

Holy Spirit LEAPs

by Pastor Kurt Hoover

Holy Spirit Litany adapted from Psalm 51

Pastor: Create in me a clean heart, O God,

All: and renew a right spirit within me.

Pastor: Cast me not away from your presence,

All: and take not your Holy Spirit from me.

Pastor: Restore to me the joy of your salvation,

All: and uphold me with a willing spirit.

Pastor: We worship You Lord in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen

Acts 1:15-21 ¹⁵ In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (the company of persons was in all about 120) and said, ¹⁶ “Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. ¹⁷ For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry.” ¹⁸ (Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness, and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. ¹⁹ And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their own language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) ²⁰ “For it is written in the Book of Psalms, “May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it”; and “Let another take his office.”

²¹ So 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.”

Acts 7:51-8:3 ⁵¹ “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. ⁵² Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, ⁵³ you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.”

⁵⁴ Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. ⁵⁵ But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and

saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.⁵⁶ And he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”⁵⁷ But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him.⁵⁸ Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul.⁵⁹ And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”⁶⁰ And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep. And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.² Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him.³ But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

The first 6 chapters of Acts introduce us to the context of the early church. It occurs mostly in Jerusalem. In chapter 7 the church spreads because of persecution. The people with this good news are sent out into other towns.

Peter, the rock on which Jesus would build his church, did in fact get used by God to build the church. As Luke writes his Gospel it is noteworthy that Peter says some pretty dumb things. He tempts Jesus to not go through his suffering and crucifixion. He kind of just blurts out, ‘no it can’t be.’ To which he gets that famous rebuke. ‘Get behind me Satan.’ He is the one at the transfiguration that suggests they might stay in this glorious moment. ‘Let’s build houses for Elijah and Moses... certainly this is the new Kingdom the Messiah would usher in.’ To which God say’s ‘This is my son, Listen to him. Sola Christus.

But in Acts Peter gets all the mic drops. Luke gives him credit for not backing down and inspiring speeches that lead to 3,000

Baptisms and the almost overnight growth of the church to 5,000 members. Jerusalem was 50-80,000 people depending on the pilgrimages from all over – maybe 100,000.

And then Peter almost disappears as we hear about the ministry of Paul. Paul was the guy holding the coats, then known as Saul, when Stephen was Martyred.

Stephen we only get introduced to once although he has one of the longest speeches in Acts. Almost all of chapter 6. We get to hear the story of others who answered the call to be leaders in that early church. Luke obviously interviewed Philip getting the story of Samaria where the early church really took off. And the story of the Ethiopian eunuch from last week.

Interestingly enough both Stephen and Philip were one of the 7 chosen for the ministry of caring for the poor and the widows which we find at the beginning of chapter 6 had become such a burden to proclaiming the Gospel that they set aside 7 others – the first board chairs of the early church. :) These lay leaders were just as influential in the life of the early church as the Apostles in charge of preaching and teaching.

The church has changed the world. And you are a part of that church. The same Holy Spirit that changed lives back then is changing lives today. You are ... You are God's promise to a lost a distracted world. Even if this is your first time hearing or reading this invitation... you are set free from proving yourself to be a promise. It is true that if you stop trying to define yourself and your part in the Kingdom... You will actually become of use to the Kingdom. You will find that part of you guided by the Holy Spirit that has been leading and point to the Lord your whole life.

And how is it that God does this. How is it that God creates these leaps out of self and into faith?

Three things stand out clearly in the first 5 chapters of early church. *Baptism*, the *Holy Spirit* and the *name* of Jesus. We find these words mentioned more time in Acts than any other New Testament book. The church exists to give people the freedom of the Holy Spirit which is given through Baptism in the name of Jesus – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

You are right now being set free to LEAP out of self and into Faith.

LEAP! How is God asking you and your family to take a LEAP of faith in 2026?

As we walk through the book of Acts in Sunday morning worship, we ask – ‘What the church looked like then and how we are being asked to do the same.’ The early church changed the world because its people lived out of their faith, rather than an obligation to God. Life is more than a rat race for acceptance and success. We get to LEAP into new adventures together as families and as the church.

In 2026 the leadership and I have identified 3 areas we see God at work in us.

First, we are a training ground for future church leaders. God does this with our youth and young adults who are getting their first taste of ministry. We are creating podcasts...

We have students teaching Sunday school... (family worship - she owns this it is her identity)

We are providing scholarships...

We will advertise for a Seminary Intern in 2026...

And this is the part I am most excited about remodeling a new youth room and renovating the Gathering house to be a Seminary

Greenhouse... We plan to have 2-3 rooms where students can live as they get real experience leading in the church here at Messiah.

Other concrete ways our families might be asked to LEAP are in celebrating 125 years of ministry and getting more involved in our community with our benevolence and ministry partners.

Messiah Lutheran tithes our weekly offerings to local and international charities. What would it look like for your family to make a connection with one of those local partners. What a LEAP of faith to spend even one day as a family volunteering at Morning Star Mission, Daybreak or The Pregnancy Resource Center.

We have a dozen ministries who use our space throughout the week. What would it look like for your family to welcome and create connections for the families already coming through our doors for *Lil' Loves*, *Stay-n-Play*, *YMCA Kid's Zone*, or an exciting new ministry that supports foster families: *Love Moves. US*. There are many more.

Gift bags, hospitality, basketball, ...

Finally, throughout the year 2026 we will be celebrating our 125th year of ministry. Part of that celebration will be laying the foundation for our new bell tower. Much like our *Baptism Sunday*, anniversary celebrations are an evangelism moment. Now is the time to invite others into this Holy Spirit movement called the church.

What a LEAP it truly is to start that conversation about Sunday morning worship and what it means to you. The next time someone comments on your faith, your positive attitude, your willingness to help... that is God giving you the nudge to LEAP!

The same Holy Spirit is at work in the church today as when it first began.