

## Fueling Up

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Acts 1:12-26

I knew two things when my friend Dave showed up for Church on Sunday morning: First, knew that Dave was basically OK and, second, I knew that something had gone very wrong. Dave was a hunting buddy, who was in our church's college ministry with me. I say I knew something had gone wrong because Dave looked really bizarre: His hair, which was thick and curly, was gone from here to about here. He had no eyebrows, and most of his face was bright red. It looked like he had fallen asleep in a tanning booth. It looked like a boiled lobster. Except for one thing: Etched into his face, in lines that alternated between normal colored flesh and lobster colored flesh, was a very particular expression - that looked like this - frozen in mid-flinch! When he took off his glasses, you could see a perfect outline of his frames.

I asked Dave what on earth had happened to him. He explained that his cousin, Neil, had built a home-made rocket. Because it was home-made, they weren't too sure about the fuel and it didn't have a proper fuse, so they decided it would be safer if they made a trail of black powder (gunpowder) from what they thought was a safe distance to the rocket - just like in the cartoons. What they didn't realize is that black powder isn't like normal gunpowder. It doesn't just burn. It basically explodes.

So when David, who was flinching, touched the powder with the match - it pretty much all went up at once - just like in the cartoons - and the rocket never launched. But he did get a new hairdo. Once his eyebrows grew back, he was fine. David learned a very important lesson that day: If you're going to launch, you've got to have the right fuel!

Let me ask you a question today: What is it that fuels the launch of a church? What is the right fuel? What will propel a church to the kind of success that God wants it to have? Is the right fuel a great plan? Is it a compelling vision of what could be - with a well-crafted mission statement that people can easily get behind? Is that what fuels a church for launch? Or is it maybe a charismatic leader? A Pastor that easily connects with people and inspires them? Is the Church fueled by a great location? A place with lots of traffic and great curb appeal? Is it fueled by its friendliness and relationality? By the quality of its music? What is it that fuels the launch of the church?

Well, all these things are good, and they can all help a church as it launches. But I don't think that they are the correct answer to the question. Today we are going to read a passage about the preparation for the launch of the first church that ever existed: The Church at Jerusalem. This passage is going to show us two things that are even more basic than plans and leaders and location and music that fueled the launch of this first church.

We are continuing today in our series called "Launch." This study of the beginning of the church in the early chapters of the book of Acts. If you think of the church as kind of a Rocket - hopefully not the kind that David's cousin built - but still a rocket. Last week, we kind of talked about the

guidance system: How God guides us not by giving us the plan but by giving us his power, and his purpose, and his presence - so the guidance system.

Next week we are going to talk about ignition - literally - because the Apostles are going to have flames over their heads! This week we are going to look at their final preparations for launch and what really fuels the church. We will see two things, and these are two things that we are going to need in abundance if our church is going to launch successfully.

These are two very basic things. It doesn't get much more basic than what we are going to look at today. But two very necessary things - and I hope that as we look at this story and see these components that fueled the church - that we will be encouraged to grow in these two things, both individually and as a church, that these things - and not the aesthetics - will fuel our church - and launch it to growth.

So let's read Acts 1:12-26, the next step in the story of the Church's launch. Just to remind you - as we come to this part of the story, Jesus has just told the Apostles to go to Jerusalem and wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Then he ascended into heaven. Let's pick the story up at verse 12:

*Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city. When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.*

*In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) and said, "Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus - he was one of our number and shared in this ministry." (With the reward he got for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out. Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) "For," said Peter, "it is written in the book of Psalms, "May his place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in it,' and, "May another take his place of leadership.'*

*Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection."*

*So they proposed two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. Then they prayed, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs." Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles. - Acts 1:12-26*

What fuels a church for its launch? What provides the impetus - the momentum - that the church needs to accomplish its task? Well, the passage shows us two things. The first is this:

## A Rock Solid Faith

That is one of the most basic things that will fuel a church for its launch. This is an unusual passage. There's the whole intestines thing, but there is also this listing of the disciples, who were already listed in Luke. There is this lengthy story of replacing Judas with Matthias, and Matthias is never mentioned in the Bible again! This passage has always puzzled me. I've always wondered "what is this all about?"

The more I studied this thing the more I came to see that this is all about faith: This passage is a display of the unshakable, life-changing, rock-solid faith that the resurrection of Jesus brought to the disciples. Listen to me: The resurrection changed everything. Everything in this passage is a display of the rock-solid faith that it gave to the disciples. Let me show you what I mean. I hope this blesses you. Let's just look at three simple questions from this story, and you'll see that it's all about resurrection faith:

1. Who? Who is in this story? Look at versus 12-14 again, Luke tells us:

*When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. 14 They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers. - Acts 1:12-14*

OK, so who's there? Everybody. Everybody that knew Jesus is there. All of the remaining disciples are there. Notice that Luke lists them all by name, so that if his readers have any questions they could confirm with the disciples or with people who knew them - that it was true - that every one of them believed in the resurrection.

The disciples are there. Luke tells us "the women" are there. By that, he means both the wives of the Apostles - and the women he mentioned in his gospel - those who followed Jesus - and those who were the first to see him resurrected: Mary, and Mary, and Joanna, and Salome. They were all there.

Luke tells us that Mary the mother of Jesus was there. I know your mom kind of has to be there for you, but it's really cool. Mary gave birth to Jesus, and now she's here for the birth of the church. So she's there. Then Luke tells us about one more group that's there. In the end of verse 14, Luke says these were all there. Look at the last words: "With his brothers." With Jesus' brothers. It may surprise you to hear this, but did you know that Jesus' brothers didn't believe in him during his ministry? In John 7, John is telling us about a conversation that Jesus had with his brothers, and John concludes the conversation with this statement: *For even his own brothers did not believe in him.* They didn't believe that Jesus was truly the Messiah. That was just six months before his crucifixion. But now - they believe. They're here. Everybody is here.

My point is simple: This is no hoax! The resurrection really occurred! The people that know Jesus best - the ones who knew what he looked like and how he had died - are all here. Just think - there

is no way they would have all come together if the resurrection wasn't real. You would have gotten one or two - but they're all here - even the doubters! The who is everybody.

Secondly, look at Where? Where does this take place? Look at verses 12-13:

*Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city. When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. - Acts 1:12-13*

Where is all this happening? In Jerusalem: The very city where 40 days ago, Jesus was captured - and tried - and flogged - and crucified. Listen, this is not a safe place for a follower of Jesus to be. Why on earth would they go back to such a dangerous place?

Notice where in the city the disciples are: They are in what Luke calls "the room." Quite possibly the same upper room they were in on the night that Jesus was betrayed. Again my point is just this: This is no place they would have been if they had any doubts about the resurrection.

The who? is everyone. The where? is Jerusalem. Now finally What? Look at what they are doing.

In verses 15-26 there is this lengthy account of how they chose Matthias to be one of the twelve. I have always wondered "Why is Luke telling us this?" Matthias is never mentioned again! Here's why it's important. Here's why Luke is telling us this: The apostles are preparing for Jesus to fulfill his promises! There had to be 12 faithful apostles. The number wasn't random. By the way, not even Paul could be in that elite group because although he had seen the resurrected Christ this passage tells us that to be one of the 12, you had to be with Jesus from the beginning of his ministry. You had to be able to "I saw the resurrected Jesus - and I knew the pre-resurrected Jesus well - and I can tell you for sure they are the same guy!"

And here's why I say there had to be 12: Look at what Jesus told his disciples:

*Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel - Matthew 19:28*

Jesus is going to restore the kingdom to Israel, just like the disciples asked him in last week's passage. There are going to be 12 thrones! We don't know the time when that's going to happen - but it is going to happen - there is still something special about Israel in God's sight.

There had to be 12 Apostles. They had to be with Jesus from the beginning. The disciples had to replace Judas not because he died. They didn't replace any of the other Apostles after they died - but because he left the faith. He's not going to be in the resurrection, so he can't rule. They have to have 12 because they are preparing for the resurrected Jesus - who has proven himself to them to fulfill his promises.

In fact, look how much the Resurrection has changed their view of things:

*"Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David concerning Judas" - Acts 1:16*

Peter's going to go on - and after the intestines part - he's going to give a couple of quotes from Psalms 69 - which is all about Jesus - and Psalms 109. The point is Peter no longer sees Judas' betrayal as just an accident - or as a tragedy - or something God wishes he could have stopped. He now sees it as a necessary fulfillment.

The resurrection changed everything for these guys. They saw the evidence of the resurrection. It was like big tsunami that just overthrew their earth-bound thinking and caused a giant paradigm shift and suddenly they got it! They got what Jesus had said to them again and again. Suddenly everything made sense in light of the resurrection. It was like one of those giant binocular machines on top of sky-scrappers. You look through the eyepieces - and you don't see anything - and then someone drops a quarter in - and all the sudden you can see! It makes sense.

That was what the resurrection was like for the disciples. It changed everything. It changed the way they thought about danger and being in Jerusalem. It changed the way they thought about injustice - like Judas' betrayal. It changed their priorities.

It transformed these fearful disciples into Apostles, who had to replace Judas because they knew that Jesus was going to fulfill his promises and had to go to Jerusalem because that was where they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. They would never be the same. They had a rock-solid faith.

I know that we haven't seen the resurrected Christ like they had. It's not the same for us. But I long for our church to be fueled by a rock-solid faith. I want us to truly believe in the Resurrection of Jesus. You see the evidence, right? He appeared to people after his resurrection – ten times that we know of in Scripture. Paul tells us he appeared to over 500 people at once. He ate with them. He let them touch him. And they believed. Everyone believed. Luke gives names. Even the unbelieving believe. In the end, Jesus' brother James gave his life for the truth of the resurrection.

This wasn't a legend. There were eyewitnesses. This wasn't an exaggeration. Read the way the New Testament writers write. They don't exaggerate. They tell the plain truth. This wasn't a hallucination. Hallucinations aren't visible to 500 people. Jesus was resurrected. I want us to truly believe that.

Because that belief becomes the foundation that helps us to think rightly about our faith. Christianity is not just a set of ceremonies we do to earn God's approval. It's not a collection of principles to live by. It's not just nifty sayings or mottos of home spun wisdom. It's a truth claim. It's based on an actual event that really happened.

Here's how it fuels the church. If we think rightly about our faith - then just like it did for the Apostles - it will change the way we view everything. It will change what we think about danger - and injustice - the way we talk and live - where we want to be - it will change what we see as wins and losses in our job - and our family - and our life. It will change the way we view everything.

We will be a sending Church. One that sends our best and brightest to share the gospel around the Triangle and around the world. One that is all about the gospel. The things we're going to see as we read the book of Acts will make perfect sense to us if we really believe the resurrection. Because without the resurrection, what we see in Acts makes no sense at all.

The first thing that fueled the launch of the early church is rock solid faith. There's another element that fueled the early church:

## **Passionate Corporate Prayer**

Look at verse 14. Luke tells us something very important about these people who had come to believe in the resurrection:

*They (the apostles) all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers. - Acts 1:14*

The launch of the early church was not just fueled by faith - although that is most fundamental - it was also fueled by passionate corporate prayer. There was prayer.

We believe in the power of prayer here at Perry Creek Church! It's one of our five core values (along with Bible, Family, Community, and Mission). We believe in it!

We believe in it, because at times - we have seen prayer change the situation. How many of you have really seen God answer prayer? You've heard some of my stories about how I've seen God provide for us - and protect us - and heal - and change hearts through prayer.

I was thinking this week, about a counseling situation that Kelley and I had - and I can't give details - but it was an unbeliever and a believer that were partnered together, and just before we met, I asked God to do something very specific - very outside the box - something that you would say there is absolutely NO WAY that is going to happen. And it did. Within five minutes it did.

That unbeliever later told me "I don't believe in God, but I'm starting to - because it was like he was right there telling me "You're going to do this, and you're going to do it right now!" Prayer changed that situation!

So that happened, but it doesn't always happen. There are plenty of times when I've prayed, and the situation pretty much seemed to stay the same. God didn't change things. Prayer sometimes changes the situation.

Prayer always changes me in the situation. When we pray, it may change the situation but it always changes us. Prayer encourages us. It has a way of giving us the strength to go on. Prayer gives us peace in the midst of the storm. Prayer enables us to perceive God's will, so that if he doesn't open the door for us, we can understand why he doesn't - and if he does - we can act.

Prayer changes us. Notice what's going on here in Acts 1: The disciples aren't praying to change the situation. Jesus has already told them that he is going to send the Holy Spirit. They're not praying to change that. So why are they praying? They are praying because they want their hearts to be ready. They have no idea what this is going to be like, so they are asking for God's grace to recognize the Holy Spirit when he comes. They want God to change them - to make them ready. In fact, sometimes I think that's why God doesn't answer our prayers and change the situation. Sometimes we aren't ready for the answer yet. Prayer may change the situation - and it always changes us.

Notice this isn't just any kind of prayer. This is passionate corporate prayer. Look at the beginning of verse 14 again. The New International Version puts it this way:

*They all joined together constantly in prayer - Acts 1:14*

That is a pretty vanilla translation of a very powerful verse! You could literally translate the verse: "these all kept on being busily engaged in prayer, like-mindedly"

The idea - expressed by both the words and tenses that Luke uses here - is that these guys were passionately engaged in unifying prayer - together. They were devoting themselves to praying passionately not just as individuals - but as a unified, like-minded group. It was passionate corporate prayer.

I have to say - that it's true - there are benefits to praying alone: You can really pour your heart out to God, and sometimes you can really hear him. The longer I am a Christian the more I am aware of the benefit of praying together. There's just something different about praying as a group. It's just special - not because you get to show off how well you can pray. It's just God just seems to work differently, powerfully when we pray together.

Jesus said "if two or three of you agree on earth about something it will be done in heaven." I don't know everything that that means. I believe he is saying that there is something special about corporate prayer.

This is the kind of prayer we do every other Thursday night at Joel and Allison Brown's house when we do Prayer on the Porch. We meet. We share requests. We don't talk about praying. We pray. Listen, it changes us. It unifies us. It reminds us of our purpose as a church, and it encourages us. I can't tell you how many times I have been discouraged - and busy - and I wonder if I should go - and I always leave encouraged. Always.

We're going to meet there this Thursday night at 7:00pm. I really want to urge you guys to be there. Maybe you say "I'm really busy." I hear that - I'm busy too - but I'm always glad when I take the time to join together there in prayer.

Maybe you would say "I don't know to pray - I would be embarrassed." Listen - that's OK. Not everybody prays out loud. You don't have to pray. What better way to learn how to pray than to pray with other Christians, some of whom have been praying for a long time?

I would really urge you to be there, because we want to be a church that is fueled by prayer. We want to be a church, that like this church in Jerusalem is birthed out of passionate, unifying, expectant corporate prayer. We want to see God move in our situations and sometimes change them. But more than that - we want to see him move in us - to give us clarity - and boldness - and unity as we seek his will. That is what is going to fuel our launch.

Because of that, let me say one last thing: Terrye Johnson is going to lead us in a prayer initiative as we move toward launch. She's going to pray here every Sunday at 10:00 before our services start. She will likely have some other prayer opportunities for us as a congregation. If you'd like to join Terrye - just talk to her or to Allison after the service - and we'll get you connected.

As we move toward launch, we want to be fueled not by aesthetics but at our core. We want to be fueled by God's movement - by rock solid faith - and by passionate corporate prayer.

Benediction: *Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* - Matthew 28:18-20