**Breakthrough - Week 3 - Places**

**Message Big Idea**: The Spirit brings breakthrough in specific places in specific ways.

**Scripture:** Acts 17:16-34

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**Introduction: Places**

Places are important.

The places we live, work, and play are special to us and this week I was thinking through some of the places in our own city that I am particularly thankful for…

(Option 1 – Make a selfie-style video of your favorite places in the community around your location … i.e. Restaurants, local parks, ice cream shops, etc... (30 sec. to 1 minute in length)

(Option 2 – Take 3 pictures of some of your favorite places, or funny pictures of TP in that place, and just talk through them – See example below)

*(Placeholder for Picture)* This is downtown Naperville. I love walking around here on summer night, walking along the river with my family.

*(Placeholder for Picture)* This is a picture of where my eldest and I sit when I come home from work and watch the trucks drive by. I’ll always think of these times when I see this spot.

*(Placeholder for Picture)* Or this place…this is where both of my boys were born and our lives were changed forever. More so than we ever knew!

Places are important. The places you live your life are important. So, today I want us to dream together and imagine the breakthroughs that God wants to bring to these places.

**Series Recap**

*(Series Graphic)* That’s one of the reasons we’re in this 6-week series. We believe God wants to breakthrough into our lives. In fact, we believe as a church that we are entering into a new season of breakthrough. This series is part of that season, but we believe what God wants to do is much bigger than a 6-week series.

During this series we are also launching a new 3-year initiative called “Breakthrough” that will be an important part of this season. We’ll have a special Commitment Sunday on November 17 when we’ll ask everyone who calls Community their church home to bring 1) a special gift 2) and a commitment of what they’re willing to give above and beyond their normal contribution to the church over the next 3 years. But again, we believe that what God wants to do in and through Community is much bigger than this initiative too.

We believe God wants to breakthrough in every area of our lives, transforming us in ways we’ve never experienced before.

As we continue to open ourselves up to what we believe God is doing, we decided the best place to start would be to study the book of Acts together to learn how God was at work in the early church. The breakthroughs that God brought about in the book of Acts had a lot to do with particular places…the cities and neighborhoods… the physical places where people lived and worked and moved.

**The Mission Spreading to Places**

In fact, the charge Jesus gave to his apprentices before leaving this earth was about spreading his good news to various places. At the beginning of Acts, Jesus tells his followers:

**“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**

If you are not familiar with the geography Jesus mentions, *(Map)* let me show you on a map.

First, Jesus starts where they are… *(Highlight)* **Jerusalem.** In many ways, Jerusalem was the center of gravity for much of Jesus’ ministry. Jesus tells his apprentices to start right there…where they already were.

From there, they are to go out to the surrounding areas known as *(Highlight)* **Judea and Samaria.**

And then they are to be his witnesses to the *(Highlight)* **ends of the earth.** They are to carry the good news of Jesus to the furthest reaches of the known world!

And as we move forward in Acts, this is exactly what happened!

* *(Acts 1-8:5 – Jerusalem)* At the start of the book, Jesus’ apprentices boldly proclaim the good news of Jesus in Jerusalem.
* *(add Acts 8:5-13:1 – Judea and Samaria)* Then, when facing persecution, the Christ-followers scatter away from the city taking the good news of Jesus to Judea and Samaria.
* *(add Acts 13:1-28 – Ends of the Earth)* And this movement continues! The second half of the book of Acts tells the story of the mission expanding to the ends of the earth!

Now, the ever-expanding Jesus mission didn’t stop in Acts 28. It has continued on for 2000 years! You may not realize it, but by being on mission here inNaperville, you are part of this incredible movement!

**Community Story**

*(Chicago area showing each COMMUNITY location listed below)* In fact, here at COMMUNITY, we have been able to see this type of Acts 1:8 movement across Chicagoland! Some of you may be aware of our story, but my guess is many of you are not. So let me give you a few highlights.

*(Note to TPs: A location-specific version of these highlights will be made for you. Each location will highlight 4-6 of the following points…you can delete the others.)*

1. It all started in **Naperville** on **March 5, 1989** – when our founding pastors, Dave and Jon Ferguson, launched Community Christian Church in the cafeteria of Naperville Central High School.
2. Nine years later, a building developer asked if we'd consider moving the church to a community 20 minutes south of Naperville. Moving the church didn't seem like a good option, but this conversation gave birth to our multi-site vision. In March of 1998 we launched our second location in **Romeoville**.
3. Just a few years later, a door opened for us to start holding services in the clubhouse of a gated retirement community. In October of 2001, our **Carillon** location was born.
4. Just six months after that, a small church west of Naperville offered to gift us their building if we would launch a new location in it. We celebrated the beginning of our **Montgomery** location on March 16, 2002.
5. Then, in March of 2004, the Community Pastor at our Naperville location felt a call to launch a new location in the city of **Shorewood**. John Ciesniewski led a team that planted our fifth location there.
6. Two years later, a door opened in **Yorkville** for another new location. On March 23, 2006, we launched a new church that first met in the courthouse. If you got there early, you could get a seat in the jury box!
7. Next, we sent a couple hundred people, our largest launch team yet, to open a new location in **Plainfield**. The original Plainfield location celebrated its Grand Opening on March 1, 2008.
8. It became obvious that our next location should set out to reach the community west of Naperville. On January 8, 2010 we celebrated the launch of our **Aurora** location.
9. Then on March 20, 2011, our first female Community Pastor, Tammy Melchien, led a team that launched our first location on the north side of Chicago in the **Lincoln Square** neighborhood.
10. On the same day, we opened our **Lemont** location. The only time in Community's history that we launched two locations on the same day!
11. Two years later, Eric Metcalf and his team opened our second location on the north side of Chicago in the **Lincoln Park** neighborhood. Their Grand Opening was on October 19, 2013.
12. A few years later, in an unprecedented move for Community, our Romeoville, Shorewood, and Plainfield locations combined to form the new **Plainfield** location and opened a beautiful new facility on September 18, 2016.
13. Most recently, we launched our **Downers Grove** location on February 11, 2018 with Ted Coniaris and his team knocking it out of the park in reaching that community.
14. And I am so excited to let you know today, that our 11th location will be coming soon. On \_\_\_\_\_\_ we will be launching **Community Freedom** inside the Joliet Treatment Center.

It’s incredible to think about all of that movement…isn’t it?! But there’s even more good news... This movement isn’t done. In fact, the best is yet to come! You and I have the privilege of carrying the good news of Jesus to more and more places!

We believe God has called each of us to join in this mission of helping people find their way back to God, *(City map of Community location)* and it starts right here in this place, in our community. So the question is, how can we, the people gathered in this room, carry the good news of Jesus to *this* particular place?

Well, let’s look to the book of Acts and a story of Paul carrying the good news of Jesus to a very particular place to see what we can learn.

**Listen to the Place**

The second half of the book of Acts tells the story of Paul carrying the good news of Jesus to cities and towns throughout what is modern day Turkey and Greece. In Acts 17, he finds himself in the city of Athens. Even for Paul, getting through to the people of Athens was a challenge, but Paul’s approach can give us insight into how to reach our own city.

So, how did Paul go about this?

Well, he begins by taking the time to **Listen to the Place**. He wants to better understand the place he’s trying to reach. So he takes a walk through the city, carefully observing the *culture* of the place.

Now, the people of Athens consumed new ideas like Americans consume fast food. In the ancient world, the city of Athens was the capital of philosophy and a place that prided itself on its rich cultural heritage.

Luke describes the general flavor of Athens with a statement in Acts 17 that I think is kind of funny:

*(add)***“All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.” – Acts 17:21**

This town is full of professional beard-strokers. Picture Gandalf in a toga and you’re on the right track. If Paul is going to be effective, he has to realize that the people he’s going to encounter listen to new ideas everyday. It’s all they do day in and day out. So when Paul is invited to speak to a group of these philosophical types, he starts with what he has learned about them. Listen to what he says in the next verses:

*(switch)* **“Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: ‘People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious.For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.’” -Acts 17:22-23**

The Athenians wanted more and more knowledge so Paul starts with something they do not know. He uses the idea that the Athenians worshipped a god they did not know to tell them about the God they could come to know. He didn’t jump up with his bullhorn on the first street corner he found, but instead he started by listening and observing. And then, when he got an opportunity to speak in the city’s most influential forum, he knew what to do.

Now, I think the wisdom of Paul’s strategy still holds true today. Church planter Rich Gorman describes it as learning the *(Heading)* **Four “P’s” of a Place**. These four “P’s” exist in every community and can help us understand the culture of that place.

The first P is *(add)* **Pain**.

What are the things that are draining the life out of the community? Loneliness, anxiety and depression, poverty, addiction? There’s pain in every place, and anyone who wants to reach a community can’t turn a blind eye to its pain.

The second P is *(add)* **Pennies.**

Understanding our communities certainly includes having some idea about the local economy. What kinds of jobs make up the community? How has the local economy affected the lives of the people living there?

The third P is *(add)* **Power**.

Whether it’s the city government, school boards, or even home owner’s associations, every city or neighborhood has certain focal points of influence. If we are going to reach our communities and neighborhoods, it’s important to know what these hubs are so that we engage people in these areas.

The final P is *(add)* **Parties**.

Every community has things that it cherishes and celebrates. This could be anything from high school sports, to a thriving arts scene, or even the local flavors at the most popular restaurants. This is often where you find the heartbeat. What does the community celebrate? *(Give a few examples from your location)*

So Paul starts by listening to the place of Athens so that he would better understand the place, but he doesn’t stop there.

**Broken for the Place**

One of the things I love about Paul is that he brought his whole self to the mission. His observation of Athens wasn’t merely academic. In fact, Luke begins the whole story by pointing this out:

**“While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols.” –Acts 17:16**

Paul looked around at the extent of idolatry in the city, and his heart was **Broken for the Place**. That’s the starting point. I can almost picture him walking the great streets of Athens, filled with the world’s greatest marvels and architecture. But all the while, he knows there is pain in this city. And he knows the statues and shrines he sees can’t move an inch to heal any of it.

If we are going to reach this place that God has given us to reach, our hearts need to be broken for this place. We have to decide that it isn’t OK that:

* 15% of adults are clinically depressed.[[1]](#endnote-1)
* More than 10% of adults suffer from some form of substance abuse.[[2]](#endnote-2)
* Teen suicide rates are at record highs.[[3]](#endnote-3)
* Loneliness is now an epidemic affecting up to 47% of adults.[[4]](#endnote-4)
* And thousands of people living right around us are far from God.

I believe all of these things break the heart of God, and to join him on mission in this place, we need to let them break our hearts too.

**Reaching the Place**

Once Paul knew the place and his heart was broken for the place, *(Reaching the Place)* he set out to reach the place. I think Paul would have done anything to see breakthrough in the places he invested himself in. In one of his letters to the churches, he writes: *(add)*

**“I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.” –1 Corinthians 9:22**

If that meant going to the Aereopagus to do some beard stroking with Gandalf, that’s exactly what Paul was going to do. He engaged the rational minds of Athenians in the most rational ways. It was on their home turf, in their home language, and on their home terms.

Let’s think back to the *(Slide with all 4)* **4 “Ps” of a Place.**

Maybe God is calling you to engage with people in the places of POWER in our community or to help shape the decisions about how the PENNIES get spent in this place. You have the connections you have for a reason. To help people find their way back to God.

Maybe you could join the PARTIES in this place. That sounds fun, doesn’t it? But you come not just for the entertainment, you come because you know there are people who need to find their way back to God in those places.

Maybe God is calling you to enter into people’s PAIN. To journey with people below the social media surface of their lives. To show love and compassion and ultimately to point them to the one who can heal their hearts.

The truth is that no task or mission has ever been as important as people finding their way back to God. What’s astounding to me is that of all the ways God could go about spreading the most important message in history, *he chose us*. It’s the church that God uses to reach the world. ***WE*** are his plan for reaching this place. ***WE*** are his plan for reaching *(your location)*!

**Challenge**

So I want to challenge us with two things today.

The first challenge is to **Show Up!**

I loved getting to look back on COMMUNITY’s story today, but not just to reminisce. Looking back pushes me to look ahead with different perspective. When I look back over the years, I see God’s faithfulness to this place. Thousands of people have found their way back to God in this place! God has been so good to us!

As we look forward to this season of breakthrough, I can’t stress to you how important it is for everyone who considers COMMUNITY their church home to show up on November 17. He’s calling us to do something together on that day that is going to have a dramatic impact on the next season in the life of our church as we commit to an above and beyond gift of generosity.

Big things are happening at every single location to move the mission forward. Here at Plainfield, our plans include adding a stoplight and expanding the parking lot. It’s going to give us more capacity than ever in a place where we feel the squeeze every weekend.

Beyond Plainfield, God is doing tremendous things at our other locations such as Downers Grove. We recently were able to acquire a building in that city, and it’s a fantastic location. But for it to be the place that it needs to be, tons of updates are necessary. They entire building needs to be completely renovated. God is already showing us what he can do and I can’t wait to see what this season holds for us!

So the first challenge is to show up on Sunday, November 17 to make your commitment to the Breakthrough Initiative.

And the second challenge is **Suit Up!**

Sometimes we zoom way out from the map when we think about how God is moving. It might feel like Jesus’ mission to carry his message to the ends of the earth happens somewhere else and through someone else. Not here…not me. But here is the truth… God wants to use each and every person here to bring breakthrough in this place!

Where is God calling you to connect to the power, pennies, parties, and pain of our city? The place that you work, the neighborhood you live in, the businesses you shop at, the places you go for entertainment… You are the one with the best chance to reach the people in those places! Not the pastor, not the small group leader…you! He’s calling each of us to suit up and get involved. We all have a role that no one else can fill. No one else is you in your family. No one else is you among your friends and neighbors. No one else is you at your job.

In this season of breakthrough, God is calling every one of us to suit up to carry his mission forward!

**Conclusion**

God is breaking through in this place, and as shocking as it might be to us, we are the instruments through which he’s breaking through. The news that Paul brought to Athens is the same news we’re speaking in this place today. We live because Jesus lives. There has never been a time or a place that didn’t need the good news of Jesus. But the time for God to break through is here and now. His love and his life are on our lips and in our hands. So show up, suit up, and let’s experience the breakthrough that only God can bring.

So if you would bow your heads right where you are, let’s pray together.

First, I want to invite you to ask God for a breakthrough in a place that’s close to your heart – your home, your work, your favorite coffee shop. Just pray this simple sentence, **“God, I ask you for a breakthrough in this place.”** *(pause for 30 seconds)*

Next, I want you to think about the breakthrough you’re longing to see in this place, our church home. How would you love to see God move? Get together with a couple of people around you and simply talk to God about it. Ask him for a breakthrough here. *(Pause for 60 seconds)*

As we close, let’s join together as one community of Christ-followers, and ask God for breakthrough in our church by praying this prayer on the screen together:

**“Father, we ask you for breakthrough in this place and any place we find ourselves. We open ourselves to the work of your Holy Spirit. Grow us. Transform us. Use us to further your mission in this world. We pray all of this in the name of Jesus and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**”

**Communion Idea**

The church, WE, are God’s plan to help restore God’s dream for this place and to help people find their way back to God.

And we can do that for others because it was first done for us…

Jesus came to this place, Earth, perfectly restoring God’s dream for his world everywhere he went. And ultimately making THE WAY for anyone and everyone to find their way back to God through His death, taking full weight of all our failures and brokenness on himself, and through His resurrection, destroying the ultimate power of failures and brokenness, death.

Now, he calls us to join Him in His mission. To be His apprentice as he transforms our lives and places through us.

And together we celebrate and remember what Jesus has done and the mission He has called us to by receiving communion together. The bread represents the body of Jesus that was given for us and the blood of Jesus that was shed for us.

All we need to do is receive it.

1. <http://www.dph.illinois.gov/sites/default/files/Volume2_Issue14_Mental%20Health.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=32300> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.luriechildrens.org/en/news-stories/suicide-rate-rises-among-illinois-youth-ages-10-to-17/> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/envy/201902/loneliness-new-epidemic-in-the-usa> [↑](#endnote-ref-4)