



The Acts of the Spirit

GATHERING THE CHURCH

ACTS 12:20–25

“THE BLASPHEMY”

FEBRUARY 11, 2024

CONTEXT

The Book of Acts is the theological history of the Church. In previous weeks, we explored how God's people (the Church) have become where heaven and earth meet. The Church is multiplying rapidly, and with it, opposition from the outside and obstacles from within. Despite the opposition, these followers of Christ are sown, not scattered, into areas and people groups in need of hearing the Gospel.

Even as the gospel spreads, political pressures are brought to bear on the early Church. We left off last week wondering if God would protect his church, not just reactively—by rescuing Peter—but proactively, by judging evil. Or would the Church give in to the temptation to usurp God's role in judging the world?

SERMON SUMMARY

Pastor Joey preached this week about a part of the Church's story, a part in which the Church herself played no role. Herod Agrippa continued his reign of tyranny, and while other people groups (the people of Tyre and Sidon) responded with acquiescence and blasphemous flattery, the Church, in the background, continued to pray, trust, and work.

Today, we tend to think we need to fight to make things right instead of work toward making things right. These two approaches may overlap in actual actions, but they carry a huge difference in feeling and in the story we're telling ourselves about our role in the world and God's role in the world. When we can't trust that God is going to make all things right, whether now or in the future, we have to fight. But when we are able to trust God, we can experience the peace that enables us to work, and pray, and trust.



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This document can be used for either personal or group reflection.

Group facilitator: you do not need to ask every question but can select the best ones for your group dynamic.

DISCUSSION

Pastor Joey began his sermon by sharing the Motto of the State of Iowa: “Our liberties we prize and our rights we will maintain.”

- How does that attitude strike you? Do you resonate with it? Do you think it captures what Pastor Joey called “the mythology of America,” that we are a people who were forged through battle?
- Do you agree that the default position of Americans is generally one of fighting, rather than working?
- How does your identity as an American conflict with or complement your deeper identity as a follower of Jesus, a citizen of the Kingdom of God? How do you handle those conflicts?

Read Acts 12:20-25

- What jumps out to you?
- Given that the Church plays no role in this story, what do you think the church was doing in the background? Is it reasonable to suppose they were fighting behind the scenes, resorting to political manipulation to get Herod removed? Or perhaps praying for Herod’s death?
- Is it more reasonable to assume they were going about the business of living, working, and sharing the gospel, regardless of the political pressure they were under?

Pastor Joey said that there are two worldly responses to political pressure, which exist on a spectrum. On the one end, people respond to tyranny by submission and acquiescence, like the people of Tyre and Sidon. On the other end, people fight back and use brute force and political manipulation to garner enough power to defeat the power tyrannizing them.

But Pastor Joey said the Church does neither, nor does she simply land in the middle. She does something completely different, not on the spectrum at all: she trusts that God will make all things right, she prays for God’s will to be done on earth as in heaven, and she works for the good of the communities in which she is planted.

- How is the Church’s response different from the responses the world offers?
- How is Faith Church, in today’s political climate, called to respond?



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At root, each of us wants to prayerfully trust God. But sometimes that's difficult, especially when other difficulties seem so much closer to our eyes than God is, eclipsing him in our minds and in our anxieties.

Let practice surrounding these anxieties to God.

Share in your group, or write down for yourself, the anxieties that you feel surrounding the current political situation.

Ask one another:

- Where do these anxieties arise from? What good thing am I afraid I am being deprived of, or will be deprived of, if what I fear comes true?
- Is God big enough to sustain me even if I lose those things?
- Is God big enough to keep me from experiencing those losses?
- How will I respond to God in either case?
- What tools can your community bring to bear that will help you regularly practice surrendering anxieties to God (e.g., regular worship, prayer, lament, etc.)?

Read: 1 Peter 3:8-17

- How does this passage give us a picture or goal we can strive towards?
- Do you, and/or does your community currently embody this picture?
- What would it take to arrive at this goal?

Prayer

This week let's practice prayerful release of our anxieties to God.



PREPARE FOR NEXT WEEK:

Attend the Ash Wednesday Service and make sure to pick up a Lamentations journal. Prepare your heart to re-enter into past griefs as we practice individual and corporate lament together.