

## **“SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA**

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Text for the Sermon: Acts 1 and 2

**Prayer:** Holy Father, we are as a people in a dry and thirsty land who desire spiritual food and water. We cry out to you for insight from your Holy Word. By your present and powerful Holy Spirit, come to us, fall afresh upon us and help us, we pray in the name of Jesus, Amen.

### **Introduction:**

You know the drill.

“Good morning Ladies and Gentlemen. Welcome aboard United Flight 1083 bound for Chicago. Our captain has informed us that our flying time to Chicago today will be approximately 3 hours and 30 minutes at an altitude of 32,000 feet. We want to review with you at this time some of the safety features of our Boeing 757. You can follow along with the laminated card in the seat pocket in front of you. During takeoff and landing we ask that you keep your seat back in their full and upright position and that your tray table be stowed and locked and all electronic devices be powered off and stowed. There are eight exits, two at the front of the aircraft, four over the wings and two at the rear of the aircraft. In case of emergency floor lighting will direct you to the exit nearest you. In the unlikely event of cabin depressurization an oxygen mask will drop down in front of you. Place the mask over your nose and mouth, tighten the straps around your head and pull down on the tube to begin the flow of oxygen. If you are traveling with small children, put your mask on first and then assist your child with their mask.”

There are important leadership lessons in these pre-flight emergency instructions.

We are acknowledging the grace of God in our church by recognizing, blessing and praying for those who are gifted by God and willing to serve among us in these ways. But the leadership here doesn't stop here. It goes beyond these walls into our homes and community.

Husbands are spiritual leaders. Mothers and fathers are leaders, older siblings are leaders, fifth graders are leaders in elementary schools, eighth graders are leaders in middle schools, and seniors are leaders at high schools and colleges. Many of

you lead in your kids' schools, in your neighborhoods, in your places of work and service.

I want to talk about leadership this morning at all levels, and especially about the kind of leadership we will need for our homes, church, community and nation.

Flight attendants are exercising authority for the sake of the passengers. Lives are at stake. They are giving warnings that in time of crisis will be very important, but are often ignored. Spiritual leaders are God's gift to His flock, to exercise authority for the sake of our souls.

To guide us in this, the first chapter of the book of Acts is like a pre-flight announcement before the Church takes off at Pentecost. This passage gives us insight into spiritual leadership, how to be the leaders God has called us to be.

Since we are already at 32,000 feet, I am going to fly over this text and land on several verses to help us get a picture of how to get and stay connected to the source of our life.

***First, a spiritual leader is a student of Christ Jesus (Acts 1:1).*** Luke wrote two volumes in the NT: Luke and Acts. Luke was a student of all that Jesus began to do and teach. He interviewed eye-witnesses in order to:

**Luke 1:3-4** ... to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, 4 that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

Be a student of Jesus like Luke, a question asker, an observer, an inquirer, a learner. Make Jesus your life study; make Jesus the main subject of your life. Learn, grow, dig deeper, ask questions, hang around those who know Him and have been following Him and walking with Him. Talk to eyewitnesses. Spend time in the community of Jesus' followers, in fellowship with His people. Write, journal, reflect, meditate, pray, act, serve, be involved, and be intentional, in order to have certainty concerning the things we have been taught.

When the disciples were choosing a replacement for Judas they said there was a requirement:

**Acts 1:21-22** One of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, 22 beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.

A good leader follows a leader, he submits to Jesus, knows Jesus and leads others to do the same.

***Second, a spiritual leader is a lover of God (Acts 1:1).*** That's what the name Theophilus means, literally "God lover" or "friend of God." How would you like to have a name that means lover of God? Oh that that would be said of all of us and of this church. There is a lover of God, one who loves to spend time with God, one whose life bears a resemblance to God.

A leader is a lover, first of God and then of God's people. A leader cultivates a love for God and His people. A leader embodies the two great commands, "to love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-39). Make God your first love, be a lover of God and of God's people. A good leader is a lover.

***Third, a spiritual leader is chosen and ordained by God and is profoundly aware of it (Acts 1:2, 24).*** To be a godly leader there must be a clear sense of God-appointedness and not self-appointedness. The apostles were chosen by Jesus. They didn't make application, they didn't sign up. They didn't answer a classified ad. There were no posters declaring, "Wanted, a few good men." They were minding their own business, absorbed in their own lives.

God sovereignly interrupts their worlds and turns them upside down. The call to leadership is from God, by God, for God.

Today Jesus is continuing to establish and build His church in this place. As He says in John 15:16, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit."

A spiritual leader is humbled by the knowledge that it is God who rules and leads and chooses and ordains and decides, not us. A leader gets it that it really is all about Him. If you are in any position of leadership it is God's doing. A good leader is humbly dependent on God.

This is humbling, that it is God's call and choice and not ours or anything in us. We are reminded to keep the focus on the one who calls, not on the one called. Spiritual leadership is not a profession, it's a divine appointment with a divine purpose planned long beforehand.

***Fourth, a spiritual leader walks by faith and not by sight (Acts 1:9-11).*** This is an important connection for leaders. Jesus is taken from us so that we will have to

walk by faith and not by sight, by what is unseen, not by what is seen. How we live and work and relate with God and with each other will be by faith and not by sight.

Now when we say that we walk by faith, that does not mean that there are no visible evidences. The apostles had them. Jesus “presented himself alive after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3).

To walk by faith means that based on the past visible acts of God and based on the testimony of many eyewitnesses, we completely trust Him now to do all that He promised.

I can say I have seen Jesus. I have seen the clear evidence of His presence: in my own life, in your lives, in incredible acts of grace and kindness and forgiveness. In His salvation. In His Word and in His Church. We can see Jesus more clearly with the eyes of faith than with the eyes of sight

***Fifth, a spiritual leader is a pray-er (Acts 1:14) and a reader of Scripture (Acts 1:20; 2:16).*** More humility. Prayer implies dependence, it implies need, it implies that I can't do this, I need help. Prayer says that if anything good is going to happen here, it will be God who does it. Prayer is the life of a submitted, surrendered person.

Leaders lead best, at church or home or work, who humble themselves in prayer, constant, daily prayer. The best leaders appeal to a higher authority. The best leaders don't just stand tall, they bend low.

Prayer sends us upward into the power of God. Reading the Word sends us deep into the knowledge of God in Christ. They cannot be separated. If we want to experience the power we will need to know the depth, the roots as well as the fruit.

We see how they prayed, that they were devoted to prayer. And we read in both chapter one and chapter two how Peter when he speaks, speaks from Scripture. The decisions and plans they make are motivated by God's Word.

We need leaders and teachers who know the Scripture, who can articulate the truth, who are not afraid of theology, who know God and His Word.

In order for leaders to keep their minds clear they will have to breathe the pure oxygen of prayer and Scripture. That means they will have to withdraw and retreat, get away, push out the world and its demands to breathe God.

When we are traveling together in community it is important for all those who are in any kind of leadership role to be well connected to the source of life before they try to assist others in getting connected.

Getting and staying connected is very important. You have to take care of yourself, of your own soul, of your walk with God so you can be of help to others.

Let me give a practical example on the home front. Mothers are leaders. They plan, organize, make decisions, execute, implement, and on and on. The nurturing, giving nature of mothers means they often don't take care of themselves. It's like they are trying to put on their child's oxygen mask without taking the time to put on their own. This is a recipe for burnout, exhaustion, frustration, depression. Moms must take time to read, pray, sit down, go for a walk, lock themselves in their room, some time and place to take care of the soul and be in fellowship with God so that they can lead those who look up to them.

*Sixth, a spiritual leader is Spirit-filled and Spirit-reliant (Acts 1:4-5, 8; 2:1-4).*

Jesus is absolutely clear that to live a chosen life the Holy Spirit is necessary. When God calls us to Himself, what He calls us to do is impossible without God. This is so important that Jesus says don't even dare to leave home without it. Don't set foot outside of Jerusalem until you have received from God what you will need to do God's work.

Jesus is saying, "What I am calling you to do, you can't do in your own strength and wisdom. You can't do it alone, you can't do it with any of the human resources you have or can acquire. None of that is sufficient or adequate. You need something that you do not have and can't get apart from Me giving it to you."

**John 15:5** I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

It is His work that we are called to be a part of. It is about Him, not about us. The vaccine may or may not be optional, but receiving the Holy Spirit is not optional.

This is humbling and God means for it to be so. This magnifies the sovereign greatness of God and the humble dependence of us who are creatures, He is the potter and we are the clay.

This means that what we do, we will do in His strength and power and by His grace. This means that He gets the glory and credit and we get the joy.

A good leader takes responsibility, exercises his authority under the power and authority of the Holy Spirit. The spirit of our age hates authority, don't shrink back, exercise your God-given authority out of love for Christ and His Church.

### **Conclusion and Application:**

This is what it means for leaders to be connected to the source of life and ministry.

The analogy of the oxygen mask is helpful here. When do you need an oxygen mask? When you are at high altitude. If we stay in low level flight we don't need the oxygen masks. There is a sense in which we can pull off living life with our own strength and wisdom, but it is a pretty low level of living.

If you are living without daily relying on Jesus, you are not living the life God intended you to live and you are missing the blessings He intends you to have.

If we want to soar, if we want to get closer to the sun, to the glory, we will have to put on the oxygen mask. If we want to live closer to the brink of eternity, we will have to drink more deeply from the things of God. We will have to connect to God and His resources and live life completely submitted to and dependent on Him. We will need leaders who put on the mask first and then help the rest of us with ours.

*To the Saints, I say, remember your leaders.*

They are a gift from Christ to His church which is very precious in His sight. They are an expression of His love, His care, part of His leading and feeding. They are God's faithful provision for the accomplishing of His purpose.

**I Timothy 5:17** Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor.

**Hebrews 13:7** Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.

**Hebrews 13:17** Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Pray for your leaders. Pray for the joy of our leaders. Joyless leaders are no advantage to you. Pray that they will be overwhelmed with the knowledge of God's love for them and how precious they are in His sight. Pray for the Spirit to fan into flames the gifts that are in them for the sake of Christ and His church.

*To the Leaders, remember the saints.*

Behold the flock of God. His sheep have been gathered by the blood of God's Son. The Great Shepherd of the sheep has chosen you and called you by God's Spirit to serve. Give it the same energy, zeal, passion and heart that Christ does.

Be Christ-centered. Do all you do in the full awareness of Christ. That means be Christ-centered and biblically grounded. Guard the good deposit. Be zealous for the truth, full of the Holy Spirit.

Keep watch over yourselves and do not neglect your souls. Spend time daily with Jesus, the one who loves you, has called you and purchased you with His own blood.

Remember we are servants who serve the saints for the sake of the Savior who died for them and lead them to the Savior.

I commend you to God and to the Word of his grace which is able to:  
Build you up, and edify, feed, strengthen and nourish you.  
Give you an inheritance from your Father.

**Prayer:** Our Holy Father in Heaven, bless us with the power of your Holy Spirit to become a more transformed and empowered congregation. Bless us with a deep and lasting hunger and thirst for righteousness, zeal for the truth of your Word, and a great love for you and for each other. Bless us to be a blessing, used of you to extend your glory and your kingdom to all the nations. I pray for your Fatherly blessing to be upon this flock. Make us faithful and fruitful for your glory. And above all, dear Father, grant that our lives will increasingly bring glory to your dear Son, our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ, in way completely disproportionate to who we are and what we have. This we ask in the infinitely precious name of Jesus. Amen.