Power from on High April 12, 2026
1 of 12 in *The Holy Spirit Series: Book of Acts Edition* Acts 1:1-11

Today, as we begin a new sermon series, I'd like to take you back to a moment I've shared about before, but it continues to stay with me.

It was early January 2025—not quite a year and a half ago. Our Ministry Staff Team had gathered here at Cornerstone Centre for our first meeting of the new year. It was one of those cold, blustery winter mornings—the kind that makes you instinctively pull your coat tighter as you make your way in from the parking lot.

Once we had settled in, Pastor Jeremy invited us to spread out in the building and find quiet, solitary spaces where each of us could listen for a personal word from God for the year ahead.

I made my way to Room 101, where I stood by the tall windows, looking out over the church property. And then I heard it—a gust of wind. Powerful. Steady. Invisible, apart from the trees outside which bowed in unison beneath its force.

Right away, I sensed that God had given me a word: *Wind.* And at the very same time, I sensed that this word wasn't only for me—it was for Cornerstone. For all of us.

We were entering a season of prayer and discernment as a church, seeking God's direction for our next chapter of ministry. And in that moment, it felt clear: God was inviting us to depend more deeply on the guidance, fullness, and power of his Spirit—the *Holy Spirit*—so often pictured in scripture as *wind*.

You see, Christians believe that the one true God exists in a loving community of three persons called the Trinity—Father, Son and *Holy Spirit*. So, the Holy Spirit is God, the third person of the divine Trinity—not some impersonal energy force, but the personal presence of God himself— active in the world and in the hearts and lives of all who follow Jesus.

We read in Acts chapter 2 that as Jesus' disciples huddled in prayer on the day of Pentecost:

> Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent <u>wind</u> came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting… All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit… [1]

As the Holy Spirit came upon those disciples, the church of Jesus Christ was born. And from that day forward, the Spirit has been propelling the church into the world for the sake of God's mission to restore all things in Christ.

Now, it's as if God is saying to us at Cornerstone:

> *The wind is coming afresh, so hoist your sails. I'm preparing to breathe new life into you, and to propel you forward as a church, for the sake of my world-restoring mission, through the life-transforming power of my Spirit.*

[1] Acts 2:2, 4a (NIV)

Now, we don't set the church's course based on one person's impression alone, whether that impression is mine or anyone else's. And so, in the weeks after the prompting I received on that cold winter's morning in Room 101, I shared with our ministry staff and others in the congregation this sense of God inviting Cornerstone to a deeper experience of and dependence on the Holy Spirit. I also shared the word that had come to me that morning— *wind*. As those conversations unfolded, there was a shared sense of: *yes, this is right.*

And so, combined with some other significant signs of affirmation, plans were made for an extended journey of biblical teaching focused on the person and work of the Holy Spirit. That teaching has taken the shape of a "series of series," which we've simply called *The Holy Spirit Series*.

Last fall, we began with the *Gospel of John Edition* of the Holy Spirit series. Next year, we plan to explore the person and work of the Holy Spirit in the letters of the apostle Paul. But today, we launch into the *Book of Acts Edition* of the Holy Spirit Series.

Acts is the story of what happens when the promised Holy Spirit is poured out on all God's people. It's the story of how Jesus' disciples are *set into motion* as a community that would come to be known as *the followers of the Way*.

Of course, this year we've been leaning into that same theme at Cornerstone. We too are *On the Way*, following Jesus into the future he has for us as a church. But as we learn from the opening chapter of the book of Acts:

> Before the movement… there is waiting.
> Before the witness… power must be received.
> Before the church goes… the Spirit must come.

And so, Jesus says to his disciples: "Do not leave Jerusalem… but wait for the gift my Father promised."

In other words: Don't try to walk the Way in your own strength. *Wait for the wind.*

With that in mind, let's turn to today's text in Acts chapter 1, where we learn three important truths that matter deeply for our life and mission as a church, as well as for each of us personally.

1. Jesus continues his work through us.

Not everyone realizes this, but Acts was written by Luke as part two of a two-volume set— his first volume being his gospel.

As he did in the opening verses his gospel, Luke addresses Acts to someone named Theophilus.[2] We don't know exactly who this was, but many scholars think he might have been a Roman official who was either a new Christian or perhaps someone exploring the Christian faith. Luke's stated purpose is to offer Theophilus an orderly account of the story of Jesus. And so, he begins the book of Acts with these words:

[2] Luke 1:1-4

> In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. [3]

Here, we learn that the Gospel of Luke tells us what Jesus *began* to do and to teach. The book of Acts tells us what Jesus *continues* to do and to teach.

This lands with particular weight for Cornerstone, because we've just spent the past several weeks walking through Luke's gospel in our Lenten series, *On the Way with Jesus.* All through that series, we journeyed with Jesus as he moved closer and closer to Jerusalem and his cross. Along the way, we witnessed how he taught about and embodied the kingdom of God—proclaiming good news to the poor, welcoming outsiders, healing broken people, and confronting injustice.

Then, he went to the cross, rose from the dead, and in Acts 1 Luke tells us that he appeared to his disciples over a period of forty days. During this time, the text says that the risen Jesus continued to do what he had always done: He spoke about the kingdom of God.

It's the same message, the same mission. But now, something is about to change. The same Jesus who was "on the way" in Luke's gospel will now carry his kingdom mission forward *through his people*. Perhaps this is why, as I mentioned earlier, the first Christians would become known as *followers of the Way.* [4]

And Luke makes it clear that this continuation of Jesus' mission through his people is grounded in something absolutely solid: the resurrection.

He tells us that Jesus gave "many convincing proofs" that he was alive. He appeared to his disciples. He spoke with them, even ate with them. This wasn't mass hallucination, wishful thinking or spiritual metaphor. This was embodied, historical reality.

Why does Luke emphasize this? He does so because everything that follows in the book of Acts is built on this foundation: *Jesus is alive.* Not *was once* alive, but *is* alive *now*—reigning, present, and at work.

Which means the mission of the church is not about carrying on the memory of a great teacher. It's about participating in the ongoing work of a living King.

So, when we talk about our future as a church, we don't just set our own strategic plans. *We discern where Jesus is already at work and how he's inviting us to join him.* In Cornerstone's case, we've prayerfully discerned together that the future Jesus is calling us into involves four Guiding Priorities:

Guiding Priorities for Cornerstone's Next Chapter

- Deeper and wider discipleship

[3] Acts 1:1-3 (NIV)
[4] Acts 9:1–2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22.

- Building bridges across difference
- Joining God in our neighbourhood
- Cornerstone Centre as a hub of connection and belonging [for the wider community]

Each of these priorities speak of the ongoing work of Jesus in this world—work he wants to do *through us*.

The book of Acts makes it clear that when Jesus ascends back to heaven, Jesus is not withdrawing—*he's reigning*. He's not stepping back—he's stepping into a new mode of presence, where he's no longer limited to one place at one time, but is at work everywhere, through his people, by the Holy Spirit.

So, Acts becomes the story of *Jesus' ongoing work through ordinary people*:

> People like Peter, who had failed him.
> People like Thomas, who had doubted him.
> People like the rest of the disciples, who still didn't really get what was going on.

And yet—Jesus continues his work through them. This should be deeply encouraging for us, because it means he also continues his work through people like you and me.

> Not because we have it all together.
> Not because we've got it all figured out.
> But because Jesus is alive, and is at work in and through his people.

That's who we are—a people on the Way, walking with Jesus, being formed by Jesus, and participating in the ongoing work of Jesus in the world.

But this is only possible because of the second truth we find in today's passage:

2. The Holy Spirit empowers us for mission.

If Jesus continues his work through us, it's essential to understand that *we cannot do that work in our own strength.*

This is why Jesus gives what might seem like a surprising command to his disciples. After everything they've experienced—three years of following him, hearing his teaching, witnessing his miracles, and now encountering him alive after his resurrection—you might expect him to say, "You're now ready. Get started. Take this message to the world."

Instead, we read that:

> On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." [5]

[5] Acts 1:4-5 (NIV)

This is an echo of Jesus's words back in Luke's gospel. There, speaking of the Holy Spirit, he said:

> "I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." [6]

The apostles had a message to share, but they did not yet have the power to live it out and proclaim it in a way that would truly transform lives. Even for them, **knowing about Jesus' message is not the same as being empowered by Jesus**.

So, Jesus tells them to wait for the outpouring of his Spirit, the Holy Spirit. For them, this was the beginning of something entirely new—a historic moment in God's redemptive story, when the Spirit would come to dwell in and empower all God's people for the very first time.

For those who follow Jesus since then, the Spirit has already been given. We are not waiting for a *first filling* in the same way the disciples were. And yet, we are still called—again and again—to *fresh fillings*, a continual prayerful seeking of the Spirit's power to work in and through us.

Which means the command to "wait" still speaks.

Not because the Spirit has not been given—but because we so often live as though we can do without him. And so, in our text, Jesus goes on to tell the apostles:

> "But 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." [7]

The word he uses for power—*dynamis* (in the Greek)—speaks of real, active, effective power. This isn't a vague sense of encouragement or a confidence boost. It is the very power of God, present and at work in and through his people.

And notice the purpose of that power. Jesus doesn't frame it in terms of personal experience or spiritual intensity, even if those things do have their place. He connects it directly to *mission*: "You will receive power… and you will be my *witnesses*."

In other words, the Holy Spirit is given not simply for our comfort, but for our calling to mission. The Spirit empowers us to *bear witness*—to speak and to live in such a way that others encounter the reality that Jesus is alive and that he is Lord.

In the first-century world, when a new king came to power, messengers would be sent out across the land announcing the good news: there is a new ruler, and his reign has begun. That's the backdrop here. Through his death, resurrection, and ascension, Jesus has been enthroned as King, and now his followers are sent out as witnesses to that reality. But—and this is crucial—they are not sent out on their own. They are sent out in the power of the Holy Spirit.

This also helps us understand something important about the nature of God's kingdom. It doesn't advance the way earthly kingdoms do. It isn't established through force, political maneuvering, or

[6] Luke 24:49 (NIV)
[7] Acts 1:8 (NIV)

human strength. Instead, it spreads through Spirit-empowered witness—through ordinary people whose lives are shaped by the presence of God and whose words and actions point others to Jesus.

And so, before the church moves *outward*, it must first learn to look *upward*. Before the disciples go into the world, they are called to remain in Jerusalem, to wait, and—as we see in the following verses—to *pray* together. Their waiting is not inactivity; it is an act of dependence. It is a recognition that the mission they have been given is beyond their natural ability to accomplish.

And that speaks directly into our life as a church.

Because it is very possible for us, even with the best intentions, to begin relying primarily on our own strength. We can lean on planning, organization, know-how and effort. Those things have their place, but if we're not careful, we can become very busy doing good things, and yet slowly drift into functioning as though everything ultimately depends on us.

Acts 1 gently but firmly calls us back from that posture. It reminds us that the mission of God is not sustained by mere human ingenuity and strength, but by the power of the Holy Spirit.

So, the invitation of this passage is both simple and searching: **will we rely on our own strength, or will we seek the empowerment of the Holy Spirit?**

For over a year now, I've been praying every night for God to do a deep work of the Holy Spirit in our midst here at Cornerstone—purifying us, making us more Christlike in character, fanning into flame the gifts his Spirit has given the people of this body, and of course empowering us for the mission he's called us to as a local church. In scripture, these things are all aspects of the Holy Spirit's ministry.

I have a question for you: Would you join me in praying this way each day? After service, we'll be handing out special cards with a simple but powerful prayer for a deep move of the Holy Spirit here at Cornerstone. Take one, keep it someplace where you'll see it, and join me in praying that prayer each day. Who's in?

Let's move on to the third truth that our passage points to:

3. We are called to live "between the times"—and get on with the mission!

As followers of Jesus, we live in an "in-between" time. God's kingdom has *already* been inaugurated through Jesus' birth, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension. But obviously, God's kingdom has *not yet* fully come "on earth as it is in heaven."

Acts 1 captures something of the tension of living between the *already* and the *not yet* of God's kingdom. Just before Jesus ascends to heaven, the disciples ask:

> "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"
>
> He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But 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."

> After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.
>
> They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven." [8]

The disciples were still thinking in terms of Israel's restoration as a nation, but God's kingdom isn't limited to Israel. It's about the restoration of the whole world in and through Jesus, the King.

When Jesus ascended to heaven, it signaled that he would soon send the Holy Spirit to empower his followers to live and work as agents of God's kingdom, bringing God's forgiving love, justice and renewal in an ever-expanding circle—like ripples in a pond— from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

That said, the *fullness* of God's kingdom will not come until Jesus returns to earth in the same way the disciples saw him go into heaven. That's when he will set the whole world right, once and for all.

Until then, we are called to live between the times. We are called to live in the tension of the *already* and the *not yet* of God's kingdom. What does this mean for us as followers of Jesus?

Here's what it does *not* mean: It does not mean gazing up into heaven in passive wonderment as we wait for Jesus to return. In our text, when the disciples were doing just that, the angels said, "Why do you stand there looking into the sky?"

Instead, we are called to receive the power of the Holy Spirit, and then to act—to be Jesus' witnesses. In other words, we are called to get on with God's kingdom mission, which Jesus continues through us, his people.

New Testament scholar N.T. Wright describes the meaning of Jesus' ascension to heaven like this:

> Jesus goes up, the power comes down, and the kingdom gets going. What are we waiting for? [9]

We wait only to be filled afresh with the power of the Holy Spirit. And then we get on with the mission.

Like the disciples, we are sent out as witnesses into places of ordinary life, yet with eyes fixed on the kingdom that is coming. Our work is real, meaningful, and Spirit-empowered, but it is part of a larger story—a story that will only be completed when Jesus returns and God's restoration of this world is fully realized.

In practical terms, living between the times challenges us to ask: How do we carry the "already" of God's kingdom into the "not yet" of our neighborhoods, workplaces, and communities? How do we embody

[8] Acts 1:6b-11 (NIV)
[9] N.T. Wright, *Lent for Everyone: Luke, Year C: A Daily Devotional*, p. 123.

God's love, justice, and hope in ways that point others toward the kingdom—even when we can't yet see the full outcome?

That's why we need to pray fervently for a deep move of the Holy Spirit in our midst (remember to grab a prayer card when you go today). And empowered by the Spirit, we get on with the mission God has given us. Because that's why we're here.

Today, we've seen three vital truths from Acts chapter 1:

1. Jesus continues his work through us.
2. The Holy Spirit empowers us for mission.
3. We are called to live "between the times"—and get on with the mission!

Instead of staring up at heaven, may we look around—at the people, places, and moments God has put before us. The wind of the Spirit is already blowing. The power from on high has been given—even as we continue to seek it afresh, again and again. Jesus is alive, reigning, and at work through us. So, let's hoist our sails, catch the wind of the Spirit, and step into the mission—joining God in setting the world right, one Spirit-empowered act of love and witness at a time.

Closing Prayer

Benediction

May the power of the Holy Spirit fill you afresh this day. May Jesus continue his work through you, and may you walk boldly in the mission he calls you to—bringing hope, love, and restoration to the world around you. Go now, hoist your sails, and let the wind of the Spirit propel you into God's kingdom work, until Jesus returns. Amen.