

Sermon for Sunday, January 27, 1974 by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor  
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"ENERGY CRISIS IN THE CHURCH"

St. Luke 24:36-53

Text: "And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high." St. Luke 24:29

Once, when the early disciples of Jesus went to a town in Asia Minor and began to tell people what Jesus had done for their lives, some of the people complained that those who had turned the world upside down had come to their town, too.

I want to ask you a question. Do you know of any towns lately that have been turned upside down because somebody was telling about Jesus? Do you know many people whose lives have been turned inside out recently because Jesus got hold of their hearts? Do you know very many families that have had their relationships healed, marriages restored, lives made over because someone named Jesus became the center of that family's life? Are there any people in your circle of acquaintances whom you have noticed have a radical transformation of their personalities, who have become astonishingly different, because of Jesus?

The Bible says that when a man meets Jesus he becomes a new creation. The Bible says he is a new man, a different personality, a transformed person. The Bible says that when a man meets Jesus it is as though he passed from life to death. If such a change isn't happening in your life or in the lives of people around you, why do you suppose this is so?

There could be two reasons. If lives are not being changed today it may be because the simple sharing of what Jesus has done for a person has lost its power, lost its punch. It could be that we live in such a sophisticated age, such a time of the triumph of the intellect, such a scientifically oriented society, that men no longer believe that story of the Bible and it no longer has the power to change them. That could be one of the reasons that lives are not being changed.

The other reason that people are not being transformed may be because people are no longer telling about Jesus. Which of those two reasons do you suspect is the real one? Do you seriously suspect that telling the story of Jesus has lost its punch? If it has, let me say quite plainly that is God's problem and not yours or mine. What happens in a person's heart when he hears about Jesus is God's business--not ours. In our scripture this morning we read of the last time Jesus was with his disciples. He tells them about himself and how he has died for men. Then Jesus says to them, "You are witnesses of these things." Now, that's the Christian job. To tell people about Jesus. And then Jesus says this: "but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high." That is, he says, "the thing that is going to make what you say effective in the life of another is that God's power is going to be working through you.

So, from the beginning, the job of the Christian was to tell about Jesus. God's job, God's business was to give power working through them to make that story effective in the life of another. God doesn't require success--that's his business--what he does require is faithfulness in sharing Jesus and that's our business. As a matter of fact, Jesus once told his disciples that if the people rejected his message they were to forget it, they were not to worry about it, and they were to shake the dust of that place off their feet and go on somewhere else. What happened when they preached about Jesus was God's business and the

business of the person who heard it and who either accepted it and got his life changed or rejected it and suffered the consequence.

No, I don't really think the problem is that the story of Jesus has lost its punch. I don't think the problem is that the power of God is no longer effective. If lives are not being changed--if lives are not being transformed, it is because Christians such as you and I are not sharing Jesus in the power that God has promised. Well, we are hearing a great deal about the energy crisis in the world today. We are asked to drive slower, turn off the lights and turn down the thermostat. I want to say to you that there is a far more serious energy crisis--it is the spiritual energy crisis in the church. The church has lost her power. Jesus told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem until the power of the Holy Spirit came upon them. On the day of Pentecost, when God's Spirit came, they were power-filled people. They went out to change the world. Today there are desperate men and women, there are disillusioned and hopeless young people. There are personal relationships that have been broken and shattered, marriages that have come apart at the seams, persons who have simply broken down emotionally in the face of the pressures of life. How the world needs Jesus. How the world needs God's word spoken in power. Only God's power can change the world and change lives. But there is a spiritual energy crisis in the church. We have lost our power--we have become unplugged spiritually.

There are some of our leaders in the church today who talk about power. Some of them have gone to Washington to lobby with radical left groups to give power to certain elements in our society. Others have tried to use the power of influence to force large corporations to take certain courses of action. Others have tried to use the structures of our denomination and the pulpits of our churches to exercise power to reshape our society by certain forms of social action. Yes, there are many kinds of power and there are many of our religious leaders who are trying to exercise various sorts of power to accomplish their goals.

But let me say this to you: the only power that is going to change our society, the only power that is going to change our world, the only power that is going to change the hearts and lives of men is the spiritual power of God working through the lives of men and women as they share what Jesus can do for a man. Someone has said that you can take a pig, give him a bath, sprinkle him with Chanel No. 5, tie a pink ribbon around his neck and he will still jump in the first mud puddle he comes to. The only way you can keep that pig out of the mud is to change his nature so that he is no longer a pig. It is the same with human beings. You will not keep us out of the spiritual mud holes of life, you will not keep us out of the trash and filth of the world, until you change our natures, until we become new creatures in Jesus. And all of the social action in the world--no matter how important it is--will not do the job. Ultimately, you've got to change our hearts and that is the work of God by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Yes, there is a spiritual energy crisis in the church--there is a spiritual energy crisis in the human heart. Men do need to be changed. And there is a world out there that is broken and bleeding, a world crying out for something or someone, a world crying out for help and hope. We have the answer. The church has the solution. You and I know how to solve the problem. We know because we have learned in our own lives that the only answer is Jesus. And if we share Jesus in the power that God promises us, we will see a world transformed, we will see lives changed, marriages healed, relationships mended.

I want to challenge us as Christians this morning to surrender our lives totally to Jesus. I want to challenge us to give him our wills, and to ask him to fill us with His Holy Spirit. Jesus said we are to be witnesses to him and he

promised us that power. We can put an end to the spiritual energy crisis at least in this congregation. We can ask God to shower down his Spirit upon us in a mighty way that we will be clothed with power from on high.

Back during the early days of Hitler there was one German pastor who dared to oppose him and to stand up for Jesus. His name was Martin Niemöller. For his opposition he spent eight years in a German concentration camp. Upon his release the news reporters gathered around him, hoping to get some juicy copy for their papers. Instead, they heard from him a stirring Gospel message about Jesus. One reporter was heard to remark in disgust, "Eight years in a Nazi prison camp and all he has got to talk about is Jesus Christ!" Yes, that was all he had to talk about. And it was the spiritual power of men like Martin Niemöller who began a transformation in the national life of Germany.

Do you know why communism has had such a fantastic spread over the world? Simply because men and women who believed in it were so captivated by their belief that they had to tell others. We shouldn't fool ourselves. The Kremlin hasn't won half the world through power and propaganda. No, it has won the allegiance of men and women because they came to believe from the lips of others--others who were fired with a passion and a zeal for their distorted philosophy of life. If mere men can make such dramatic changes in the shape of the world by the power of their witness, what changes could Christians make if they shared Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit?

Let me share a story with you that has meant a lot to me. Back when I was in seminary they taught a course called homilectics. It is a course designed to teach young candidates for the ministry how to preach. The book we used in the course was written by a man named Dr. John A. Broadus. Dr. Broadus was a nationally known figure before his death. I once read a story about him that I would like to share with you. In his younger years, Dr. Broadus was converted to Jesus in the little rural town in which he lived. The very next day he went to one of his schoolmates, Sandy Jones, a red-haired, awkward chap, and told him that he had given his heart to Jesus. "Sandy," he said, "I would like for you to be a Christian. Won't you take Jesus, too?" Deeply moved by the witness of his friend, Sandy Jones soon gave his heart to the Lord. After the service in which he publicly accepted Jesus as his Saviour, Sandy Jones stalked across the little church and held out his hand to young John Broadus and said, "I thank you, John; I thank you, John."

Dr. Broadus went on to become a great scholar and the president of a seminary. Every summer when he went home for vacation, this awkward, red-haired farmer, dressed in his plain work clothes and with the sand of the fields on his boots, would come up, stick out his great, bony hand, and say, "Howdy, John. I never forget you and I thank you, John." When Dr. Broadus lay dying, with his family gathered about him, one of the last things he said was this, "I rather think the sound sweetest to my ears in heaven, next to the welcome of Him whom, not having seen, I have loved and tried to serve, will be the welcome of Sandy Jones. He will thrust out his great hand and say to me, 'Howdy, John. I thank you, John, I thank you, John.'"

Yes, Jesus says we shall be witnesses. And when the Holy Spirit comes on us, we shall be clothed with power from on high. Don't let there be a spiritual energy crisis in your life or in this congregation. Let us ask God to fill us with the power of His Holy Spirit and in that power let us share Jesus with dying men in a dying world. Will not the sweetest sound in heaven, next to the voice of Jesus, be the voice of someone with whom we have shared Jesus who comes up to greet us, "I thank you--I thank you."