

Many of you know that I love to run, but what you may not know is that I'm a bit of a track and field nerd. Some of you follow your favourite sports team—the Canucks, the Lions, the Whitecaps, or Bluejays; in my free time, I can be found reading articles or watching videos that feature professional runners.

I don't know what it is that draws me to running—there is something so basic, so elemental about it; it's been hardwired into the created order. Perhaps you've heard the following quote, “Every morning in Africa, a gazelle wakes up, it knows it must outrun the fastest lion or it will be killed. Every morning in Africa, a lion wakes up. It knows it must run faster than the slowest gazelle, or it will starve. It doesn't matter whether you're the lion or a gazelle-when the sun comes up, you better be running.”<sup>1</sup>

As I said, I'm something of a track and field nerd, and I was in my glory in late August as the World Championships of Track and Field took place in Beijing, China. Canada had its best ever showing with 8 medals. Once again, Usain Bolt won the 100m, 200m, and 4x100m titles—he is the greatest sprinter the world has ever seen.

But sport is not what it once was. At one time, sporting events consisted of part-time athletes; people who had day jobs but happened to be particularly fast, agile, or strong. In those days, athletes trained when they could, according to the bits and pieces of wisdom they had gathered from other part-time athletes. We live in a different world today. The people we see on t.v. are professional athletes—their craft is their body, and they work on it full-time. And many of them have researchers and scientists who are designing

training plans that will allow them to push their body just a little bit further.

**illus:** In 1965, an assistant coach at the University of Florida gathered a team of physicians to ask them a question: *why are my football players effected adversely by the heat, and how can we counteract these effects?*

What they discovered was that as players sweat, they lose electrolytes—if these electrolytes are not replaced, the ability to run, catch, and tackle diminishes. And so, these physicians took their findings into a lab to create a scientifically formulated drink that would replenish these Florida Gators football players. In the end they produced a drink that they called “Gator-aid.”

Not long after, the football began to win games, in withering heat, against heavily favoured teams. In 1966, the Gators' record improved to 9-2 and they won the Orange Bowl for the first time. It wasn't long until the word began to spread about Gatorade; other universities and colleges began to submit orders for the drink. At present, Gatorade is fuelling more than 70 Division I football programs, and in 1983, Gatorade became the official sports drink of the NFL.

Research has shown that it's not just the athlete that matters, you have to pay attention to the fuel. The right fuel can power an athlete to accomplish more than they could do in their own strength. Gatorade has seized upon this idea and generated slogans like, “*Is it in you?*,” and, “*Fuel of the Gods*”.

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<sup>1</sup> Anonymous.

The question I want to ask this morning is, *what fuels you?*

Last Sunday I began a new teaching series entitled, *Bearing Fruit That Will Last*. I suggested that we have been designed by God for fruitfulness. God has led each of us through experiences, given us skills, talents, and passions, each of which makes us a gift from God to others.

Last Sunday we opened the Scriptures to John 15 where Jesus says, “*I am the vine; you are the branches... Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.*”<sup>2</sup> A branch has no life in itself—it relies on the vine for the fuel it needs in order to produce fruit. The same is true of us.

The trouble is that we have been trained by our culture to be self-reliant, independent, producers. We learn to rely on our strengths, talents, personality, ingenuity, and intellect; we ask God to bless our efforts but practically speaking, our best efforts are simply that—*our* best efforts.

Last week I asked the question, “*where is God inviting you to serve Him and others?*” This week I want to ask, “*will you invite Him to fill you and fuel each act of service?*”

Here’s my Big Idea for this morning’s message—**the power of God, through the people of God, brings glory to God and blessing to others.**

This morning I want to walk you briefly through the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. Let me invite you to open your Bible with me to the first chapter in the Gospel of Luke. As you turn there, I want to pose a question that will frame the way we look at these two books this morning. Here’s the question, *how did Jesus do what He did during His earthly ministry?*

If we are concerned with good theology, then certain answers are simply not available to us. For instance, we cannot say, “Jesus did what He did because He was God.” He was God, no question, but unless Jesus was fully human, we will never really be able to follow Him. How can we become “like Jesus” if He isn’t really “like us”? The Scripture writers and early theologians went to great pains to argue that apart from having a sin nature, in His humanity, Jesus was like us in every way. In other words, Jesus led a truly human life, He didn’t have an unfair advantage, He didn’t flip the “God switch” every time He was in a pinch.

So, how did Jesus do what He did? Luke gives us a clear answer: Jesus’ life was marked by the Holy Spirit—this reliance on the Holy Spirit was **the** crucial factor in Jesus knowing where to go, what to say, and what to do. As Luke wrote his Gospel and the Book of Acts, he paid particular attention to this truth—let’s take a closer look, beginning with Luke 1:35.

What I want to highlight is that the first mention of Jesus takes place in parallel with the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. An angel appeared to Mary, an unwed virgin, to tell her that she would bear a son. “*The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most*

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<sup>2</sup> John 15:5a, 4.

*High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.”* From conception, Jesus’ very being would be marked by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

Now turn with me to Luke 3:16. John the Baptist was out in the desert, calling people to return to God with their whole hearts—some wondered if John was the Messiah, the one who would deliver Israel from her captivity. Listen to John’s response, *“I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”*

It’s important to note that before Jesus began His public ministry—before He went anywhere, taught anything, or did anything—Jesus’ submitted to John’s baptism; He was entering into Israel’s story. As I said last week, Jesus would be the faithful and fruitful vine that Israel wasn’t. Look at 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.”*

In Luke 4:1-2, we’re told that immediately following His baptism, *“Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.”* **Q:** how did Jesus know that He was to go into the desert?  
**A:** The Holy Spirit led, and Jesus kept in step with the Spirit’s leading.

Look ahead to Luke 4:14. After His days of testing in the desert, *“Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside.”* In Luke 4:18, we’re told

that Jesus returned to His home town, and He was given the honour of preaching at synagogue. He then proceeding to read Isaiah 61, *“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 favour.”*

I said earlier that Jesus’ reliance on the Holy Spirit was the crucial factor in Him knowing where to go, what to say, and what to do. Jesus returned to Galilee because the Spirit led Him. Jesus read Isaiah 61 and then said what He said because the Spirit gave Him words to speak. In the same way, the activity of Jesus—miracles of healing and deliverance, acts of mercy and love—were directed and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

In Acts 10:38, the apostle Peter sums up Jesus’ ministry saying, *“God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and...he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.”*

In order for Jesus to do what He did, two things were necessary: authority and power. **Authority** implies having **the right to do something**. A police officer, with uniform and badge, has the authority to pull you over and give you a ticket if you’re caught speeding. **Power** implies having **the ability to do something**. A weight lifter has the power to lift heavy objects above their head.

As we’ve already seen, Jesus clearly had both authority and power, and the question we need to ask ourselves is, *do we?* Are we simply to marvel at what Jesus did and said, or, have we been invited to enter into His words and deeds? Is the authority and power that

marked Jesus, His and His alone, or, have we been invited to walk in the same authority and power?

It's usually at this point that we are tempted to conclude that maybe Jesus was more God than man, or at least that His god-ness overshadowed His humanity. And we arrive at this conclusion, not because of what the text says, but because we know that we could never do what Jesus did on our own. But please hear me—neither could Jesus.

When God the Son embraced our humanity, He embraced all the limitations that mark humanity. Jesus did what He did because of His reliance on the Holy Spirit. What I'm arguing is that because Jesus was human—*just like us*—we can live *just like Him*. And if what I'm saying is accurate, then we might expect to see Jesus' followers speaking, acting, and bearing fruit that was marked by the same authority and power that Jesus knew—*and we do*.

Let's turn our attention briefly to the Book of Acts. If Luke's Gospel tells the story of what Jesus said and did, then Acts tells the story of what Jesus' followers said and did—what we find is that the two are remarkably similar.

Jesus was both commissioned and empowered at His baptism.

**a) The Father commissioned Jesus**—“*You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.*” It's more than an endorsement of

identity—it's a setting apart and a sending out. Later in Luke 9:35, the Father speaks again saying, “*This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.*” Jesus speaks with the authority of the Father.

**b) The Father also empowered Jesus**—the Holy Spirit descended upon Him.

I've been arguing that the church is meant to walk in the same authority and power that marked Jesus. If that's the case, we might expect to find a similar commissioning and empowering of the church—*and we do*.

**a) Jesus commissioned His disciples.** Before Jesus ascended into heaven, He said, “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations*”.<sup>3</sup> We go in His name and in His authority—the Father sent Him, and He sends us.<sup>4</sup>

**b) And, Jesus promises power from on high.** When Jesus commissioned His disciples, He knew that they could not do His works in their own strength. In Acts 1:4 and following, Jesus said, “*Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised... For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit' ...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.*”

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew 28:18-19.

<sup>4</sup> John 20:21-22.

In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit descended on those first followers of Jesus and they immediately made their way out into the street and began to speak the good news concerning Jesus. And the rest of the book of Acts tells the story of the early church walking in the authority and power of Jesus.

The Holy Spirit fuelled each act of service—sermons were preached, the poor were loved and served, and people were healed and delivered. In the power of the Holy Spirit, the gospel went forth and people were saved. By the leading of the Spirit, the church was able to discern God’s will and keep in step with Him—they were given wisdom to make difficult decisions. The Holy Spirit gave those first disciples power to stand firm in trouble, difficulty, discouragement, and persecution.

We too have been designed by God for fruitfulness—but it’s not just the servant that matters, we have to pay attention to the fuel. *What fuels you?*

A branch has no life in itself; the fuel it needs to bear fruit flows from the vine. We have the very same need, *but O to be a branch!* The branch has the luxury of being unable to make a choice. We, on the other hand, have a very real choice to make. We can attempt to do the work of Jesus, relying on our strength, talent, personality, ingenuity, and intellect—and we will bear *some* fruit. But human effort will lead to human results; the Spirit’s power will lead to something more.

If we want to walk in the same authority and power that Jesus did, we will need to live a life of reliance on the indwelling Holy Spirit. Are we ready to stop relying on what we can produce and look to the One who can fill us with power and fuel each act of service? It’s the

power of God, through the people of God, that brings glory to God, and blessing to others.

**Conclusion:** As I draw this message to a close, I want to offer a few points of application and then share a story with you.

First, you may be new to following Jesus, or, find yourself really growing these days, and you may be asking, *how can I begin serving when I’m not sure what God has gifted me to do?* In a few weeks time, Pastor Mardi is going to be teaching a class entitled, “**Serving Jesus: Discovering Our Passions, Call and Gifts**”—it will begin on October 20th and run for 4 weeks. We will be talking more about this class in the coming weeks, but this might be a good place for you to start.

Or perhaps you are new to our church, and you may be asking, *where can I get involved in a serving opportunity?* The short answer is, “it depends on your availability, your areas of interest, or your experience.” You could serve in an age-level ministry from nursery right on up to Sr. Adults. You could serve in a ministry that happens once a year to ministries that happen every week.

And many of our ministries utilize a wide range of gifts and abilities—if you love working with people, if you love coordinating details, if you love serving in the background, if you have gifts for singing or playing instruments, if you love crunching numbers, there are places for you to serve. Check out our website, read the bulletin, talk to one of our pastors, or visit the Welcome Desk after the service—we’d love to talk with you further.

But once we've got our foot in the door—and we're serving—*what would it look like to move from a more self-reliant way of serving, to a more Spirit-reliant way of living?* Here's a few thoughts:

- As we serve, no matter how we're serving, praying becomes one of our most important activities. For example, before you serve, you might pray something like, *“Father, I'm about to lead our small group—would you fill me with your Holy Spirit? I want to serve under your influence and power.”*

If your praying ends there, you might be tempted to say your *“Amen”* and then get busy doing whatever you had planned to do—lead Bible study, ask a few questions, and then wrap things up with a nice prayer. What if our praying became more about listening? *“Holy Spirit would you come and fill me? I want to know the Father's heart for the people in my group. Fuel me so that I can love them with His love and teach them your truth. Holy Spirit, is there anything you want to see happen tonight? Is there anything you want me to say or do? It's the power of God, through the people of God, that brings glory to God, and blessing to others.*

- I want to offer a second thought in the area of decision-making. Perhaps you are serving in a ministry area and you are a part of leadership team that makes decisions for the wider group of volunteers and participants—*how can we move from self-reliance to Spirit-reliance so that we can experience more of His presence and power?*

Walking in step with the Spirit demands a fundamental commitment to listen and follow. Yes, leaders need wisdom, and wisdom does come from what we have learned and experienced. But with

maturity comes the recognition that in every situation, there is more to know than we could ever know. And so, we look to One who sees and knows all there is to see and know.

This fundamental commitment to listen and follow requires a fundamental posture—living with open hands. We cannot keep in step with the Spirit if we are hell-bent on controlling the outcome.

**illus:** I want to try a physical illustration with you this morning—I want all of you to go ahead and clench your fists as tight as possibly you can for the next 7 seconds.

And now release your hands. How does it feel? Better than the clenched fists, right? When we unclench our fists, we can feel the life returning to our hands. In this case, what is true in the physical realm is also true of our life with the Spirit. God allows us to be in situations that are beyond our ability to grasp or control. In these situations, we have a choice: to rely on self, or to rely on Him. The invitation is to listen and follow Him, the promise is that as we live with open hands, life and fruitfulness will follow us.

**illus:** I want to share a story to conclude. My brother (Chris) texted me on Tuesday, asking me to pray. One of his friends (Jim) was in serious condition—he'd gone off a jump at a bike park, flipped off his bike, landed on the handlebars and cracked his head on the ground. The helmet saved his head, but the handlebars destroyed his left kidney, ripped his adrenal gland, and damaged his pancreas. Jim was rushed into emergency surgery, had the one kidney removed and the adrenal gland repaired—during surgery he coded once and required 38 litres of blood.

When Chris got the call, he and my sister-in-law (Jen) took the day off work and rushed to the hospital to be with Jim's wife Lori—I'm sure they prayed the whole way. For a long stretch of time, no one knew if Jim would live or die. When Jim coded while at the hospital, his family began to panic; Jim and Lori are followers of Jesus, but Jim's extended family are not. One of Jim's sisters grabbed Chris' hand and said, "*would you please pray for Jim?*"

Jesus warned His disciples in advance, *Because of your connection to Me, the day will come when you find yourself standing before rulers and authorities. Don't worry about what you will say; the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say.* The Holy Spirit is God's Empowering Presence; as He was with Jesus, so He will be with you. My brother stood up, the family gathered around, they held hands and Chris prayed for Jim's life to be spared. God did spare Jim's life and he is slowly recovering.

We have been designed by God for fruitfulness—but it's not just the servant that matters, we have to pay attention to the fuel. And church, the question I want to ask this morning is, *what is fuelling us?*

At this time, I'm going to invite Alana to come and sing a modern day hymn, written by Keith and Kristyn Getty. The song has been written as a prayer to the Holy Spirit—as she sings this prayer, if you are willing, make this prayer your own.

### **Holy Spirit, Living Breath of God**

*Holy Spirit, living Breath of God,  
Breathe new life into my willing soul.  
Bring the presence of the risen Lord  
To renew my heart and make me whole.  
Cause Your Word to come alive in me;  
Give me faith for what I cannot see;  
Give me passion for Your purity.  
Holy Spirit, breathe new life in me.*

*Holy Spirit, come abide within;  
May Your joy be seen in all I do—  
Love enough to cover ev'ry sin  
In each thought and deed and attitude,  
Kindness to the greatest and the least,  
Gentleness that sows the path of peace.  
Turn my striving into works of grace.  
Breath of God, show Christ in all I do.*

*Holy Spirit, from creation's birth,  
Giving life to all that God has made,  
Show your power once again on earth;  
Cause Your church to hunger for Your ways.  
Let the fragrance of our prayers arise.  
Lead us on the road of sacrifice  
That in unity the face of Christ  
Will be clear for all the world to see.*

### **Benediction**

