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**Ascension Sunday**

**Title: Reanimated for Spirit-Powered Witness**

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## Ascension Sunday – Reanimated for Spirit-Powered Witness

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.” 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.” (Acts 1:6-11)

One of my favourite things to do is go and support my local sporting club. In Queensland, the most commonly supported sport is Rugby League, and at the games when my team, the Brisbane Broncos play – we have cheerleaders.

And the cheerleaders help remind all of the other supporters who are there – to cheer, to support their team. Sometimes our team is down, and they need a boost, and so one of the cheers they might like to use is “We’ve got spirit, yes we do, we’ve got spirit, how about you?”

And back and forth this chant might go between the cheerleaders and the crowd, getting louder and louder, and in the spirit of the moment, the team would pick up on the crowds energy, play with more intensity, and hopefully, go on to victory. The spirit that was created changed things.

In the Bible text I am talking on today, Jesus talks about a different kind of Spirit. It’s not a spirit we create, but rather a Spirit given to us by God.

Jesus and the disciples are together after Jesus has been raised from the dead. In the spirit of the moment, the disciple want to know from Jesus if now is the time he will restore the glory of Israel.

He’s resurrected from the dead, so there is no one more powerful, and the disciples are wondering, is now the time we overthrow the powerful Romans and restore Israel to its God promised glory? And if not now, then when?

It is a legitimate question and one that Jesus answers in the true spirit of the moment. And maybe that conversation went a bit like this:

Jesus might have said: “First, you won’t and don’t know the timing of God. It’s not for you to know the seasons of God. Is it now? It could be. But don’t focus on the when. Focus on something else; something more important.

Second, the Kingdom will come, but I won’t be here to do it. I’m leaving it up to you. Yes, you heard right. You. You, my disciples. The coming of the Kingdom of God rests on you. Congratulations.”

And one of the disciples might have responded like this: “So what I hear you saying, Jesus, is that I don’t know the timing of God, and it’s up to me to make it happen anyway. Thanks. Thanks a lot. I think this is a recipe for disaster! How is this going to work?”

And I can almost imagine Jesus smiling at his confused, fearful, and not-so-sure disciples. Even after all they have been through, after all they have seen, after watching Jesus be crucified, setting him in the tomb, and now standing in the presence of the resurrected Jesus, they still need help.

They still need something other than what they can bring to this situation in and of themselves. They need Jesus, still.

I wonder what you would do if you were Jesus? Would you abort the mission? Would you give that mission to somebody else? Would you tell them to move aside and simply bring the kingdom in yourself? Would you give them a chance to see what might happen?

Jesus announces God's amazing plan for all of humanity. All of eternity is in the balance. It is a life and death decision, and God goes with the last option, the 'give it to the disciples' plan. And when God calls, God equips.

Jesus said: **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.**" (Acts 1:9)

Then, Jesus was gone. He was up on a cloud, and into heaven. Gone. One moment he was here, and the next, gone. I suppose that Jesus ascension into heaven that we celebrate today is the most amazing part of the story. And in many ways, it most certainly is.

But I wonder if it is even more amazing that the mission of God for the world is left with the disciples. God puts the hope for the world onto people like you and people like me.

Jesus ascends, and all that's left is you and me and Jesus' words. What did he say? It was something about power and the Holy Spirit.

Bringing in the Kingdom will take lots of power. That's what the disciples were getting at when they asked the resurrected Jesus if now was the time that he would make it happen. If you've got the power over death, surely toppling an earthly government and restoring a Godly one should be easy, right?

The disciples seemed to have an earthly kind of power in mind. When you hear the word 'power' I wonder what comes to your mind. Is it political power like the President of the United States of America? Is it violent power, like a soldier with a machine gun and a finger on the trigger? Is it visionary power like that of Lady Aung San Su Kyi? What kind of power is Jesus talking about?

To start with, the power comes from God. It is not manufactured on our own. It is not something we create. It is not like that 'cheerleader power'. It is Godly power.

There is an American movie called 'Bruce Almighty' and it tries to give a glimpse of Godly power in the hands of an average, everyday person. The main character, 'Bruce' tests this power by parting his tomato soup like Moses parted the Red Sea.

But the power for Bruce is intoxicating, and he goes on a power spree. He points at a water pipe which bursts and water gushes into the air, he looks at an outfit in a shop, and suddenly he is wearing those exact clothes.

This is God's power for personal gain, and this is how the sinful minds of humans work – we think of ourselves and make things happen for us and our situation.

Is that the kind of power that brings in the Kingdom of God? No. Is that the kind of power Jesus was talking about? Again, No.

Kingdom power has a different focus – it is an outward, towards my neighbour and friends and family focus. It is a power that looks beyond ourselves, and into the world around us.

In South-Eastern Kosovo, a country wedged between Serbia and Albania, there is a tiny, rural town by the name of Letnica. There, at the local church, a girl by the name of Agnes was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she felt a call to mission work.

Her call led her to India, where she ministered to those who were poor in the slums of Calcutta. Her work and dedication had an impact throughout the world. You might know her as Mother Teresa.

Did Mother Teresa have power? Yes she did. She had a God-given, outward-focussed, touching-lives, having-an-impact power.

When Jesus tells us we will have power he means it. Lives will be changed. The world will change. An impact will be made. God will be glorified.

Where will this power come from? The Holy Spirit.

What is the Holy Spirit? Well, in church language, the Holy Spirit is the third person of the trinity. We have God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Spirit in the language of the Bible is 'pneuma' in Greek and 'ruach' in Hebrew. Both of these terms mean: spirit, breath, or wind.

Holy Spirit, Holy breath, Holy Wind.

From Jesus' words we know that it comes from God to empower us to do God's mission in the world. God breathes life into us, reanimating us for Spirit-powered living.

What does that entail? The Holy Spirit does four things: It calls, it gathers, it enlightens and it makes holy.

God calls to us through the word of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As we hear the story of Jesus being told, the Holy Spirit works in us to create faith. We find ourselves trusting and believing in Jesus.

God calls us out of our sinfulness and into a saving relationship with Jesus. It's not something that we do, or that we have the ability to do. It is God's doing, through the Holy Spirit.

This call brings us into community. We are not saved to be alone. God in the Holy Spirit moves us into community. Look around you today. This is God's work – bringing us together as people of God.

And within this God-created community God gives the gift of life in Jesus Christ through the preaching of the Word and the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion. Here is where it happens – in community which is created by the Holy Spirit.

In this community, our eyes are opened and our ears are unplugged to a new reality. It is God's reality, which is foreign to our thinking and spirit.

Here we are convicted of our sin and assured of the forgiveness for that same sin. Here we hear God's word for us and start to see the world in a different way. Here we are enlightened, as a work of the Holy Spirit. Here we are moved out into the world to live, which used to mean living for ourselves, but now, it means living for Jesus, looking to love our neighbour as ourselves.

As we love and as we live, the Holy Spirit continues to come to us to mould and shape us into the image of Christ. We live in the world, but we are not of the world. The Holy Spirit enables us to make different choices, love those who others deem unlovable, forgive the seemingly unforgivable.

As we grow deeper in relationship to Christ, the Holy Spirit shapes us to be more like Christ to others. And it's not just a one-time thing. The Holy Spirit continues to make us holy as we move through life.

This is the same promise to the disciples. They will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon them. But that sounds like a future event. What are we supposed to do in the meantime? We have heard the promise and now we are waiting. What now?

Jesus has ascended into heaven and we know he will come again in glory. I get it. I heard the two men in white robes. I was listening. But what about now? What do I do now?

I want to encourage you to do what the disciples did. They prayed. They devoted themselves to prayer and stayed connected to God in great anticipation of the next phase of life. They prepared for the coming of the Holy Spirit and prepared to be witness about Jesus to the world.

Jesus said that would take them from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria and then to the ends of the earth. But let me translate that for you. When the Holy Spirit comes to you and you begin to witness about Jesus, start local – your family, your neighbours, your village, your city.

Then move outward – your state, another place in Myanmar and keep going, and go throughout the world – that is what has brought us here to this place today.

Pray, prepare and project. But don't rush to failure. Wait on the Holy Spirit. It's not 'if' it will happen, but 'when' it will happen. And when it does, be ready and go!

Serve the Lord, tell others about Jesus, and love your neighbour. That is your mission. It is a gift from God, just like the Holy Spirit. The 'what' of mission is contained in the 'who' of mission: Jesus.

You will have the power to do it when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. You will be reanimated for Spirit-powered witness. Then you can join in a cheer that now has a powerful, Godly meaning to it. "We've got Spirit, yes we do, we've got Spirit, how about you?"