**Something More**

About 300 years before Braveheart, William Wallace defeated England in the battle of Stonebridge to effectively end the war for Scottish Independence, another William, Duke of Normandy invaded England in the Battle of Hastings to claim the throne of England from Harold, Earl of Wessex. (And you thought the Left Wing resistance against President Trump was bad.)

In those days wars were fought man against man – the last man standing wins. Also in those days horses were not part of battles. They were used exclusively for transportation. When the English arrived at Hastings, they come on horseback but sent the horses to the rear as they prepared for battle.

A knight on horseback was easily toppled and thus not a very effective fighting tool. William, Duke of Normandy had a surprise. He started the battle with a barrage of arrows followed by an infantry charge. The English lines held. William then sent in his mounted knights, but with a secret. William had invented stirrups.

Previously unknown in military history, stirrups secured a knight to his horse providing a stable fighting platform. The English were routed, Harold was killed, and Duke William of Normandy became King of England, better known as William the Conqueror.

William won that war because he had something more than the English had. The stirrups didn’t win the war. The stirrups made the knights more effective.

A theme that has shown up over and over in my studies recently is that we’re at war.

e.g. In preparing for our Men’s Retreat where we’ll talk about what it means to be a man I was led to Ephesians 6, *Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.* Ephesians 6:11f

We’re at war. It’s not a war between Republicans and Democrats, conservatives and liberals, rich and poor, black and white. We’re at war with spiritual beings who intend to destroy the things of God. If we try to do battle using our wits and strength, we’ll lose. To fight against spiritual powers, we need a something more.

Here’s another example of the same theme in my studies. In our Bible study last Sunday evening we were studying the Letter of Jude found near the end of our Bibles, right before the Revelation.

It’s possible that some here have actually read that little letter. Jude said that he intended to write a very positive letter about salvation, but he felt the need instead to write about the spiritual battle we face.

He wrote, *I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith.* Jude 3 He went on to discuss two heresies that had invaded the church:

         one is that as long as you believe in Jesus your behavior doesn’t matter, you can do whatever you want because you’re forgiven

         the other heresy is that Jesus is only one of many ways to heaven.

People outside the church and even people inside the church were believing and promoting these false teachings. Jude urged his readers to contend against these on behalf of true faith.

I want you to get this: the word contend that Jude used is επαγωνιζω.

         Αγωνιζω, agony, like a wrestler who battles his opponent for three 3 minute rounds

         The prefix επ intensifies the verb.

         This isn’t two brothers wrestling in the living room. This is hand to hand mortal combat; two enemies fighting to the death.

Does that describe us? Are we fighting in mortal combat against the devil?

How do we, mere humans contend for the faith against spiritual powers? We need something special. Just as William the Conqueror had the advantage of stirrups for his mounted knights, we too have something special.

Jesus said to His followers…*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

The Holy Spirit is that something more. With the Holy Spirit we are more than conquerors (Romans 8:37). *Neither death nor life, nor angels nor demons* (Romans 8:38) can defeat us. With the Holy Spirit we are assured of victory.

Ben and I are preaching through the Book of Acts, specifically looking at our something more, the Holy Spirit. We’re identifying how the Holy Spirit worked in the early church to spread the Gospel throughout the known world. We’ve pointed out some specific things the He did. Today we’ll look 9:32-10:48.

We’re not going to read it all this morning. I’ll trust you to read it later. I know many won’t but that’s on you. To get the most out of this teaching I encourage you to read the text. I’m going to discuss the highlights.

Last week we introduced Saul of Tarsus, better known as The Apostle Paul, who is soon to become one of two major figures in the life of the church. This morning we’re going to look at three stories involving the other towering personality of the church, Simon Peter.

In these stories Luke was showing us how the Holy Spirit works. The church had experienced some serious failures:

         their leaders had been arrested for preaching about Jesus

         one couple died in church for lying to the Holy Spirit

         a conflict arose between Greek speaking women and Hebrew speaking women

         one of their Deacons, Stephen was murdered by a mob

         persecution broke out against Jesus followers.

Can you imagine a start-up church experiencing that kind of negative today? Suppose somebody starts a new church in La Porte.

         They make a deal to use the old Al’s building right over here.

         They send out fliers and purchase radio and newspaper ads.

         With support from a  sponsoring church they launch with a three person staff.

Then during the first few weeks:

         One of the staff is publically shamed for an indiscretion

         A division erupts over whether to use old hymns in worship or contemporary music

         Somebody starts a campaign of terrible FB posts about the church

The young Christians of that church in Jerusalem could easily have discouraged. They needed some victories. There’s nothing like success to encourage and motivate people. Victories build a real sense of corporate self-esteem. Knowing that we’re being used effectively by God for His purpose and kingdom opens up new doors of possibilities.

There are times when nothing is working for a church and we wonder why. “*What’s wrong with us?*” Then there are times when see what God is doing and we shout, “*God is on the move here. What’s next?*”

Beginning with Acts 9:32 we see that the Holy Spirit was working on Peter, guiding him through three victories that would propel the church forward in God’s mission.

As the church observed what the Holy Spirit was doing, God was revealing His plan. Jesus hadn’t come to establish a new religion nor simply to renew Israel. He came to save the world. He came to transform people from being religious to being friends of God. The church was and is supposed to be the conduit of God’s power in the world.

We’ll look at three stories of victory.

The **first story** involves a man named Aeneas. We know little about him except that he had been paralyzed for 8 years. Much like he did in Acts 3 when he encountered a man crippled from birth, Kapha as Peter was known in Aramaic said, *“Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and take care of your mat.”* Acts 9:34 Now that’s a feel good experience that’ll give the church a boost.

The **second story** involved a woman called Tabitha in Aramaic and Dorcas in Greek. Both names translate into English, Gazelle. Tabitha was known for doing good deeds for other people, making robes and other clothing, sort of like Sierra Sue is known for making blankets and comforters for people, especially babies.

Tabitha became very sick and died so the disciples in Joppa called for Peter. I suppose they were hoping he could do something. Or maybe it’s like people today who call for the minister when someone’s in the hospital. I’m not going to heal anyone and my prayers are no better than yours, but I bring comfort in that I represent Jesus.

I find it interesting that Peter did almost exactly what he had seen Jesus do with Jairus’ daughter in Mark 5:41f. Jesus *took her by the hand and said to her, “Ταλιθα κουμ!” (which means, “Little girl, I say to you, get up!”).Immediately the girl stood up and walked around.*

Peter *got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, “Tabitha, get up.” She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet.* Acts 9:41f

It doesn’t mean anything, but did you notice that Talitha (little girl) and Tabatha (the woman’s name) are only one letter different?

Peter and the whole church had to be feeling pretty good now; healing two people while the church is in a time of peace, being built up and encouraged. They’re going to need it because things are about to change. For now the Holy Spirit had another thing to prepare Peter and the church for, taking the Gospel to non-Jews.

This **third story** starts with God sending an angel to a Roman soldier, a centurion. The Roman army was divided into legions (6000 men), cohorts (600 men), and centuries (100 men). This man, Cornelius was a good man who believed YHWH God. He was a generous man donating to the poor, probably Jews in Caesarea.

The angel said to Cornelius, *Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea.* Acts 10:4-6

The next day Peter, who just happened to be staying at Simon the Tanner’s house, went to the roof of so he could be alone to pray when God gave him a vision. He saw a sheet, like the sail of sea-going ship. This sheet held a bunch of animals that a Jew was forbidden to eat. A voice said to him, *Get up Peter. Kill and eat*. Acts 10:13

Peter was not about to violate food laws, *“Surely not, Lord!” Peter replied. “I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.”* Verse 14

The voice said, *“Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.”* Verse 15

About that same time the men Cornelius had sent to Simon the Tanner’s house arrived and inquired about Peter. *While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Simon, three men are looking for you. So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them.”* Verses 19f

God didn’t want Peter to stop at only thinking. He wanted to link his thinking with action and had already arranged a call to action. When the angel said “*do not hesitate*” he used a word that means, “*Don’t think too much. Just do it*.”

The message got through to Peter. Verse 23 says Peter “*lodged*” with these men. The verb ξενιζω means to welcome as a guest. Did you see the movie “42, The Jackie Robinson Story”? There was a scene when the white players on the other team were really going after Jackie, then one of his white teammates stood with him. That’s what this was like. It told everyone that a Jew and a Gentile could come together as equals in the kingdom of God.

This is what the Holy Spirit was preparing Peter and the church for, welcoming non-Jews into the faith. Peter had apparently softened a little bit already as he was staying at the tanner’s house. A tanner worked with dead animals and so was required by law (Numbers 19) to stay 50 cubits outside of any city or village.

Now he was told to go to the household of a Gentile to tell them about Jesus.

Peter went with the men to Caesarea to the home of Cornelius. When Peter arrived Cornelius was obeisant but Peter quickly said, *Stand up. I am only a man myself*. Verse 26 Paul will later do the same thing in Lystra in Acts 14:15

Peter preached the Gospel beginning with this huge statement, *I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear Him and do what is right.* Verses 34f

I now realize is καταλαμβω. It means to take hold of something. Peter was saying, *I got this*. *I understand. God doesn’t show partiality or prejudice. There’s no racial, ethnic, or social exclusiveness with Christian faith. We’re all in this together*.

One writer, I believe having fun with a tongue twister described Peter’s sermon as a propitious passage for preparing people. Whatever, it was a good sermon. Cornelius’ household believed and were baptized.

Chapter 10 ends telling us that while Peter was still preaching, the Holy Spirit came upon Cornelius’ household, proving that they were accepted by God. They were speaking in tongues and praising God.

Let me be clear about this. No one tried to induce the gift of tongues. And no one tried to make it a requirement of faith. The Holy Spirit did what He chose to do in order to assure everyone that He was present in these Gentiles. He wanted Peter and the other Jews to know that God endorsed the Gentiles’ faith.

These are wonderful stories of victory for the Gospel, but they’re not just stories. They show us how the Holy Spirit works in the church.

God never intended for faith in Christ to be exclusive to the Jews but to just tell them to invite the Gentiles, that’s not going to happen. Their prejudices were too deep. So He gave them little victories to build them up.

Healing Aeneas and Tabitha was like a pep talk for Peter. These victories got him ready for the vision God was about to give him, a vision to take the Gospel to Gentiles. This would be a radical change. Christianity is not racially or ethnically exclusive. It’s for everyone.

I see something in this for our church. Maybe I’m reading too much into things, but I believe the Holy Spirit is doing something in our church right now. I believe He’s preparing us for a new chapter in the history of this church.

Often, when everything’s going well there lingers a sense of, *Oh no. I wonder what’s going to go wrong*. We can’t imagine Satan leaving us alone.

I’m suggesting that we take a positive approach. The Holy Spirit is arranging experiences to build us up. He’s giving us little victories so that we know He’s with us because He has plans for us. The Holy Spirit is actively working in us.

Like most churches, a lot of what we do we can do without the Holy Spirt. I think He has something bigger ready for us. And I think He’s getting us ready for it.

Whatever it is, we’re going to need something more. We’re going to need the Holy Spirit. We are at war with the same spiritual forces that the early church fought. For many years the lines separating the good guys from the bad guys was blurred. Those lines are becoming very clear now.

The Holy Spirit working in us is that something more that will make us effective in our fight against the enemy.

We’re well established as a Bible believing and Bible teaching church. The next step for us is to find more ways to take the Gospel to the world. That message is coming through loud and clear.

As opportunities present themselves to us, God is linking our insight with action. Action is an essential stage of learning. As we learn new ideas of what it means to be an externally focused church God sends opportunities to act.

He knows our tendency to think too long and never not get around to action. We need to think beyond what we’ve been for years and look for what the Holy Spirit has for us next. He’s already arranging things for us. He’s just waiting for us to say, “*Yes!*”

I’ve said this before, if we’re actively doing the will of God that we already know, we’ll know when He’s calling us into something different or more. We don’t control the Holy Spirit so we shouldn’t be surprised when he acts.

Do you remember what Sonshine first started telling the churches in La Porte of her vision for the Worthy Women Recovery Home? It seemed a bit crazy and probably untenable. Now several years later that ministry is thriving. What makes this ministry effective? It’s the Holy Spirit directing Sonshine and the Worthy Women Board.

We are on the cusp of something new and great at Agape Christian Church. I don’t know exactly what it’s going to look like, but I’m ready to follow the Holy Spirit. Will you join me in saying, “*I will follow you, Lord. Wherever and whatever. I will follow you*.”