

You Shall be My Witnesses

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Loved ones, I'd like to share some things about what we'll be doing during the summer, but I'd like to share them through Acts 1 if you would look at it. It's the promise that we read before, that Jesus gave to the disciples, and it's the promise that has assured us that he will give us the same gift as he gave to them. Acts 1:8, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth."

I was in the Methodist Ministry when Jesus baptized me with the Holy Spirit, so I already had been, for maybe nine years, a minister of Christ. At least, I was concerned with bringing other people to Jesus, so that was a help in some ways because when I began to seek the fullness of the Holy Spirit, it was in the context of already being involved in his ministry. Except that I've shared before with you, how that doesn't matter too much, because you can easily pervert his ministry to your own purposes. I was as caught up with myself in the ministry as I could have been raking in the money at a Vegas casino. But it did mean that when I began to seek the fullness of the Holy Spirit, I was very clear in my own mind that it wasn't so that I could have a happier life. Do you see that? I was very clear in my mind; it wasn't so that I could have a happier life, even though I wanted a happier life; it was essentially so that I would have power and would be his witness.

I thought I'd share that with all of you tonight, because I know you're concerned about the fullness of the Holy Spirit and I think it's very easy to fall into the trap of saying, "Oh, I want to be filled with the Holy Spirit so that I don't have so much trouble with myself, or so that my wife doesn't have so much trouble with me, or so that I don't let myself down so much, or have to struggle so much with anger and unclean thoughts." Now loved ones, that isn't the purpose of the fullness of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is given freely; God fills us with the life that fills nature, and fills birds, and fills little dogs, and fills all the beautiful things in the world. God gives us that when we are willing to live for him and to spend our lives reflecting his beauty.

Now you can't get the Holy Spirit if you just want it for yourself. If you just want it for thrills and party games kind of excitement you won't enter into the fullness of the Holy Spirit; you'll enter some emotional deal that you'll call the baptism of the Holy Spirit, but it really won't be the fullness of the Holy Spirit. So it is pretty important to get that clear in your heart; that it's when you align yourself with God's purpose that he gives you the fullness of the Holy Spirit. That's why it's so clearly linked to witnessing in Jesus promise; but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. And what will you be -- you'll be rich, you'll be happy, you'll be joyous every day? No, you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem -- where you live, your own hometown, in Judea -- the area around about, maybe the place where you work, and then in Samaria -- the place where people don't like you, the other side of the tracks; the people that you don't understand, the people that don't understand you; and then unto the utter most parts of the earth.

So it is in those concentric circles, and that's a good way to find out how real your life with God is. If you're doing very well sending money to the missionaries on the other side of the world but your wife thinks you are the worst example of a child of God that she has ever met, then you can be

sure that you're not involved in the fullness of the Holy Spirit. It has to be in the concentric circles, it has to be in that order. I knew God had really changed my life when he changed it so that my wife could see it. That's the real test: if it's changed so that your loved one that you live with can see the change, then it's real. But loved ones, it is connected with the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

Now it might be good to see that that isn't where the disciples started. They started where all of us started. Mark 1:16-17 tells the story of Jesus going along the beach and speaking to the disciples. "And passing along by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net in the sea; for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, 'Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men.' And immediately they left their nets and followed him."

Now I'm with you; they did some more fishing during the rest of their lifetime. At times they had to fish to get food and they had to sell their fish in order to exist and to live. But that was the last time they ever fished as the main purpose of their life here on earth, because the Bible says, "They left their nets." They got hold of the idea that there was only one reason for being alive in this world, and that was to be fishers of men and so they left their nets. Now loved ones, I think America is a tricky place to grow up, because we not only have it pretty well hammered into us by our parents that our job is to get a good education, and get a good job, and not be a burden on society; but the school and the work place actually intensifies that for most of us.

The sheer competition of the whole society encourages you to get absolutely caught up in getting a good job that can enable you to support the size of a mortgage that you need, to buy the kind of house that you absolutely must have, in order that you'll enjoy life as any good red blooded American must enjoy it. We're kind of brainwashed with that stuff so it is impressed upon us that any son or daughter worthy of the name, will give their whole life to their job and to getting a good job, and to being faithful in that job, and to earning money through that job so that they can bring up their children. And then their children will go out and get an education and they'll get a good job, too. And they'll get more and it'll go on until the "mushroom cloud" (nuclear bomb) catches up with some group of little children who are trying to do the same thing as we are doing.

But it is true isn't it, that we are desperately caught up with earning our livelihood? And indeed, we've grown used to seeing our dad's move from place-to-place according to the demands of the company, so many of us ourselves have moved from place-to-place throughout the United States. Indeed, many of us have seen our home life fall apart because of the pressures of their jobs on our dad or our mum. And so you and I are absolutely committed to the idea that maybe God's first, but next comes your job.

Now loved ones, I know it sounds bad, but you can't be filled with the Holy Spirit if you continue to live like that. Sooner or later you have to come to see that the biggest thing in this world is not putting band aids on it to keep it going a little longer. And that's really what most of us are doing in our work, you know. Most of us, whether we're in engineering drilling oil wells, whether we're teachers, or lawyers, or nurses, whatever we are, most of us are involved in expressing the preserving grace of God keeping this world together somehow, so that his redeeming grace can get going. But do you see that that is not our primary task? You only have look at Mount Washington to see that the place is beginning to shake. And you'd hate to live in the San Andreas Fault at the moment, wouldn't you? We're all beginning to feel, "Yeah it's not looking as steady or stable a world as it was 40 years ago."

Loved ones, you cannot get caught up in the job of preserving the world for another few years. When Jesus comes along to you, he says, "But there's only one thing worth doing. I'll tell you; this world is going fairly fast, and the only thing worth doing is bringing people to know me and to know my Father, so that you can begin to enjoy the new world that we are preparing for you. But your main task in this world is not to keep it in existence, your main task in this world is not first and foremost to enjoy yourself, your main task in this world is to get to know me and to introduce others to me, you'll enjoy yourself as you do that. And then in the new world that I have prepared where there are no volcanoes, where there are no earthquakes, there is no disease, where there is no war, where there are no fights or battles, in that place, then you and I can get going onto developing the rest of this universe the way I had planned."

But loved ones, the first necessity is that you leave your nets. It's interesting that it's put that way, "They left their nets." I don't know if you've done any fishing, a guy started to show me how to cast a net. Well, I mean I ended up lying on the ground with the net all around me, but no fish anywhere near! And I began to realize it's easy to get entangled in nets. I wonder how many of us get entangled in our nets? I wonder how many of us have so got entangled with our jobs, and our businesses that that has become everything to us?

Now loved ones, do you see what I'm saying; I'm not saying pack it in – that is, quit -- that's dumb. I was like you, I taught school for eight years, and I give my whole heart to Jesus. The school teaching was not the be all and end all of my life; it was Jesus and bringing others to him, even though I did that part-time for five or six years. So I'm not saying you have to pack in your full-time job, but you have to pack in your full-time heart attitude to your job and you have to adopt a full-time heart attitude to bringing people into Jesus' friendship and into a relationship with God.

Loved ones, anything else is just a waste of time. It's the dumbest thing: why slog it out for 30 years to get a gold watch, and then see the whole company falling apart anyway after all your work? I don't know if you've seen it, but I've seen my Father do that. I've seen my Father go down to the place that he had spent years trying to build up and the German bombs just destroyed it absolutely. I think many of us have come to situations where we've seen our dad's or our mum's spend years and years trying to build something and the thing falls. It just isn't worth it.

We do have to work to earn our living, but do you see that Jesus is making it plain when he came along by the side of the disciples in the Sea of Galilee, he's making it plain, "Look, I want you by all means, to fish if you need to, to teach if you need to, to engineer if you need to, to administer finances if you need to, but actually I want you to come and do what I am not only living my life for, but what I'm dying for; to bring people to my Father, and to get to know me and know him so that we will be able to live together forever in peace, and in love, and in joy."

Now loved ones, until you adopt that attitude, you can't be baptized with the Holy Spirit. You do have to settle; what is going to be the main purpose of your life? You can see then, Jesus clinches it in the Great Commission which he gives to the disciples in Mark 16:15, "And he said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe; in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.'"

I think we're pretty dumb because we want to stay here and do a little picking up of demons, a little laying hands on the sick, a little bit of excitement of the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Do you see how silly it is? Do you think that all those things only come to someone who is like that? No, they come to someone who is moving; someone who is on their way. Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit anybody who is on their way; anybody who is moving out after the purpose that he has died for and that he has given us our lives to fulfill, that's it loved ones. Jesus won't give you the Holy Spirit for parlor games, or for a little bit of excitement, or a little nth degree of TM (transcendental meditation), he won't. He will only baptize you with the Holy Spirit, he will only lead you into those things, when you are moving, when you're on your way.

Do you know that China in 1890 had 1,300 missionaries throughout the Provinces of China, and they had 3,000 full-time Chinese Christian Evangelists? You find that in the book about Hudson Taylor and that was in 1900. Do you see it has to be done in every generation -- do you see that? It has to be done again, and again. It was done in 1870 then 1900, now it has to be done again. That's why you and I are alive today -- nobody living today is going to hear from the people that will take over after we die because this generation will have died by then. But you and I are committed to doing that all over again in China -- and India is the same. We think "Evangelize the world in our generation" is a new thing -- well, the guys and girls have always been doing that in the universities. They've always seen that it has to be done again in our generation.

And may I point out to you; that's the exciting life that God has for us. Can I point out to you that the deadliest, most boring thing in the world is to stay here in the States going to church every Sunday, and singing your hymns, and trying to keep a little bit of liveliness inside your heart? That's the dullest thing in the world. I know America needs saving, I know that. But really, it has a fair chance! It's hard to turn on that car radio without hearing that old gospel stuff -- we're so swamped with it, but loved ones, the rest of the world is empty, and there's an exciting world out there that is waiting for people like you and me.

And if you ask me, "To do what --to go and preach on street corners?" No, they don't need that; they've had enough of that hypocrisy. But the people in India do need some dear guys and girls like ourselves, who don't think we're anything great, who don't think we're coming as the great white missionaries to bestow something on the poor natives, but have come along side them as ordinary friends to go in with a drilling rig and begin to drill wells for water. And as we're doing that, they sense there's a beauty about these people, there's a love about them, there's a gentleness about them that they'd like to find out about.

That's what's needed in Africa. They don't need more of us building churches, they don't even need more of us giving out literature, though that would be good. But they need to see people like ourselves, going in on the same level as them, into schools teaching alongside them, working in their hospitals, working in villages, doing the kind of thing that Jesus did; helping people. If they needed water, he gave them water. If they needed bread, he gave them bread. Doing the things that God wants done and that he has committed us to do to develop his world in terms of his own will.

Loved ones, that's what's needed. And oh, really, you're missing the fun of life, I can tell you. I left Ireland, and it's far more fun leaving home, far more. It's far more exciting, and it takes you way beyond yourself. I know if I'd stay in Ireland I would've been a shrunken little creature. I know that God can expand you beyond anything that you think possible, if you will commit yourself to the Great Commission. Not to thumping them and saying, "Are you saved? You have to believe in

Jesus.” Not that stuff, but loving them, loving people, being kind, being alongside them, and having a real relationship with Jesus, yourself, in your prayer times, so that the Holy Spirit is able to touch them in his good time.

Loved ones, that’s why God gives the fullness of the Holy Spirit to us. When he said, “Don’t get drunk with wine, but be filled with Holy Spirit,” he knew drunk with wine, that’s nothing. You think it’s great -- it’s nothing compared with fullness of the Holy Spirit. No hangover, its continual, and it doesn’t cost any money! There’s nothing like it! When God combined those two that’s what he was saying: “The fullness of the Holy Spirit is what you need and it’s the counterfeit of that that you’re trying to satisfy yourself with. But I can only fill you with the Holy Spirit, I can only fill you with the liberty and the freedom of birds, and dogs, and fish; I can only fill you with the freedom of the sunshine and the breezes and the springtime; I can only fill you with that transcendent life that will lift you above the miserable pedestrian boredom of this ordinary every day life if you’ll come and be what I am. I’m bringing people to myself, will you join me in that? Will you make that the chief purpose of your life?”

Loved ones, that’s what this life is for, honestly. It’s not for our little attempts to keep ourselves alive -- don’t you feel we were made for something more than that; that we were made for something more than trying to balance that miserable checkbook? Don’t you feel you were made for something greater than that? But loved ones, it takes risk -- it does take risk, but the fullness of the Holy Spirit is for that, you see. So if you’re sitting here tonight and you’re thinking, “Well, I want to be baptized with the Holy Spirit, and I want to live above the miserable pedestrian boredom of this world, I do. But I want to hold onto what I’ve got. I want to hold onto my little job at the bank, I want to keep my little hopes to marry John, or Tom, or Gerald, or Peter, or Jane, and I want to have little babies, and I want to have a nice house in Bloomington.”

Loved ones, why get into a prison? Why get into a prison? If God gives you that to do, if he commands you to do that, then it will be joy, and the babies will be great, and the house in Bloomington will be a palace. But if you press yourself into that and say, “That is what I’m going to do; I’m going to prison whether you want me to or not.” If you have that attitude, God has to let you go to prison. And you see -- it will be prison unless it’s where Jesus wants you. But loved ones, it does not take a lot of logic, or a lot of common sense to see that we’re in remarkable shape here in America. You know the statistics: 75% of the world’s Christian workers are here in America among 200 million people -- I forget what that is but something like 7% of the world’s population. It just is obvious that God wants the greater majority of us here in this room abroad unless he tells us to stay here.

Now, you have to start somewhere. This summer what we’re going to do is have the evening services down in Colony Inn on the university campus. We’re probably going to put the chairs and tables back and have an informal setting there around that fountain. And we’re probably going to center the evening service around the whole experience of all of us in our day-to-day lives with Jesus. But the really big change is, after morning service, instead of going to the same park that we used to go to on the river every Sunday; we’re going to go to different places every Sunday afternoon. Some Sundays we’ll be at Lake Calhoun, another Sunday we’ll be at a different park, another time we’ll be down by the riverside. But we’ll go wherever people gather, wherever college people and school people gather. All of us will go there, and have our picnic, and just mix as Jesus guides us. Some of us will presumably play volleyball with each other, and some of us will sit and read, and some of us will do what we began to do in London 10 years ago; trust Jesus to lead us as we wander around to strike up conversations with people. And we’ll begin to trust the Holy Spirit to use those Sunday

afternoons, and use us in those Sunday afternoons. And then to begin to bring not only ourselves to Colony Inn on Sunday evening, but also bring loved ones that we will have met. Knowing that it won't be a kind of gospel preaching service, but it will be a loving time of enjoyable fellowship, with somebody telling a little of what God is in their life.

But loved ones, that's what we're going to do from the following Sunday on. I would say this to you; what are you going to do with your summer? There's no point in saying, "I agree with you. I do see that my life should be more outgoing. I do see that my life should have some cosmic purpose. I do see that I ought to be concerned with something other than my own little squirrel existence. I do see that and I'm going to do that sometime. When I get married, or when I get my job settled, or when I get my education over or when, when, when.....I'll do it." You know you're just saying you won't do it. Because actually, it doesn't begin when you get to Africa, it begins now. You decide to begin to live your life for God now.

So I would ask you: what are you going to do with your summer? Do you know that most of us believe the Devil goes on holiday in summertime? We do. We think he goes on holidays, "Oh, we can lie back and just let it roll." And that's what we do and we come to September and we're worn out, worn out spiritually because it's a bluff thing. The summertime is often the worst time for passivity and lethargy. I would encourage you to join us in a whole outgoing attitude here in Minneapolis in the parks and the lakes.

Loved ones, it's a great time -- you know, it is; it's one of the most beautiful times. It was one of the exciting things for us when we came to Minnesota, to see how everybody is anxious to get out in the summertime. You really want to make the most of June, July, August, September. And they have been great months for us, in going out and beginning to open out our lives to others, and above all beginning to open our lives out to God giving us power and giving us ability. I see Dennis and others here, who were probably shyer than anyone else in this room, honestly. There were many of us were very, very shy in-turned people who were afraid to speak to any stranger, in case they would say something that we wouldn't know how to answer.

So it was a big step for many of us to begin to say, "Holy Spirit, I'm going to take the first step; I'm going to put myself into the spot and then I'll trust you to give me the right words." That, for many of us, was the first experience of the fullness of the Holy Spirit. But it takes you to be willing to move out.

So loved ones, I would ask you really to think of it; would you think seriously about the way you're going to spend Sunday afternoons? Because most of us have got fed up with the siestas, you know! It's just deadly -- you don't sleep so well at night, or you have to watch the late, late show, in order to be sleepy, because you slept on Sunday afternoon. Don't do that. Don't sleep the sleep of the dead, oh don't. God has given us daylight, and beautiful weather, and there are thousands of loved ones out by the lakes, and the parks on these Sundays. And you say to me, "What's the importance in this?" Oh, it's probably for many of you, the most important step in receiving the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

I know you think, "Oh, no, Pastor, there are all kinds of other problems I have. I mean, I have real problems with sex, real problems with my motive life, real problems with greed." Loved ones, really probably the greatest problem is that you disobey the greatest commandment, "Thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and thy neighbor as thyself." Probably your failure is, to fail to obey the whole purpose that Jesus said you're here on earth for; to go and preach the gospel to

all nations. That's probably it; that's probably the greatest failure that is preventing you being filled with the Holy Spirit.

So I would encourage you to come. You may say, "Oh, you're going to draft us all in, and we all have to go around with the little Four Spiritual Laws booklet." No, we're not saying that, no. Just be yourself. Let's go to the parks and the lakes and be ourselves that's it. If all we can do is play volleyball with somebody or Frisbee, then let's do that. If all we can do is walk the dog, let's do that. Let's do what we're able to do. Let's be ourselves, because Jesus wants to show forth his infinite variety through us, really. So I'd ask you to think about it.

And then why I asked John to stay here, is that he is one of us who is going to go out in about two weeks time -- he and Linda? They're going to go and it'll be saying goodbye to them for as long as God wants -- perhaps forever, but it'll be for as long as the Father wants. But John is one of us who has been with the rest of us for 10 years, and we feel like family together. I remember meeting him when he was first at Bethel (College) when he was seeking the fullness of the Holy Spirit. So it seems like a lifetime we've been together. But now he knows it's time for him, as it was for many of us who went to London, to begin to make a move.

And oh, I'd ask you -- as you listen to his few words about what he's going to do, would you begin to think which way is your life going to go? Which way is it going to go? I'll tell you; it'll go the way you, under God, decide to make it go. And if you decide to let it drift, that's what it'll do, it'll just drift, drift, drift steadily down. But if you decide to do something with it, something will take place and there will be hundreds who will know God because of you.