

INTRODUCTION

After everything we have walked through together this series — Pentecost, a lame man healed at the temple gate, Ananias and Sapphira, Philip and the Ethiopian official, Saul transformed on the Damascus road, Peter in the house of Cornelius, Paul in Corinth and Athens, a farewell at Miletus, a violent storm, a viper on Malta, and finally, last week, arrival in Rome itself — the Book of Acts ends like this:

"He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance."

And then the book simply stops.

No verdict from Caesar. No description of what ultimately happened to Paul. No dramatic final scene, even though every reader Luke was writing for would already have known that Paul was eventually executed. Luke had that ending available to him. He knew how the story actually turned out. And he chose, quite deliberately, not to write it down.

I want you to sit with that for a moment, because it is genuinely strange. Nearly every other book in Scripture, and certainly nearly every other story we tell, works toward some kind of resolution. A conclusion. A sense of things being wrapped up. Acts refuses to give us that. Luke ends his account of the early church not with an ending, but with two men — Paul and the gospel itself — still very much in motion.

I don't think that was an accident. I think it was the whole point.

I want to take you back, for a moment, to where this series actually began. On Pentecost Sunday, at the very start of this journey through Acts, we celebrated the church's birthday alongside something else extraordinary: Beverly Keaton's hundredth birthday. I said then that Beverly's life was itself a testimony to God's sustaining faithfulness — sixty-five years helping carry St. John's forward, through wars, depressions, cultural upheaval, and every kind of season a hundred years can hold.

I want you to notice something about Beverly's story this morning. It doesn't have an ending either. Not yet. Every year she has lived has simply continued — one more year of faithfulness added onto the last, without ever arriving at some final, tidy summary of what her life meant. Her story, like Paul's, like the Church's, keeps being lived forward rather than concluded.

That same week, I told you about a ledger from 1915, kept by the eighteen women of the Women's Guild who founded this congregation. I've mentioned that ledger several times this series, usually to point out how faithfully those women trusted a future they couldn't see. But notice something about the nature of a ledger itself. It never has a final entry that says "the end." A ledger simply keeps being added to — page after page, entry after entry — by whoever comes along next to keep the account. Nobody closes a ledger on purpose while the work is still going. You only add to it, faithfully, one entry at a time, and hand it to whoever picks it up after you.

Beverly's unfinished life. A ledger that is never actually closed. And now, this morning, a book of Scripture that ends without ending. I don't think that's a coincidence. I think it's the same truth, told three different

ways: God's story with His people was never designed to conclude in any single chapter, any single life, or any single ledger entry. It was designed to keep being lived forward, faithfully, by whoever comes next.

I. EMPOWERED TO BE FAITHFUL IN THE NOT-YET-RESOLVED (v. 30)

Look closely at what Luke actually tells us about those two years. Paul lived in Rome "at his own expense" — meaning he was covering his own costs while under guard, likely through the same tentmaking trade that sustained him back in Corinth. He was still a prisoner. His appeal to Caesar was still unresolved. He had no idea, in the middle of those two years, how the whole thing would end. And yet Luke tells us he "welcomed all who came to him."

Notice what Paul does not do during those two unresolved years. He doesn't simply mark time, waiting anxiously for Caesar's court to finally decide his fate before he resumes being useful. He doesn't grow bitter about the chains, or resentful of the delay, or paralyzed by not knowing how his own story would end. He welcomes people. He keeps teaching. He stays fully present and fully faithful in a chapter that had no resolution in sight.

I lived a version of that unresolved faithfulness myself, in a week I will never forget as long as I live. I was three weeks into a seven-week training course with United when the news came: my mother was sick, terminally. Late-stage esophageal cancer, already spread to her liver, her bones, her lungs. She had, at most, a few weeks left, and what remained of those weeks would be hard and painful, with no possibility of recovery.

We got the news on a Friday. Training was in Houston, which meant I was close enough to see her — but leaving training meant starting the entire seven weeks over from the beginning, with no guarantee I'd even be accepted back into a class. It felt unbearably unfair. And my mother herself forbade me from leaving. As soon as class let out Saturday, Jay drove me straight to the hospital to see her. She was still lucid that day, and through the pain, she made me promise that I would be back in training Monday morning — that she would be okay. On the speaker in her room, Vestal Goodman was singing an old gospel song called "What a Day That Will Be." My mother smiled through her tears and said, "That will be me soon. I'm about to get my wings — you go get yours."

I went back to training that Monday. She fought a valiant fight that week. The following weekend I saw her again, but by then she was heavily medicated just to manage the pain. Leaving her room Sunday night, looking back through the window, I knew — I simply knew — it would be the last time I saw her alive. The next day, at noon, my mother earned her wings. A week and a half later, I earned a different pair of wings myself — the pair that eventually led me here, to this pulpit, to this congregation.

I have never forgotten her words, and it was never really about a set of metal wings with my name and an airline logo stamped on them. It's because every one of us who serves Christ carries that same promise she was clinging to in that hospital bed: that for now we see only dimly, but one day we will see Him face to face. And what a day that will be.

I think this is one of the most important, and most overlooked, truths in this entire book. Almost none of us actually live at the moment of resolution. Most of life — and I believe most of what a discernment season will actually feel like for this congregation — is lived exactly where Paul was during those two years:

genuinely faithful, genuinely present, genuinely useful, without yet knowing how the larger story concludes. Finishing well was never about already knowing the ending. It was about staying faithful for as long as the not-yet-resolved chapter lasts.

II. EMPOWERED TO STAY UNHINDERED REGARDLESS OF THE CHAINS (v. 31)

Now look at the very last word of the entire Book of Acts. In the original Greek, the final word Luke chose to end his account with is *akōlytōs* — "without hindrance." After twenty-eight chapters, after Pentecost and persecution and shipwreck and chains, the very last word of the book is a word about being unhindered.

Think about how strange that actually is. Paul is, at this exact moment, chained to a Roman soldier. He cannot leave that house. He cannot travel where he wants. Every outward, physical measure of freedom has been stripped away from him. And Luke insists, as the final note of the entire book, that none of it actually hindered the one thing that mattered most: the boldness of his witness to the kingdom of God.

That is such an important word for us to hear, especially in a season where so much genuinely feels outside our control. Circumstances can restrict where we go, what resources we have, how our days are structured, even our physical freedom, the way they restricted Paul's. But circumstances have never had the power to hinder the actual substance of a faithful witness. The chains could hold Paul's body. They could not touch what was unhindered inside him.

I think back to that same week of training, because grief turned out to be its own kind of chain. I could not leave. I could not properly mourn. I could not simply take the time I needed to fall apart, the way any of us naturally want to when we lose someone we love. I had to show up every single day, sit in a classroom, pass exams, demonstrate emergency procedures in front of instructors and classmates who had no idea what I was carrying, all while my mother was dying, and then while she was gone, and the funeral itself had to wait until training was finished. By every outward measure, I was about as hindered as a person can be — physically required to be somewhere, unable to grieve the way grief usually demands.

And yet, looking back now, that grief never once hindered what God was actually doing in me during those weeks. If anything, I finished that training with a clarity and a resolve I don't think I would have had otherwise — carrying my mother's own words with me into every single day of it. The chains were real. The restriction was real. But none of it touched the thing that mattered most: showing up faithfully, day after day, toward a purpose I could not yet fully see, exactly the way Paul kept teaching, day after day, chained to a Roman guard in a rented room.

I believe that is exactly the word St. John's needs to carry into whatever comes next. Whatever limitations shape this congregation's next chapter — fewer people, fewer resources, an uncertain structure — none of those limitations have the power to hinder what actually matters. The boldness of our witness to Jesus Christ was never dependent on the absence of chains.

III. EMPOWERED TO HAND THE STORY FORWARD (Acts "29")

So why would Luke end the story here, with two unresolved years and one deliberately chosen word about being unhindered, instead of simply telling us what happened next?

I believe Luke ends the book this way because the Book of Acts was never actually about Paul. It was never even primarily about the twelve apostles. The Book of Acts is the story of the Holy Spirit building the Church, and the Holy Spirit's work did not conclude when Luke set down his pen. There was no way for Luke to write a true ending, because the story he was telling had no ending yet to write. It still doesn't.

That is why so many people over the centuries have jokingly, but seriously, referred to an unwritten "Acts 29" — the chapter Luke never had to write because it was never his to write. It was always meant to be lived, not recorded. Every act of Spirit-empowered faithfulness since that final verse has, in a very real sense, been the next paragraph of a book Luke intentionally left unfinished. The Women's Guild, keeping a ledger through a world war in 1915, was living Acts 29. Beverly, faithful for a hundred years, was living Acts 29. Gateway of Hope, and everything God did through those thirteen uncertain years, was Acts 29. And this congregation, right now, in whatever chapter it is currently living, is Acts 29 as well.

CONCLUSION

I think about everything we have walked through together since we opened this series back at Pentecost. A frightened handful of disciples, transformed into bold witnesses by the Holy Spirit. A community devoted to prayer, fellowship, and radical generosity. Courage under persecution. A church learning to live honestly rather than performing appearances. The gospel crossing boundary after boundary — to a eunuch on a desert road, to a persecutor on the Damascus road, to a Roman centurion's household, to the marketplace in Athens, to a rented room in Rome. A farewell wept over at Miletus. A storm that could not sink the promise, even though it sank the ship. And now, finally, two unresolved years, ending on the word "unhindered."

That is not a story that concludes. It is a story that gets handed forward. And this morning, it is being handed to us.

INVITATION

So let me leave you with this question as we close out our journey through the Book of Acts. If Luke handed you the pen right now — if the next paragraph of Acts 29 were yours to live, starting today — what would you write with your life? What would you write with this congregation's next season?

We do not know yet exactly what chapter comes next for St. John's. That is precisely why, starting next week, we're turning to the book of Hebrews, to ask what actually sustains a people called to keep believing and keep moving forward, long after the promise has been made but before it has been fully seen.

The mission of Jesus did not end when Luke set down his pen. It has never once stopped moving forward, generation after generation, faithful witness after faithful witness. And it is not finished yet. Let us pray...