

NOW WHAT ?



*When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart
and said to Peter and the other apostles,
“Brothers, what shall we do?”*

*Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you,
in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.
And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”*

- Acts 2:37-38

People are being vaccinated. We are returning to worship in person. Some things are beginning to seem back to some sense of normal. Yet many are saying the church will never be the same, even though our mission hasn't changed. ***So now what?*** After the day of resurrection, the disciples faced a similar question. How would they witness to Jesus in a changed world? Learning from their experience, we'll explore what it means to be the church for the world today? What has changed? What hasn't? How will we help more people know the love of Jesus?

NOW WHAT

APR 4

POWER

ACTS 1:1-11

(Parallels Disciple Bible Study Week 24: The Explosive Power of the Spirit)

As Jesus appears to the disciples before his ascension, he invites them to wait for the Holy Spirit and to receive its power. Do we believe in the power of the Holy Spirit? Do we trust in it to do extraordinary things we cannot do on our own?

Followers of Jesus claim the power of the Holy Spirit to transform lives.

APR 11

CONVERSION

ACTS 26:1-32

(Parallels Disciple Bible Study Week 25: The Gospel Penetrates the World)

The concept of "conversion" has begun to carry a negative connotation. People bristle when someone tries to convert them to their way of thinking and believing as though something is wrong with them. Conversion, however, is what happens when a life is transformed by God's love, when an individual moves from sin to right living, from hopelessness to joy, from feeling unloved to knowing God's love. Conversion isn't something we're called to do. It's something God does. We share, we witness, we love. God converts.

Followers of Jesus witness to others from their own identity and experiences how God is transforming lives.

APR 18

JUSTIFIED

ROMANS 3:21-26

(Parallels Disciple Bible Study Week 26: Put Right with God Through Faith)

Quite often we look around the church and think everyone else is perfect, faithful, and free of the sins and temptations we face in our lives. The opposite is true. We gather because we know we are sinful and need the power of God in Jesus to overcome the temptations and forgive our sins. In the Book of Romans, what some say is the most important theological treatise ever written, the Apostle Paul reflects on sin, forgiveness, and our invitation to live in right relationship to experience the full power of God's grace over sin and death.

Followers of Jesus live freed from the power of sin by the forgiving love of God in Jesus Christ.

NOW WHAT

APR 25

LOVE

1 CORINTHIANS 8:1-3

(Parallels Disciple Bible Study Week 27: A Congregation in Ferment)

From outside, people often think the church is filled with pious, sin avoiding, nearly perfect people who all get along. The truth is, inside the church people are still argumentative, sometimes divisive, and sometimes self-centered. So what makes being the church different than the secular world beyond? How does the church overcome human strife and division within and outside in the world today?

Followers of Jesus orient all of life and community around the love of God and neighbor.

NOW WHAT

DAILY QUESTIONS

APR 5-10

POWER

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|-----------|---|
| Monday | Read John 20:19-23. Who could the Holy Spirit give you the power to forgive right now in your life? |
| Tuesday | Read Acts 1:1-11. How have you witnessed, or how can you witness today, to the power of the Holy Spirit? |
| Wednesday | Read Acts 2:1-13. What sense do you have of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in your life right now? |
| Thursday | Read Acts 8:4-8. Where do you see healing, witnessing, serving, and rebirth happening through the power of the Holy Spirit in the church today? |
| Friday | Read Acts 7:54-60. How can knowing the Holy Spirit is with you empower you to face challenges with courage like Stephen? |
| Saturday | Read Acts 10:1-48. How might the Holy Spirit be empowering the church to expand its vision today? |

APR 12-17

CONVERSION

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|-----------|---|
| Monday | Read Acts 9:1-18. What do you learn about God and faith from the story of Saul's conversion? |
| Tuesday | Read Acts 16:11-15. Where are the public places today where followers of Jesus may encounter those open to hearing words of hope and healing? |
| Wednesday | Read Acts 16:16-34. What is something you've witnessed God do in your life that you could use to show God's love to someone else? |
| Thursday | Read Acts 17:1-9. What holds you back from telling people more readily about your faith or about the love Jesus has for them? |
| Friday | Read Acts 17:16-34. Where are people turning today to seek meaning and understanding, and how can we share the story of Jesus in those places and spaces? |
| Saturday | Read Acts 18:1-11. In what ways could you share the story of Jesus and your own faith story with people at work, at school, or in your neighborhood? |

NOW WHAT

APR 19-24

JUSTIFIED

Monday	Read Romans 2:12-16. What do you think Paul means that the requirements of the law are “written on our hearts”?
Tuesday	Read Romans 3:9-20. Do you think anyone is free of sin? Why or why not?
Wednesday	Read Romans 3:21-26. How would you rewrite these verses from Paul in your own words?
Thursday	Read Romans 5:1-11. What does “justified by faith” mean to you?
Friday	Read Romans 6:1-14. What is an example of how the grace of God has freed you from the power of sin in your life?
Saturday	Read Romans 8:1-39. What does it mean to you to know you are a “child of God”?

APR 26 – MAY 1 LOVE

Monday	Read 1 Corinthians 1:1-17. What are the divisions and challenges in the church and community today?
Tuesday	Read 1 Corinthians 1:26-2:16. How would you define Christian humility? What does it look like?
Wednesday	Read 1 Corinthians 4:14-21. In what ways has the church built well on its foundation? In what ways has the church failed?
Thursday	Read 1 Corinthians 8:1-13. In what ways can how we live be a stumbling block to others?
Friday	Read 1 Corinthians 10:14-11:1. What does “all things are lawful, but not all things are beneficial,” (10:23 in the NRSV) mean to you?
Saturday	Read 1 Corinthians 12:1-11. Are some spiritual gifts more important than others? Why or why not?

NOW WHAT

POWER

SERMON ON APR 4, 2021

Choose a question to get started!

- **If you could have one super-power, what would you choose?**
- **What is the most extraordinary thing you have ever seen or witnessed?**

Read John 20:19-23.

Throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus has promised the disciples that when he is no longer with them, they will not be alone. He will send the Holy Spirit to them. Now, after the resurrection, John says Jesus appeared to his followers, breathed on them, and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (NIV). He then gives them the power to forgive sins. The Pharisees were always asking who or what gave Jesus the right to forgive sins, something only God could do. Now, Jesus, by the Holy Spirit, is sharing this power with those who follow Him as well.

- **Why do you think Jesus shares the power to forgive sins with his followers?**
- **Who could the Holy Spirit give you the power to forgive right now in your life?**

Read Acts 1:1-11.

At the beginning of the book of Acts, Jesus says to his followers, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses..." (NIV). The Greek word used for power is "dunamis", the root of our word for dynamite. This isn't just run-of-the-mill power. This is dynamic, world changing power! And what will this power allow the followers of Jesus to do? The Holy Spirit will empower them to witness to the ends of the earth.

- **What does the power of the Holy Spirit look like or feel like?**
- **Do you think the power of the Holy Spirit is active today?**
- **How have you witnessed, or how can you witness today, to the power of the Holy Spirit?**

Read Acts 7:54-60.

Today we hear talk in our country of persecution of Christians, but we can openly worship as followers of Jesus without fearing for our lives. That wasn't true for the first disciples, nor is it true for some Christians in other countries today. Yet the church grew

NOW WHAT

by leaps and bounds after the death of Jesus, and it is growing today in places like China and Iran, where it can be dangerous to admit you are a follower of Jesus.

- How would your faith be different if you knew that following Jesus could cost you your life?
- How can knowing the presence of the Holy Spirit give you courage to tell others about Jesus?

Read Acts 10:1-48.

The followers of Jesus began by waiting and praying. Once they received the Holy Spirit, they went out, witnessing, healing, performing wonders and signs, and expanding the reach of the love of Jesus. They believed that the Holy Spirit had the power to transform lives, and in believing, they experienced that power expanding their vision and witness. Do we believe in that power to transform us, and to transform others through our witness?

Followers of Jesus claim the power of the Holy Spirit to transform lives.

- Where do you see healing, witnessing, serving, and rebirth happening through the power of the Holy Spirit in the church today?
- How might the Holy Spirit be empowering the church to expand its vision today?

FaithFit Challenge!

Pay attention to the power of the Holy Spirit at work. Near the end of each day this week, at dinner or before you go to bed, share with a family member or write down one way you experienced the power of the Holy Spirit at work during your day. It can be small – “The Holy Spirit led me to smile at so and so.” Or it can be grand – “The Holy Spirit worked through me today to say a prayer with someone I didn’t even know.”

NOW WHAT

CONVERSION

SERMON ON APR 11, 2021

Choose a question to get started!

- What comes to mind when you hear the word conversion?
- Who is someone you know who has had a total change in their outlook on life or their behavior? How did they experience that conversion?

Read Acts 9:1-18.

Have you ever reflected on the role of Ananias in the story of Saul's conversion? His calling wasn't to make sure that Saul converted, or to correct Saul's belief system. His job was to testify and witness to the power of the Holy Spirit. God would do the rest.

- Share how you have come to know the love of Jesus and/or be part of a church Circle.
- What do we learn about God and faith from the story of Saul's conversion?

Read Acts 16:11-15 and Acts 17:16-34.

Gallup announced recently that for the first time in their polling history of over 80 years, less than 50% of people say they belong to a church, synagogue, or mosque. The pandemic exposed a myth that those in the church have believed for a long time, that if we just worship in a building correctly (and everyone has their definition of what that looks like), people will come to know Jesus. As in-person worship stopped, people lamented as though this was the only way to be the church. The truth is, the only way for the church to grow today is to move beyond its walls.

People will say they don't want to be converted, but they do want to find wholeness, peace, and a sense of meaning in their lives. They do want forgiveness, connection, love. They are looking for this in gyms, coffeehouses, yoga and meditation centers, and bars. Paul went to the synagogues to share the story of Jesus, but we don't read that he had much success there. He found people who were ready to let their lives be converted by the love of Jesus in social gatherings and along the roads of life.

- Where do you see people turning today to seek meaning and understanding?
- What are the social spaces today where followers of Jesus may encounter those open to hearing words of hope and healing?
- How can we share the story of Jesus in those places and spaces?

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- What holds you back from telling people more readily about your faith or about the love of Jesus for them?

Read Acts 18:1-11.

The Book of Acts shows Paul using the entirety of his life and experience to witness to the power of Christ. He uses his Jewish upbringing, his former life and mistakes, his job as a tentmaker, his position as a Roman citizen, his understanding of Greek culture, and his own story of conversion.

Followers of Jesus witness to others from their own identity and experiences how God is transforming lives.

At some point in your life, God will put you in a unique position to share the love of Jesus with someone else. You might be equipped because of your age, or your gender, or your job, or where you live. You might be ready because of a life experience that you've had – loss of a loved one, loss of a job, mental health struggles, divorce. You might encounter someone who has the same questions you had before you claimed the full love of Jesus in your life. The question isn't whether that moment will come. The question is whether you will embrace the opportunity to share from your experience and let the Holy Spirit give you the courage to share the story and love of Jesus.

- What is something about you – an experience, a part of your identity – that God might use in a way you haven't thought of before?
- In what ways could you share the story of Jesus and your own faith story with people at work, at school, or in your neighborhood?

FaithFit Challenge!

Share your faith publicly in the next two weeks. How? Tell your wait staff at a restaurant, or the check-out person at the grocery store, that you are going to be praying, and ask how you can pray for them. Tell a coworker or fellow student about something you've witnessed God doing during the pandemic. Pay for a person in line behind you and tell them you are passing along the blessing of Christ. Or invite someone you know to worship with you, or to serve in the food pantry with you, or to spend some time praying with you.

NOW WHAT

JUSTIFIED

SERMON ON APR 18, 2021

Choose a question to get started!

- Do you prefer a typed paper to have just the left margin justified, or both left and right? Why?
- If you could sit down and have dinner with the Apostle Paul, what is one question you would ask him?

John Wesley, who began the Methodist movement, experienced a powerful sense of Christ's presence in his life while hearing the reading of a passage from Romans. Later, Wesley would speak of three ways to understand the expressions of God's grace, a helpful way to understand what Paul is saying to the church in Rome.

Read Romans 2:12-16.

Paul teaches the Romans that right living isn't in hearing or knowing the law, but in living by it. In this way, you can be, in Paul's words "justified", without even knowing God or the law. Wesley described this as *prevenient grace*.

Prevenient grace – God loving us and guiding us even before we know God or have claimed that love. We experience this expression of grace in our conscience, in knowing right and wrong, and in encounters with the Holy Spirit that we can only see later.

- What do you think Paul means that the requirements of the law are "written on our hearts"?
- When you look back at your life, how have you experienced the Holy Spirit at work in ways you weren't aware of at the time?

Read Romans 3:21-26 and 5:1-11.

Paul uses three words in these passages that bear deep meaning for the Christian faith. First, he talks about being "justified by faith". To justify is to put things right. If you think of margins on a page, to justify is to make sure all are aligned. Next, Paul speaks of "redemption by Christ". Redemption was a word used for buying slaves in order to set them free. In Jesus, we are set free from the grip of sin. Finally, Paul speaks of "reconciliation in Christ". Reconciliation is the restoration of relationship. In Jesus, our relationship with God is restored, or set right again. These all tie into Wesley's expression of justifying grace.

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Justifying grace – God’s love drawing us into right relationship. We experience this expression of grace in the moment of our yes to following Jesus, knowing we are redeemed and reconciled as we accept His love and forgiveness.

- How would you rewrite Romans 3:21-26 in your own words?
- Is there a moment in your life when you said yes to Jesus, or recognized a right relationship with God, or did it happen over time?

Read Romans 6:1-14.

Paul asks an important question. If we know Jesus forgives us, should we just sin over and over again? The answer is a resounding “NO”. Paul says if you’ve truly given your life to Christ, you have experienced new life and sin no longer has power over you. John Wesley struggled with the power of sin even after the conversion experience. Paul’s letter to the Romans helped him understand sanctifying grace.

Sanctifying grace – God’s love that continues to work in our lives as we grow in our faith. We experience this grace as we still make mistakes and are tempted by sin, but continue to draw closer and closer to the life God desires for us. We may, in weak moments, give in to sin, but we know that sin doesn’t ultimately have power over us.

Followers of Jesus live freed from the power of sin by the forgiving love of God in Jesus Christ.

- What is an example of how the grace of God has freed you from the power of sin in your life?
- How would you describe a “right relationship” with God in Christ?

FaithFit Challenge!

Over 4 days, reflect on sin and the power of God’s grace in your life.

Day 1: Make a list of the sins of your life. Confess them before God in prayer.

Day 2: Spend some time and reflect on ways the Holy Spirit has been at work in your life to give you strength and help you know God’s forgiveness.

Day 3: Spend some time and reflect on when your relationship with Jesus began.

Day 4: In prayer, share with God one way that you would like to grow in your faith.

NOW WHAT

LOVE

SERMON ON APR 25, 2021

Choose a question to get started!

- **What is the strongest aspect of your faith community?**
- **What is the greatest threat to the church today?**

Read 1 Corinthians 1:1-1:17.

The city of Corinth is located on an isthmus that connects the Greek mainland with the Peloponnese peninsula. In the time of Paul, it was a center of land traffic and a major port on the shipping route through the Mediterranean. With this important geographic location, the city became known for its international trade and visitors from all over the world. With temples dedicated to numerous gods, Corinth was also known for its religious diversity and, due to the cultic practices of the temples, its sexual immorality. Paul started the church there, and it seems that as he writes to them later, divisions have arisen.

- **What divisions seem to have been challenging the church in Corinth?**
- **What divisions do you see challenging the church today?**

Read 1 Corinthians 1:26-2:16.

In verses 1:29 and 1:31, Paul talks about boasting not for yourself, but for the Lord. The wise, Paul says, put their faith not in power or influence but in the message of the cross. So wisdom and humility are directly related.

- **How would you define Christian humility? What does it look like?**
- **How do our conversations today change if we approach them with the humility of Christ?**

Read 1 Corinthians 8:1-13 and 10:23-11:1.

Food sacrificed to idols seems to be a key issue of importance to Paul and the Corinthian community. In addressing the issue, Paul provides insights on how the Christian community should deal with ethical issues that divide or challenge it. Paul affirms boundaries of what one should and shouldn't do, and at the same time he argues that while the Christian may, in fact, be free to make individual choices, the upbuilding of the larger community is of utmost importance and, by necessity, may limit that freedom.

NOW WHAT

- How do we set boundaries of acceptable behavior today?
- Who gets to set those boundaries and can they be challenged?
- What do we do if we disagree with the boundaries of a community?
- What does “all things are lawful, but not all things are beneficial,” (10:23 in the NRSV) mean to you?

Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-13.

Followers of Jesus orient all of life and community around the love of God and neighbor.

- What does 1 Corinthians chapter 13 teach the church about love?
- How does the church embody this kind of love today? How is it failing?

FaithFit Challenge!

Practice humility this week. Put a wristband on for the week, or put something in your pocket that you wouldn't ordinarily carry. Any time you complain, or feel yourself judging someone else, move the wristband to the other arm or switch the object to the other pocket. As you do, quietly pray: “Lord, let me be humble for You.”