



# Sermon Growth Guide

**September 26, 2021**

**Belong – Divine Community**

**Acts 1:1-8**

**Key Verse:** Acts 1:8 “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.”

**Big Idea:** We are called to witness to divine community.

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## Foundations

We are six weeks into talking about how we belong to God and one another. But what about God? Does God experience the beauty of belonging that we have been talking about?

You bet God does! The Father. The Son. The Holy Spirit. God is a community of divine love.

This Sunday we're in the book of Acts. Pastor Tim writes, “Acts is the continuation of the Gospel of Luke. Luke part two. Acts is the book about what happened next. It's the birth of the church. Sometimes it's called the Acts of the Apostles, but the real main character is not the Apostles. The real main character is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God loose on the landscape, creating a church on a mission... Our mission, church, is to go out under the power of the Holy Spirit, in the love and victories of Jesus, and invite others out of loneliness and into communion with God the Father.”

What a blessing to be learning again about the gift of belonging. Go deep in your conversation this week. What's on your heart? How can your circle be praying for you and with you? May you feel in such a magnificent way the love God experiences within the Trinity and how that pours out into your heart this day, compelling you into a life of witness.

## Understanding God's Word

Discuss the context of Acts 1:1-8. What had Jesus begun “to do and to teach” (verse one)?

What is Jesus seen doing in verse three?

What are the apostles commanded to wait for in verse four?

What is Jesus' promise to the apostles in verse eight?

## Applying God's Word

We are called to be God's witnesses. What mindset shift(s) do you need to make in order to view yourself first and foremost as a witness to the Kingdom of God?

## Witnessing God's Word

What are the greatest barriers in your life to walking hour-by-hour as a witness of God? How would you like your circle to come around you in your growth as a witness to the Kingdom of God?

Identify at least one person you believe God is giving you opportunity to witness to. Together, pray that this person be brought into the divine community of the Beloved. Pray that this person finds true belonging in Christ. Discern your next step toward this person.

We are fighting back against the loneliness epidemic, breaking out of loneliness and into true belonging. Alone is no good. Jesus invites you to belong. I have a lot of stories coming my way of how people are breaking out of loneliness. I told the story about my niece going to her neighbors with her laundry. Now I've heard multiple stories. Lots of dirty laundry! Wet bed sheets up and down the block. One man sent me a note about his regular Monday golf group. Usually everyone splits as soon as they finish, but after the sermon he decided to linger and strike up a conversation. Two men sat and talked for over an hour. The conversation moved surprisingly deep surprisingly fast. With a few tears shed, they decided to invite the rest of the group and all the wives together for dinner that very night! They all came. Another woman lives in a new apartment complex where she doesn't know anybody, so she usually reaches out to her known friends for favors even though it is inconvenient. Why not cross the hall "without a bucket" and see what happened? She asked her neighbor over for a visit, then asked if she would water her

plants while she was out of town. Her neighbor said she would love to! They've struck up a friendship. Another guy emailed me to say that after years of being alone, he put out a new profile on a dating match app! All right! Go for it, man. Small stuff? Maybe. But big things grow from small seeds.

We are learning these dance steps, this same pattern. **(1) Know Where You Are Alone.** Recognize it. Are you alone at work? Are you alone at school? With friends? With family? At home? Where are you alone? **(2) Risk Being Known.** Is there a way to step out, to step forward, to let someone else in to know you a little better, to drop your mask? **(3) Open to God.** No amount of friendship or human community will fill the need in your soul. You need the living waters of Jesus to do that. **(4) Open to Others.** On a new footing, secure and at peace with God, you have a new foundation to begin, or renew, relationships with others. As our city emerges from this pandemic, we want to be ambassadors of belonging, inviting others to community. But why? Because loneliness is bad and belonging

is good? Well, loneliness is bad and belonging is good, but we have more to say than that. What we have to say, what we believe, is that God is invested in belonging over loneliness. God is in fact a community. God is a Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Three Persons. One God. An eternal community of divine and perfect love. If God is community, that means the fabric of the universe is community. God is at the center of all that is; the Trinity is the core of all that is. "The fabric of the universe is trinitarian." (James Bryan Smith) That changes what we are about, church. We see it in the commission of the church in Acts 1.

Acts is the continuation of the Gospel of Luke. Luke part two. Acts is the book about what happened next. It's the birth of the church. Sometimes it's called the Acts of the Apostles, but the real main character is not the Apostles. The real main character is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God loose on the landscape, creating a church on a mission. "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.” (Acts 1:1-2) The former book is Luke. He says he wrote about all Jesus began to do and to teach. It gives the sense that Jesus was just getting started. That was just the beginning. So, the Gospel of Luke was about what Jesus started to do until the day he was taken up into heaven. When was he taken up into heaven? After the training. “After giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.” Verse 1, we get Jesus. By verse 2, which is still the same sentence, we get the Holy Spirit.

“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.” (Acts 1:3) After his suffering. What’s his suffering? His passion week, his week of suffering in Jerusalem, getting arrested, crucified and buried. After that, Jesus presented himself with convincing proofs that he was alive again after death. For forty days, Jesus taught them about the Kingdom of God. What’s the Kingdom of God? The Kingdom

of God is where God is the King. God’s ways are the ways. God’s rules are the rules. There are no competing claims or confusion of authority. Is the Kingdom of God here? Yes. It is still coming? Yes. You can experience the Kingdom of God in as much as you submit yourself to Jesus as Lord and Savior. But a greater Kingdom is also still on the way. The church is meant to work for—and hope for, and prepare for—that Kingdom.

“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.’” (Acts 1:4-5) They asked Him if that meant Israel was going to take over the capital and kick out the Roman occupation. Will our government get to take control? That’s very small thinking to Jesus. This is much bigger stuff. Then we get verse 8, the key verse for our missions partnerships and global engagement, and a key verse for a lot of churches as they consider their mission, the meaning of

being the church in the world. This is right up there with the Great Commission: “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 1:8) You will go out on mission for me, and your impact will range from this city, to this region, all the way to the ends of the earth. Which for us, officially, is Mongolia. I mean, you don’t get much more “ends of the earth” than Mongolia! But the ends of the earth is also becoming the center of Christianity. Anyway, to be Christian is to be sent on mission for God, to tell others and be witnesses of the love and grace found in Jesus.

What I want us to catch this morning is the Trinity. Did you catch it? In these few sentences of prologue and set up for all that will happen in the book of Acts, all the ways the church will move forward, established by the Spirit, in these few lines you get Jesus, Holy Spirit and Father. It’s hard for us to even notice because of how used to the idea we are that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but for the





first readers, for the disciples themselves, they would not have missed this. In my former book I wrote about Jesus (verse 1) and what he did until he gave instructions through the Holy Spirit (verse 2). Jesus said, wait here until the gift from his Father (verse 4) came on them. When they asked about dates and calendars and timing, “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.’” (Acts 1:7-8) Father. Son. Holy Spirit. God is a Trinity and the mission we are sent out on is a mission from and for the Trinity.

It matters what you believe is under the surface of things. If there is no God and we are all the product of a cosmic accident, everything good you have ever fought for could disappear in an instant. All gone. But if there is a God, and if God is a divine community of love, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, everything above the surface could disappear and you will have lost nothing. I remember a

reporter interviewing a man after his home was taken by a tornado. She was trying to get him to say how horrible it all was, but he was kind of smiling and even laughing a bit. “Yup. It’s all gone! Look at that!” “Isn’t it horrible?” said the reporter. “You’ve lost everything. Your life, your family, everything!” “No,” he said. “My family is fine. They all survived. That’s not my family. That’s not my life. God is good.” The poor reporter was ready to submit her resignation. What I’m saying is, under the surface, beneath the visible, at the core of the fabric of the universe is the Holy Trinity a divine community of perfect love. This God, who is community, draws us into eternal love and true belonging. That’s what’s real. That’s what’s under the surface. Lose everything, and you haven’t lost a thing. Get it?

Our mission, church, is to go out under the power of the Holy Spirit, in the love and victories of Jesus, and invite others out of loneliness and into communion with God the Father. God is complete as a Trinity. God isn’t missing anything. But God loves to share his love. God glories to share his glory. He doesn’t need us to join him, but he loves us

to join in the divine community. Jonathan Edwards taught that God’s glory is trinitarian. It is inherent, displayed and received. The glory of God is inherent, it is a part of who God the Father is. It is displayed in Jesus Christ, and by the Holy Spirit it is received by us. God loves to share his love and glories to share his glory. It’s like when you see something awesome and you say to your friend, “Did you see that?” That’s how God feels about his glory and his love. He wants you to see it and share in it. Our mission is to help others to it. The mission of the church is not to expand the church for the sake of the church; the mission of the church is to expand the love of God. We are sent out to expand the circle and include all who will join in the perfect love and true belonging of the divine community. That’s what Jesus did with the Samaritan Woman. That’s what Jesus did with Peter. And that’s what Jesus sent each of them out to do. It is the defining mission of the people of God.

There is famous painting called the Rublev icon of *The Trinity*. It was painted in 1410 as a picture of the Trinity. How do you





paint a picture of the Trinity? You don't. Like all icons it was painted to make you think about what it depicts; not see it, but experience it. But this painting has a mystery. It depicts the three angels visiting Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 18, a moment most Christians see as an embodiment of the Trinity. But look at the base of the table. There is an unfinished rectangle down there. When the painting was being restored, they found glue residue in that spot and it produced a great mystery. What was there? It was painted by Rublev to be installed in a small church outside of Moscow. That church burned to the ground, but the painting was saved and from then on usually kept high up, out of reach, out of harm. What about that empty space? Only recently, the suggestion was made that maybe Rublev had done something no other iconographer had ever done and none has done since. When the painting is at eye level, your face is right in front of that square. What if it was a mirror glued on that space?

The Father. The Son. The Holy Spirit. God is a community of divine love. By the grace of God, you are invited in. You have a place at the table. You are drawn into that love, included in that glory, brought to the table of the Lord and adopted into the family of God. The empty spot is a place for you and when you look at this image, you see yourself right there, at table, in communion, not alone, but included, with true belonging, in the divine community. Have you thought God's love too high for you? Have you thought the things of God too lofty to understand? Here is your place. You are home.



*The Trinity (also called The Hospitality of Abraham)*  
by Russian painter Andrei Rublev  
15<sup>th</sup> century