

WHAT'S NEXT?

Series: Good God
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Adam Mosley
Vision, Community, Gifts God
Acts 1:42-47, Acts 4:32-35, Acts 4:13-16

One of the most depressing, demoralizing, lowest days of my life was when Melody and I went from DINKS to NINKS. What are DINKS and NINKS, you ask? Well, DINKS is what we were back in October of 2008 - Dual Income, No Kids - D-I-N-K. And life was good!

We were both working for a recruiting and staffing firm in Houston, the fourth largest city in the U.S. Business was up, our commissions were good, and money was flowing into our bank account. That year, I personally made three times as much money as I had ever made in my life. I had a picture on my desk of the car I hoped to buy the following year - a BMW 335i (I told you last week that I'm a car guy!)

I thought I had it all figured out. It wasn't that I had lost interest in doing God stuff vocationally, but I told myself that maybe I could work at this higher-paying job for 5 or 10 years, make a bunch of money, and have more financial freedom to do what God wanted me to do. It sounded like a great plan. And, frankly, Melody and I liked being DINKS - we liked having more income at our disposal.

But, one day that October, all of that disappeared. That's the day we went from DINKS (Dual Income, No Kids) to NINKS (No Income, No Kids). You see, the trouble with a husband and wife working for the same company is that you open yourself up to the possibility of both of you be laid off at the same time. And that's just what happened to us. We went into the office one day, and the President of the company met us at the door, along with the Vice President of Human Resources. And we both knew what that meant. It was over. We were unemployed. We packed our things and left.

I remember vividly what was going through my head as I drove home that day. Here we were, a young couple suddenly stripped of our jobs - from dual income to no income. But like most people in the U.S., we hadn't set up our lives to live on no income. In fact, we had set up our lives under the assumption that our income would either stay the same or increase. We had two new cars with car payments, we had a house with a mortgage. We had credit card debt. There were lots of bills! And now there was suddenly no money to pay those bills.

On that day, and the roughly six weeks that followed, I felt deflated. Yet, I knew enough about myself, my wife, and our God to know that we weren't defeated. We would come out of this pit. The question was, "How?" What was the path forward for us?

My prayers to God during that time were very simple. “God, what’s next?”

This morning, I want to wrap up our *Good God* series by asking that very same question. What’s next? We’ve been looking at the events surrounding Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension (or the time when his body left earth for good), and this morning, we’ll continue to do that by answering the question of what’s next for Jesus’ followers. What were they to do after spending so much time with Jesus? How did they go about doing it? And what does it mean for us?

But first, let’s pray that God will open our eyes and ears to what he has for us this morning.

Prayer

Last week, we looked at this transitional moment for Jesus’ disciples. To bring you up to speed, Jesus, having lived his life as an example for us to follow, allowed himself to be arrested, beaten, put on trial, wrongfully convicted, and sentenced to death. He then endured a humiliating and excruciating death on a cross.

His body was taken down and placed in a tomb on a Friday, then on Sunday, he wasn’t there any more. He had come back to life, and over the course of 40 days, he appeared to his followers and gave them instructions before finally disappearing for good.

Last week, we looked at Jesus’ final instructions to his followers, which are recorded in the book of Acts. He told them to wait for something God had promised them - this power from the Holy Spirit. Acts chapter 1, verse 8:

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Acts 1:8

These men and women had learned enough about Jesus to know that if he said wait, they should wait. So, they waited. They waited another 10 days until the day of Pentecost.

This was a day that the Jewish people celebrated every year - a day that marked 50 days after Passover. The traditional Pentecost celebration was a remembrance that 50 days after God rescued the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt, he appeared to Moses on Mt. Sinai. Modern Jews still celebrate this day - a day they call Shavuot [sha-voo-OTE]. It was and is an important day in Jewish history.

But on this particular Shavuot or Pentecost, something new happened - it was the thing Jesus told them to wait for. We’re told that they were all together celebrating Shavuot when

suddenly, the sound of a violent wind fills the room. Not wind itself, just that *sound*. And while they were hearing that sound, something described as looking like fire rested on them - something ethereal and weird that they didn't really have words for. And as that happened, they all started speaking in different languages - languages they didn't know and hadn't studied.

This was weird stuff! But the cool part was, all these languages they were speaking were *real* languages, and soon enough, people outside of their group overheard them and recognized that they were hearing their own native languages being spoken. We read in Acts that Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs all heard these guys declaring the wonders of God in their native languages.

And this group of Jesus-followers, led by a guy named Peter, recognized this moment as the thing Jesus was talking about. It was some kind of power given by the Holy Spirit, prophesied in their ancient scriptures. But it was also very practical - not just power for power's sake, but a power that allowed them to communicate the good news of Jesus to people from around the world. No wonder Jesus asked them to wait for this! This was a tool they needed in order to go into all the world and preach the gospel - the good news - as Jesus had asked them to do.

And it was effective. That day, we're told, about three thousand people were baptized and became part of this new church. *Three thousand people!*

Now the waiting was over! They had three thousand new followers of Jesus. It was time to move onto what was next! And that's where I want to focus today. Let's read starting in Acts 1, verse 42:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Acts 1:42-47

After all that had taken place over the course of 50 days, this event at Pentecost would really be the birth of the church. And from that point forward, this group of people would truly begin to function as a unit, as a family. What did they do?

They came together. This band of Jesus-followers - outcasts from the traditional religious system - recognized that the only way they were going to be able to move forward was if they stuck together. Following Jesus, for them, meant isolation. They would be disowned by family and shunned by friends. All their reliable support systems would be destroyed. The only way they would survive was to cling to each other. To invest in each other. To help each other.

And that's just what they did. They were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. We read further in Acts 4, verse 32:

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

Acts 4:32-35

In other words, they acted like family. This group of people who no longer had family *became* family for each other. They refused to let other people go hungry. They gave up their own security for the well-being of their new brothers and sisters.

What else did they do?

They sought God. Every day, we're told, they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to prayer. They worked on their spiritual lives. They praised God.

A few weeks ago, as I was reading through this passage, I got hung up on this idea of them meeting together daily in the temple courts. I wonder what that looked like.

The temple courts, understand, was a large walled area just in front of the temple itself. It was the same place I mentioned a few weeks ago that Jesus had driven money-changers and animal brokers out of. It was a large and busy area, but I'm guessing that a group of Jesus-followers that numbered somewhere between a few hundred and a few thousand on any given day probably caused a bit of a scene there in front of the temple.

These people whose leader had been sentenced to death at the prodding of the temple leadership chose to meet every day right in front of the temple. So, even as they were doing things like praying and praising God, they were also staging a bit of a peaceful protest. They

were making it known that they loved God and were seeking after him, and that in that pursuit, they had come to know the truth and good news of Jesus.

For this group, part of growing closer to God involved doing so in a public way. Their faith wasn't a private endeavor. So, they sought God in this way.

Two of their leaders, Peter and John, quickly found themselves arrested and on trial because they were teaching about Jesus and healing people right there at the temple.

But the same boldness in seeking after God which got them arrested is what ultimately set them free. There's a great interaction, recorded in Acts chapter 4. It's a discussion among the religious leaders who had arrested Peter and John. Check this out. Acts 4:13

*When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, **there was nothing they could say**. So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. "What are we going to do with these men?" they asked. "Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they have performed a notable sign, and we cannot deny it."
Acts 4:13-16*

They sought God in a way that even their detractors couldn't deny. That's pretty incredible stuff!

What else did they do?

They used God's gifts. God gave them certain gifts, and they put them to use. We saw that at Pentecost, where they were able to speak in different languages, and so they started praising, singing, and talking about God in those languages. They didn't, you know, start just whispering to each other. They didn't go down to the city gate and start trying to sell things in different languages. No, they used that gift from God to tell others about him, and about the good news of Jesus.

But they did other things too. They were healing people through prayer. They were giving their possessions toward a common good. Later on in the book of Acts, we see people who were particularly gifted in administration being used by God to organize a kind of food pantry system. We see people preaching to big crowds and others having one-on-one conversations helping people to understand God.

These people were committed to use whatever God gave them, whether spiritual or physical, to advance the cause of Jesus in the world.

And as I look at this time in the formation of the church, I can't help but see the parallels between this group of dedicated Jesus-followers and the group that we have gathered here today.

For us, as for them, Jesus has called us to something. He has given us some instruction. We have gathered together. We seek his power and wisdom. And I look around and go, "Wow. This is pretty good. God's doing something here." But I can't help but wonder what's next for us. What's next for this church? For this city? For you...and for me?

I think about things like, "What if we came together like they did?" What would it look like if this group of people was so committed to each other that people looked at us and saw something that looked a lot more like a family than some religious organization?

I've seen flashes of that in the past couple of weeks. One of our Trinity family has faced nearly unfathomable difficulty in her life, and some of the women from the church have come together to rally around here. Several families have pooled together money - money they had planned to use for other purposes - and they gave it to help her and her family. The people of Trinity Vineyard Church Nakuru have been acting like members of the Trinity *family*, the Trinity *tribe*.

We can go even further. By welcoming more and more people into this family, and by committing ourselves more and more *to* this family, I think we can actually begin to affect change in this city. You see, we represent something that some people think shouldn't be. We are multi-tribal, multi-ethnic, multi-age, multi-faith. We blur and erase dividing lines between people. We are a group of misfits and outcasts, and we come together into one tribe. One family. We are a picture of heaven in the midst of our own personal hell and we have a statement to make to the people of Nakuru

Come join our tribe! You are welcome here, and you are family!

That's what can happen if we come together. I think about these things. I dream about them.

I think about what could happen if we seek God the way that those early believers did. What if we were intent on walking the path God has laid out for us, individually and as a church, and we did so in very public ways - not trying to shove Jesus down people's throats, but truly living our lives in pursuit of him, unafraid that people might notice. In fact, *excited* that people might notice this peaceful protest against the ways of the world.

I'm reminded of the story of Alfred Nobel. Nobel was a guy who was successful by most people's definition. He was Swedish munitions manufacturer who amassed a great fortune by producing explosives. He was a great innovator in his field, inventing, among other things, dynamite. But that's not how most people remember Alfred Nobel.

You see, in 1888, Alfred's older brother Ludvig died, and many newspapers published an obituary, not for Ludvig Nobel, but for his more well-known sibling Alfred.

And it was upon reading his own obituary, mistakenly published instead of his brothers, that Alfred realized something. He was successful in all the violent and lucrative ways that our culture celebrates, but at the end of the day, the thing he would be remembered for was that he invented ways of killing more people more efficiently than ever before.

Alfred Nobel realized two things upon reading that obituary: that this is how he was going to be remembered, and that this wasn't how he *wanted* to be remembered. He had to do something about it.

When Alfred Nobel died in 1896, his will established the Nobel Prizes given each year in the fields of Physics, Chemistry, Medicine, Literature, and Peace. You see, Nobel realized that the ways of the world were not, ultimately worth being remembered for. Instead, he created a lasting legacy that would honor the explorers, the healers, the artisans, and the peacemakers. He revolted against the ideas of the world, against the ideal he had previously espoused. He recoiled from our errant ways.

I mean, isn't that what pursuit of God - following Jesus and the ways of his Kingdom - isn't that what we're talking about. It's a repudiation of the ways we've been told the world has to work. We're told only the greedy can be successful, but through God, we define success not by what you have, but by what you give. We're told that we have to defeat our enemies with military might, but we follow the words of Jesus to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. We're told that only the strong survive, but we cling to the truth that in our weakness, God's strength shines through - that when we are humble, when we seek to serve, when we value *loving* people over gaining an advantage over them - then and only then will we obtain anything worth having, and we'll make great strides for God's kingdom.

What if we could seek God the way those early believers did - with an understanding of what he has already done, and in anticipation of what he will do. What if we could say with confidence, "Wherever God leads, whatever he wants, that's what I'll do."

These are the things I dream about. These are the questions I ask.

What if we really leaned in and learned to use the gifts God gives us? You know, we've all been designed to function a certain way in this life. Some of us are good at one thing. Some are good at another. What if instead of despairing over all that we *can't* do, we learned to actually utilize the gifts God has wired into us?

The Apostle Paul, in writing to one church, talks about the incredible variety God has created in the church and he compares it to the human body. In 1 Corinthians 12, he muses about this. He says,

Now if the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

1 Corinthians 12:15-20

Imagine this group, free of the insecurity that tends to creep in, empowered by the Holy Spirit to embrace our place in this much larger body. Imagine a group where we can combine our God-given gifts and talents to accomplish far more than any of us could do on our own.

Imagine a community of people serving our city through these gifts - spiritual and physical - with the outcome that they had in that first church of Jesus - that the Lord would add daily to our number - not because we just want to have a big church, but because we are inviting people into the family, we're showing them what it looks like to pursue the things of God, and we're using our God-given gifts to serve, to heal, to protect, to give, to love, to empower, to lead, to teach, and to rescue.

What's next for Trinity Vineyard Church Nakuru?

In the coming weeks, we're going to delve into that. I want to encourage you to be here each of the next three weeks. I know for some of you, that's a difficult ask. But this is an important time in the life of our church. We've been doing this for two months, and things are going well.

But like those disciples who watched and waited as Jesus instructed, there comes a time when we have to ask the question, "What's next." And then we have to do something about it.

Next week, we're starting a three week series called *On Purpose*, where we'll look at why this church exists and how we plan to press forward into the future. Because we're not content to just sit back and let life happen. We want to change the city of Nakuru. We want to change the world.

But, in the words of author John Schaar, “The future is not some place we are going, but one we are creating.”

What’s next?

Let’s pray

Prayer

We’re going to close today with a time of personal response. And there several ways to respond:

1. Singing

We’re going to sing some songs together that help us reflect on some of these things.

While that singing is taking place, you will also have the opportunity for prayer.

2. Prayer

If you need prayer for anything at all, we have people here who are eager to do that.

Also, while that is going on, you’ll have a chance to take communion

3. Communion

Communion is a symbolic act, instituted by Jesus as a way for us to remember the way he willingly died for us. The unleavened bread serves as a symbol of Jesus’ body broken on the cross. The wine or juice symbolize his blood that was spilled for us.

We have people ready to serve you communion. Juice is on your left, wine is on your right. Feel free to partake of either, as it fits with your tradition. Just break off a piece of the bread, dip it in the cup, and eat.

We offer communion each week for *anyone* who wants to take it. There’s no membership requirement or hoops to jump through. You are guests at this symbolic table of Jesus, so please feel free to partake.

4. Giving

Lastly, during this time, you will have an opportunity to give financially to the work of this church. If you’re a guest with us today, we don’t expect you to give anything. However, for those who consider this your church home, and for those who believe in what we’re trying to do here, this is our chance to give back to God a portion of what he has given us, and to support the work he has called this church to in Nakuru.

There is a tall box at the back with a slot in it. You can place your gifts in that box at any time as we are singing together.

So those are the four ways to respond: Singing, Prayer, Communion, and Giving. All will be happening simultaneously. There's no order you have to do them in. You don't have to do them all. You don't have to do any of them. This is your time to respond in whatever way you desire.

At the end of that time, I'll pray a prayer of blessing over you before you go.

Closing Prayer