

Introduction

Good morning, everyone. Thanks so much for coming. As you heard, today is a little different Sunday for us. Each year about this time, we pause and say thanks to God as we take note of all the ways God has used us in the lives of our Foothills family, in our community, and throughout the world through our global Alliance family.

If you are a guest today, this is actually a great day to be here. You'll get to hear about some of the good things God is doing in and through our church and be a part of our celebration.

There will be a moment when we briefly call on the Foothills Family membership to approve our budget for the next year of ministry plans. And to affirm the nominations of our new Leadership board members. It will be quick and painless.

If you're a regular part of our Foothills Family, we've made copies of the pertinent details available for you over the last three weeks, you've had time to interact with us on any questions, and today we will formally approve all of this, so we can get on with another year of meaningful ministry together.

And topping off all of this, following our 11 am service this morning, we will be providing a free BBQ lunch for all of you to enjoy while we baptize 12 new believers, and dedicating 6 children. So, I hope you can plan to be part of that event.

[Transition] - If you've been around our church, you know that over the past several months we have been stepping through the book of Acts.

Acts is the detailed historical account of the first of the first believers who followed Jesus. It's also the powerful story of how the Church got its start and how the first Christians began to spread the news of Jesus, his resurrection, and the powerful transformations he can generate in your life.

There were three key themes in our series that I want to revisit today to set up our celebration time. First...we learned the church is empowered by the very spirit of God.

Acts 1:8 says, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

The Church is empowered by Holy Spirit

Those earliest followers were not to try and spread the news in their own power, or by their own abilities, or force anything to happen.

They were told to gather and wait until the Holy Spirit filled them and empowered them to spread the great news about Jesus. And as we followed the story, that's exactly what the Spirit did. He filled them. He prompted them. He equipped them, opened doors for them, protected them, led them to specific people, inspired them with specific messages, and used each of them according to their unique gifting and wiring.

And here's the crazy news...He's still doing that today! The Spirit is longing to fill you and empower you...not just for your life transformation, but to enable you to be his witness in all the orbits of your life.

[Illustration] - Recently, God's been pressing on me to be more present and available for my neighbors in my cul-de-sac. We have good relationships with all our neighbors. But, the Spirit has been prompting me to be more present and available and to be more in the mix of neighborhood life. So, I'll keep ya posted. But, I'm consciously inviting the Spirit to fill me and to lead me for his purposes, just as the Spirit in Acts did for those early witnesses.

[**Transition**] - The second key theme we observed in our journey through Acts is born out of the this first one. Since the Holy Spirit is empowering the Church, the Church is an unstoppable force, an unstoppable spreading fire.

The Church is an unstoppable force.

Through our series in Acts we saw religious forces, political forces, and just plain evil forces do their best to resist, squelch, and stamp out this new movement called Christianity.

But, no matter how hard they tried to kill it, the church lived on. No matter how many times they tried to snuff it out, the flame rekindled and burned on.

Illustrations:

>The Apostles would be questioned and persecuted, but then Acts 5:42 said, "Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah."

>After another wave of persecution, Acts 9:31 said, "Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers."

>In chapter 12 Herod killed Jesus' brother James, intended to do the same to Peter, and he intended to persecute some who belonged to the church. But, in the end, God sprung Peter from Jail, and Herod was eaten by worms and died...but the text tells us, right on the heels of all that, "*the word of God continued to increase and spread*" (24).

>When Paul was stoned and left for dead outside the city, the text said, "*But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe*" (14:20).

Time after time...in the face of persecution, resistance, anger, hostility and riots, the flame of the church burned on...and on...and on. The church proved herself over and over again...she was an unstoppable force.

Our world, and our culture is desperately looking for hope. Traditional values, foundational structures, and common sense morals that have kept our society relatively stable are now under attack like never before.

We've all seen things in the last few years we never thought we'd see. In many ways, life feels more unpredictable than ever. Never before are people craving hope like they are in these days. People are craving stability. People are craving something they can hope in that is solid.

The church is an unstoppable force...and we must step up and be the presence of Jesus in a world that has lost its way.

[Transition] - The third key theme I want to highlight is this: Just as the first Christians were empowered by the Spirit and called to spread the news about Jesus...now it's our turn!

Now, it's our turn!

It's our turn to be empowered. It's our turn to be an unstoppable force for Jesus. It's our turn to be his witnesses. It's our turn to carry the flame of the gospel.

>This is why our ongoing unstoppable purpose as a church is; Our Purpose: "To connect people to Jesus and help them grow to love and serve him."

The first two key themes...The empowerment of the Holy Spirit which makes the church an unstoppable force; can encourage us to pursue this mission wholeheartedly.

You won't fulfill your calling and purpose in your own power and ingenuity. And as a church we won't fulfill our purpose through ginned up energy and strategic planning. Everything we watched the believers do in the book of Acts was God initiated, God directed, God empowered, and God accomplished!

And that's the only way you and I, and together as a church, will be able to answer God's call on our lives. We must live, and move, and live our lives out surrendered and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

And this year, we believe the budget before you, and the nominees to our leadership team will enable us to answer God's call on our church. So, let's keep going. Let's keep surrendering to the Spirit. Let's keep loving God and others well.

Now it's our turn to take the powerful news of Jesus to our neighbors and the nations. Let's do this together...let's do this faithfully!