

The Upside-down Kingdom

Today is the Sunday we celebrate Pentecost, the arrival of the Holy Spirit to indwell all those who believe.

It's a little ironic for me to be the one teaching on this Sunday but I'll trust that I have plenty to be reminded of and grow from this just as much as you.

I think I've had a complicated relationship with the Holy Spirit, like many people do, and so it's good to challenge my preconceived notions and be open to the leading of the Spirit.

While I believe the Holy Spirit has been at work in my life, I don't know if I've always been aware of these moments or have been able to trust the moments that I do experience.

And so that's why I think that this part of the Christian journey is something that I'm still being made perfect in, because of my challenges I've had in this relationship.

I need grace, hope, and love in this area, just like all of you!

To set the stage for today, I'd like to fill you in on some of what we've talked about at youth group this past school year.

We've been slowly going over the books of Luke and Acts and exploring one of the major themes that is still incredibly relevant to today: **The Upside-Down Kingdom.**

When I say the Upside-Down Kingdom, we don't see that explicitly written in scripture; instead, we typically see the Kingdom of God.

But what kicks off this message of a different kind of Kingdom takes place in the early chapters of Luke's Gospel.

First, the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus in **Luke 3:21-22**:

When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

Later, after being tempted in the wilderness, Jesus goes to Nazareth and is handed the scroll of Isaiah to read in the temple. He turns to the portion that reads **Luke 4:18-19**:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

He rolls the scroll back up and says "Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing". An ancient mic drop moment!

The Kingdom of God is being built for and by the poor and the powerless, the misfits, the untouchables, everyone whom Jesus, empowered by the Holy Spirit, says "come to me" and does!

The values of the Upside-Down Kingdom don't make sense on the surface, but Jesus calls us to something radically different, that challenges all of our preconceived notions of what it means to be his follower.

Radical generosity, servant leadership, peacemaking, forgiveness, holiness and healing, all being shared with those we may already struggle to love or care about! That is a huge ask! How are going to be able to even do this?

Fast forward to John chapter 14 and Jesus is preparing his followers by promising them the coming of the Holy Spirit.

John 14:26-29 reads:

But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

The phrase, “I want to believe” comes to mind from those X files posters. It’s one thing to hear words of comfort or see miraculous things being done, but it’s another to truly believe them.

Jesus’ followers would go through the excruciating difficulty of his death and the later joy of the resurrection, only to be left behind at the ascension.

They were practically helpless in a world that did not understand them.

Prior to liftoff, Jesus reassured them of the hope they needed to hold onto, their mission of inaugurating the kingdom, and that they would not be alone with the Holy Spirit’s arrival.

Later on, Jesus says to them in **John 16:12-15**:

“I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.”

What’s interesting is that Jesus pulls a “a few good men” reference and tells them “You can’t handle the truth”.

The story so far is incomplete and while I bet Jesus would love to tell them more, He knows that right now, they won't truly "get it" until the coming of the Holy Spirit and when they do receive the Spirit, it's going to make all the difference in building the Upside-Down Kingdom.

Now we get to Acts which starts off with instructions from Jesus in **Acts 1:1-8**:

"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. 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."

Then they gathered around him and asked him, "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."

And so, they eagerly are waiting for this time to arrive, and it does at Pentecost in **Acts 2:1-10, 38-39**:

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of

them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"

... 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. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call."

Peter is saying that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is laid out before us, to turn away from what hinders and to receive the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, and that this is for all of the current and future residents of the Upside-Down kingdom, which we know to be a whole lot of people who are different and unique, but are united in their love for Jesus.

This is not something they or we can ever do completely on our own, we need community and to foster a community that looks a little more like Jesus and a little less like an exclusive club for only the right people with all the right answers.

We can only live out that community and invite others into it through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

Through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, Jesus consistently destroyed the preconceived notions of his followers and future be followers and probably even those that chose not to follow him.

He did so with his radical generosity, servant leadership, peacemaking, forgiveness, holiness, and healing.

This would eventually lead to heart, mind, and action changes in their lives and in turn would spread to others.

I don't think that's too far off from the context that we're living in today.

We are building the **Upside-Down Kingdom** one person at a time through showing Jesus' love for everyone by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

Before we close, I'd like to leave you with a couple closing questions to ponder this week:

- **Who are the people in your life that you struggle to see belonging in the Upside-down Kingdom?**
- **What Upside-down Kingdom values do you feel like you're doing a great job of practicing towards yourself and others? What ones could use a little more nurturing with the Holy Spirit's help?**

Let's Pray.