



## **ENTER** God's presence

**The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth. He says, "Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."**

**-Psalm 46 (selected verses)**

Heavenly Father, you are the creator and sustainer of all things, by the power of your word you created the universe in all its complexities. By the power of your love for us, you sent your Son to redeem us. Now by the power of your presence with us, by the Holy Spirit, open our eyes, ears and hearts to receive again and breathe more deeply, the power of the truth of your word. Amen.



## **SHARE** life together

- 1. How have you seen Jesus at work in your life this week?**
- 2. Share how you went with your living purposefully from last time?**
- 3. What does the word 'power' mean to you?**
- 4. In what areas of your life do you feel most powerful or effective?**

The moon landing was faked. Area 51 hides proof of extra-terrestrial life. Harold Holt was kidnapped. JFK was killed by multiple gunmen. Russia determined the winner of the 2016 US election. SARs-CoVid-2 came from eating bats. Conspiracy theories seem to find fertile ground in times of uncertainty, crisis and social upheaval. Conspiracies thrive when people feel vulnerable, powerless and a need to gain a sense of control over their lives. Conspiracies always blame, accuse, deflect responsibility & always cause hurt.

But the word "conspire" means to "breathe with" or "breathe together." Like a child nestled against its mother. Today... Pentecost...the pouring out of the Holy Spirit...is the day when God breathes into us so that we breathe with him. It's the greatest conspiracy ever in the truest sense of the word. God calls us to be co-conspirators with him, sharing one breath, one life, one love as we breathe new life, new hope, and new creation into this chaotic world. God calls us to be co-conspirators with him, so that the world can breathe freely, deeply and fully of the love and life found only in Jesus Christ. God calls us to be co-conspirators with him, in powerful acts, so that all people can hear the "mighty acts of God" and be drawn into his presence forever.

Week beginning  
Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2021

Worship series:  
**Getting Our Acts Together**



### **VERSE** for the week

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.

**Acts 1:8**



### **REMEMBER** this week

**When we  
conspire with the  
Holy Spirit,  
life-giving and  
powerful acts  
follow.**



**LISTEN** attentively

Read Acts 1:1-8 and 2:1-21

5. **What do you find challenging/confusing/comforting about this text?**
6. **Have you ever found yourself doing something you thought you would never be able to do? Were you successful? How did it make you feel?**
7. **Jesus told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem. How do you suppose they filled in that waiting time? How do you fill in your 'waiting time'?**

We seem to be living in a world defined more and more by the terms 'us' and 'them'. In other words, as a society, we are ever increasingly seeing the world as those who conspire with me and those who conspire against me. The area between 'for' and 'against' seems to be shrinking rapidly. There are no longer any grey areas, it seems you must be on one side or the other. This has had a massive impact on the church in many developed Western societies and cultures. We have shifted from cultures in which the church was largely the 'us' of our society. Most people belonged to it in one way or another or at least felt that it reflected their ideals and values. Then there seemed to be a transition into apathy about the church. Increasingly, people chose to distance themselves from the church but continued to see its value and contribution to society and so they tolerated it. Now it seems that the church is generally counted in the 'them' category when it comes to the media and the vocal groups of our society. More and more people seem to be openly against Christianity and institutional religion in general. However, the reality is that the world has always conspired against God's people.

8. **Have you ever encountered anyone who has had conspiracy theories about the church or has expressed a strong negative opinion of religion? How did that interaction go?**
9. **Jesus encountered those conspiring against him on a regular basis. How did he usually respond to those who opposed him?**

The word 'conspire' which is borrowed from Latin, literally means 'to breath together'. It means to be completely united in purpose and intent. The reality is that humanity has been busy conspiring against God, ever since Adam and Eve's fall into sin (see Genesis 3). Adam and Eve bought into a powerful lie, a lie which suggested God was holding back his best from them, a lie which seems to be gaining more traction again today. Perhaps you have heard some of the rhetoric in the community or in our media, "The church is an antiquated institution which only serves to uphold an outdated, male dominated, power structure and to limit our individual freedom and expression". The only answer to a powerful lie like this is a powerful truth. However, we have all learned that talk is cheap, the best way to help people see the powerful truth of the Gospel of Jesus is to back it up with some powerful acts.

10. **What are some of the other powerful lies you have encountered that have turned people away from God?**
11. **What are the kinds of things that immediately come to mind when you think of 'powerful acts'?**



**GROW** deeper

In a world so focused on the division between 'us' and 'them', one of the most powerful acts is the act of forgiveness. However, in a recent article (<https://www.cardus.ca/comment/article/the-fading-of-forgiveness/>) Timothy Keller explains how forgiveness, the one thing we need most, is quickly becoming viewed as a tool which seeks to keep the oppressed under the feet of their oppressors. What people often fail to recognise about Christian forgiveness is that it not something that we have the power to do on our own. It is only as we experience the forgiveness that God extends to us through the death and resurrection of Jesus, that we begin to understand what true forgiveness really is. It is only as the Holy Spirit of God works on us and through us, that we have the opportunity and ability to conspire with God in his plan of reconciliation. Christian forgiveness is not an act of oppressed people but of truly freed people; people who

no longer have the need to exact retribution or repayment from their enemies but rather can offer freedom and hope because their need for identity and assurance come from their standing as children of God.

**12. What is the most powerful act of forgiveness you have ever witnessed?**

**13. What other acts, aside from forgiveness, does the Holy Spirit empower you to carry out towards others?**



## **LIVE** purposefully

Since the fall of creation, God's plan – as revealed in scripture and in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus – was to reconcile us with himself. When Jesus' disciples experienced the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, they were able to partner with God, to conspire with him to bring the knowledge of that forgiveness and reconciliation through Jesus, to thousands of people. Each of us, as God's children, have also received the Holy Spirit of God, who works in us, empowering us to show the same love and forgiveness Jesus showed to others. These are the acts of power that draw people to Christ, acts of love and forgiveness, especially spontaneous, unsolicited and undeserved acts of love and forgiveness.

**14. What areas of your life or what people in your life do you find it difficult to show love and forgiveness to? Why?**

**15. Our acts and words need to go together. How would you respond to someone who asked why you are showing them care/love/forgiveness? How could your response lead them to Jesus?**

**16. How are you ensuring that you regularly hear and receive the forgiveness of your sins?**



## **PRAY** intentionally

- Praise God for his invitation to us to partner with him in his work of reconciliation. Thank Jesus for sending the Holy Spirit out on all his people. Ask the Holy Spirit to soften your heart toward others and help you to perform powerful acts of love and forgiveness.
- Ask God to help us as the LifeWay family of churches to always be a place where people encounter the love and forgiveness of Jesus.
- Continue to pray for those severely affected by the Covid-19 crisis and particularly those in India and Cambodia. Pray also for the escalating conflict between Israel and Palestine, that the love and forgiveness of God might rule in the hearts of those on both sides of the conflict.



## **BLESS** one another

You might like to address one person in your group and make the sign of the cross in the air as you say...

**[Name], the power of the Spirit lives in you. Amen.**