and they begin to declare God’s praises in multiple languages.*
- **Acts 4:8**, *Peter is filled with the Spirit and preaches to the rulers that Jesus is their only hope of salvation.*
- **Acts 4:31**, *the disciples are filled with the Spirit and they speak the word of God boldly in the face of severe persecution.*
- **Acts 9:20**, *Paul is filled with the Spirit, and he immediately begins to preach in the synagogues.*

Is this you? Are you a witness to what Christ as done in the gospel? See God never draws you in without sending you back out. One of my friends calls it the gospel flow. The gospel comes in to you but it was never intended to stop with you. Instead, **when you receive the gospel you become a conduit of the gospel.** That’s the Holy Spirit working in and through you. And that’s what we are going to see time and again in the book of Acts. New Beginnings all over the place with one singular purpose: being witnesses of what Jesus had done. Think about it this way: When God does something in you he isn’t just doing it for you. He’s got someone else in mind who is going to hear your testimony...who you are going to be a

WITNESS to what God has done...and God is going to use that to change their lives. That’s the movement. It’s got chaos to it because you never know what the Spirit of God is going to do. And I imagine you are lining up excuses in your head about being a part of the movement:

* *I wouldn’t be ABLE to be a witness.* Yes, and No. On your own, no. But you have God’s Spirit. The Spirit does the work. All you need is to believe the Spirit is constantly at work around you preparing people and that the Spirit uses you to speak God’s word to people. All you need is to believe. I heard of 4 people who believed the gospel for the first time last week. How? A Mercy member told them about it.

* I don’t have time...my life is set and my margins are real thin. First: movements move when people stop worshipping their calendar and comfort and start worshipping God. But second, we need to see evangelism as everyday life with gospel intentionality. That’s why we fight hard not to over-program our church. So the movement can MOVE in our community.

* It’s uncomfortable to talk about Jesus...Yep. Always will be. Listen the question isn’t if it’s uncomfortable, it’s if the gospel has really captured your heart and mind. Do you really think others need this? If so, you’ll overcome the uncomfortable hurdle. **Urgency triumphs over awkward every time. The fact that we aren’t actively witnessing to Jesus’ death and resurrection isn’t an ability problem, it’s an apathy problem. We don’t believe it.**

Spurgeon: “If Jesus is precious to you, you will not be able to keep your good news to yourself; you will be whispering it into

your child's ear; you will be telling it to your husband; you will be earnestly imparting it to your friend; without the charms of eloquence you will be more than eloquent; your heart will speak, and your eyes will flash as you talk of his sweet love.

Every Christian here is either a missionary or an impostor.

You either try to spread abroad the kingdom of Christ, or else you do not love him at all. It cannot be that there is a high appreciation of Jesus and a totally silent tongue about him... If you really know Christ, you are like one that has found honey; you will call others to taste of its sweetness; you are like the beggar who has discovered an endless supply of food: you must go tell the hungry crowd that you have found Jesus, and you are anxious that they should find him too.

That's the movement I long for Mercy to be a part of. Sold out for the Gospel, surrendered to the Holy Spirit, and joyfully eager to invite others into the love we've found.