

The question I want to address for a little while this morning is this: Why are ten of us setting off to New Mexico this week? After all, it's a lot of bother and a lot of money. Some of us don't like to fly, or even to travel this far away from home. Some of us are a little leery of spending time among people of a different culture. Some of us may be wondering how we are going to get along with each other. All of us are probably a little anxious about what we are going to eat, where we are going to sleep, take a shower and go to the bathroom. None of us have done this thing before, so we are all a little excited and maybe a little worried. There's this flutter thing beginning to rise up in our stomachs.

So, again, why are we doing it? Why did I encourage it? Well, for one thing it's biblical. In our Scripture lesson from Acts 1:8, we read the words of Jesus. He told His disciples: *"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."*

What we discover here is what I am calling "The Church's Four-fold Mission Field." In other words, there are four distinct places where Jesus wants His followers to be His witnesses. He tells them they will be His witnesses at home or where they are at present. Then He tells them that they will be His witnesses in the whole region immediately surrounding them. Next He tells them that they will be His witnesses out a little further—out of their comfort zone—or in a different culture. Finally He tells them that they will be His witnesses in all the world.

Our ministry as a church will not be complete unless we reach out beyond our brick walls. When

our witness is contained to what we do in this building, it's like hiding our spiritual lamps under a bowl or under our beds. It's like being asleep or maybe even like being dead. To put it in the context of last week's message, Jesus got out of the way so His followers would get going in all directions, to take the good news of His love to people near and to people far away.

This mission trip is being made in response to Jesus' call to go into all the world and to make disciples of all nations. I encouraged it, supported it, and decided to be a part of it, because I believe it's something Jesus would have us do.

I must confess, however, that there's a bit more to it than this. Frankly, I don't think this is going to be much of an evangelistic endeavor. We are not going out there to save the Navajo Indians, but to strengthen the work that is already being done. Of course one never knows what God might do. Revival could break out while we are there. We might have the privilege of leading a Navajo to Jesus. Hopefully, we will be ready to share the gospel if the opportunity should arise. Nevertheless, I doubt that we will do very much evangelism.

My agenda, in a word, is growth. My commission as a pastor is to help the members of my flock to become true disciples and better disciples of Jesus Christ. My commission is to build up the church by raising up more and better equipped leaders. This is actually what Jesus did. He called a small group of disciples to follow Him and for three years, He took them on one mission trip after another—all around the sea of Galilee, through Samaria, and all over Jerusalem and Judea. Sometimes He took them

beyond the borders of Galilee and Judea, taking them into the foreign cities of the North and into pagan territory east of the Jordan river.

And guess what? All the time they were traveling around, they were learning and growing in their discipleship. They were learning to trust God to supply their needs. They were learning to use their gifts to help others. They grew closer to Jesus and closer to one another. And the more they did this, the more excited they became about the things of God and the more contagious they became in influencing others to become Christians as well.

That's what this is all about for me. My heart's desire and my prayer is that everybody that participates in this mission team experience will come back from New Mexico physically exhausted but spiritually on fire, a fire that will spread among us and from us like that fire that came to the 120 on the day of Pentecost.

So whether you are a member of the team that is going to make the trip or a supporting member back home that has helped make this trip possible, I want you to pray for Holy Spirit fire. I expect some fire.

I've told you on a number of occasions over the past couple of weeks that God responds to humble obedience. That is, when His children risk doing that inconvenient or even scary thing He calls them to do, God will show up to support them. He will send the Holy Spirit to equip and empower them for ministry. He will send His fire, so I'm expecting some fire. I'm confident that we will be able to bring back some fire. So we pray, **"Burn Spirit, burn. Set our hearts on fire."**

The truth be told, the fire has already begun. Those who have committed themselves to be a part of this mission, as well as those who have been praying and giving to support it, have been experiencing spiritual growth and blessing.

One person, in particular, has been growing a lot. Mary Hoffman, was a part of our church and Sunday School as a child and as a member of our youth group and Bible Quiz team. Then, as it often happens, Mary grew up, got married, moved away for a while and then returned to Altoona. She was not a regular attender for a long time, but the Lord must have a special place in His heart for gals named "Mary." The Lord led Mary—now Mary Waterhouse-- back to church, and gave her a new hunger for Him. Mary has been on a journey at church and on a couple of Women's retreats. Now she is excited about being a part of the Mission work team traveling to New Mexico.

Through all of this Mary has been given a hunger to reaffirm her commitment to Christ by following Him beneath the waters of Baptism. It's been my privilege to watch Mary grow over this past year and my privilege now to affirm her new-found faith through administering the ordinance of Baptism.

The Fourth Street Church of God

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Sermon for June 18, 2017

Going for the Fire

Acts 1:4-9; Revelation 3:14-22

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