

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth

Sunday, September 27th, 2026

Rev. Gerry Gallant

Scattered, Yet Sent

Proper 21

Acts 8:1-8

Welcome

Announcements

Call to Worship

Oh sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth!

Sing to the Lord, bless His name; tell of His salvation from day to day.

Declare His glory among the nations, His marvellous works among all the peoples!

For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised.

Prayer of Adoration and Invocation

Sovereign Lord, You are holy, wise, powerful, and good. You rule over heaven and earth, and nothing can defeat Your saving purpose. We praise You for sending Your Son, Jesus Christ, who died for sinners, rose in victory, and now reigns over His church. By Your Holy Spirit, gather our wandering thoughts, open our hearts to Your Word, and help us worship You with reverence, faith, and joy. Receive our praise through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Call to Confession

God's Word calls us to come honestly before Him: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." Yet the same Lord invites us to confess, because He is faithful and just to forgive. Trusting in Christ, let us confess our sins together. (*1 John 1:8-9*)

Prayer of Confession

Merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed. We have doubted Your rule when life was painful. We have kept silent when we should have spoken of Christ. We have trusted our own goodness instead of the finished work of Jesus. We have failed to love people who are different from us, and we have often sought comfort more than faithfulness. Forgive us for the sake of Christ, who obeyed in our place and bore our guilt on the cross. By Your Spirit, turn us from sin, renew our faith, and make us ready to serve wherever You send us. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Hear the good news: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Everyone who turns from sin and trusts in Christ is forgiven, counted righteous, and received as God's child. This is not because of our goodness, but because Jesus died and rose again. In Him, our sins are forgiven. Thanks be to God. (*Romans 8:1*)

Children's Hymn #475: "I Am the Church! You Are the Church!" (V 1,2,3)

Refrain:

I am the church! You are the church!
We are the church together!
All who follow Jesus,
all around the world!
Yes, we're the church together!

The church is not a building;
the church is not a steeple;
the church is not a resting place;
the church is a people. (Refrain)

We're many kinds of people,
with many kinds of faces,
all colours and all ages, too
from all times and places. (Refrain)

Sometimes the church is marching;
sometimes it's bravely burning,
sometimes it's riding, sometimes hiding;
always it's learning. (Refrain)

The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name
Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven
Give us this day our daily bread
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one
For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory,
Forever and ever, Amen.**

Hymn: "Waymaker"

You are here moving in our midst.
I worship you, I worship you

You are here working in this place.
 I worship you, I worship you
 You are here moving in our midst.
 I worship you, I worship you.
 You are here working in this place.
 I worship you, I worship you.

Chorus
 Way maker, miracle worker,
 promise keeper, light in the darkness
 My God, that is who you are
 Way maker, miracle worker,
 promise keeper, light in the darkness
 My God that is who you are.

You are here touching every heart.
 I worship you, I worship you.
 You are here healing every heart.
 I worship you, I worship you.
 You are here turning lives around.
 I worship you, I worship you.
 You are here mending every heart.
 I worship you, I worship you. (Chorus)

Responsive Reading

Psalm 46:1-8

¹ God is our refuge and strength,
 a very present help in trouble.

² **Therefore we will not fear though the earth give way,
 though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,**

³ though its waters roar and foam,
 though the mountains tremble at its swelling. *Selah*

⁴ **There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
 the holy habitation of the Most High.**

⁵ God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved;
 God will help her when morning dawns.

⁶ **The nations rage, the kingdoms totter;
 he utters his voice, the earth melts.**

⁷ The Lord of hosts is with us;
 the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah*
⁸ **Come, behold the works of the Lord,
 how he has brought desolation on the earth.**

Anthem (Music Ministry): “Breathe”

Prayer for Illumination

Scripture

Acts 8:1-8

8 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.

Philip Proclaims Christ in Samaria

⁴ Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. ⁵ Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. ⁶ And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. ⁷ For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. ⁸ So there was much joy in that city.

Sermon

There are times in life where it seems as though God’s work is going backward. A faithful servant dies. The church suffers. Families are driven from their homes. Christ’s enemies appear strong, while Christ’s people appear weak.

That is exactly how Acts chapter 8 begins. Stephen has been killed. Saul has approved of his death, and severe persecution has broken out in Jerusalem.

Yet only a few verses later, Scripture says, ‘So there was much joy in that city’ (Acts 8:8).

How did such sorrow lead to joy? How did persecution lead to preaching? Simple, it happened because our sovereign Lord is so wise, powerful, and gracious that even the evil plans of His enemies cannot stop His saving work. The church was scattered, but the Gospel was not silenced. In these verses today, we see a suffering church under Christ’s rule, a scattered church carrying Christ’s Word, and a divided city receiving Christ’s joy.

The passage opens with these chilling words

Acts 8:1

8 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.

Saul was not simply standing nearby. He agreed that Stephen should die. Years later, Paul admitted, in first Corinthians that '[he] persecuted the church of God.'

Yet the risen Christ would soon stop this man who was attacking the church. Showing us that no sinner is beyond the reach of God's grace. Jesus found Saul, called him, forgave him, and changed him from a wolf into a shepherd.

But before that change came, Saul caused terrible suffering. Verse 3 says

Acts 8:3

³ But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

Fear came right to their doors. Believers lost their safety, their homes, and even contact with people they loved. Calvin said that persecution tore the church in Jerusalem apart, yet new churches began wherever the scattered believers went. Saul's cruelty was real evil, but even that evil remained under Christ's rule.

In the middle of this violence, Scripture pauses to show us the church's grief:

Acts 8:2

² Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him

Notice how the Bible does not hurry past their tears, and neither should we. Christian hope does not make grief unreal. Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus, even though He knew He would soon raise him from the dead. Paul tells believers not to grieve 'as others do who have no hope'. He does not tell us not to grieve. Faith and tears can live in the same heart. We can believe in the resurrection and still deeply miss the person whose chair is empty.

Perhaps some of you know something of that kind of sorrow. Maybe your life has changed in a painful way that you did not choose. Perhaps you received a difficult diagnosis, lost a job, walked through a broken relationship, or watched a door suddenly

close. Acts 8 does not ask us to pretend that darkness is light. It calls us to remember who rules even in the darkness. The nails did not defeat Christ. The tomb did not hold Christ. Persecution cannot stop Christ. We may not understand what He is doing, but the Savior who gave Himself for us will never be careless with our sorrow.

And here the passage begins to turn. The suffering is still real, but it is not the end of the story. Christ takes the scattering of His people and uses it to spread His Word.

Verse 1 said that the believers 'were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.' That word 'scattered' can also describe a farmer scattering seed. Their enemies meant to silence the church, but God used the scattering to plant the Gospel in new places. They thought they were getting rid of the church; the Lord was planting witnesses in new soil. Tertullian later wrote that the blood of Christians is seed. Christ's enemies cannot destroy what Christ has decided to build.

In fact, this scattering followed the very path Jesus had already laid out. Before He returned to heaven, He said, 'You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth'. Until this point in time, the church had remained mostly in Jerusalem. Now the believers were moving into the very places Jesus had named. Their enemies could not stop the mission of the King. In God's wonderful plan, light came out of darkness, and life came out of death.

This is the same truth Joseph spoke when he said, 'You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good'. And we see it most clearly at the cross. Herod, Pilate, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel acted wickedly. Yet Acts 4 says they did what God had already planned. People remain responsible for their sin, and God still rules over history. No evil can defeat His holy purpose.

So think again of that farmer scattering seed. To someone watching, it may look as if he is throwing away something valuable. But the farmer sees a future harvest. These believers did not choose to leave their homes, yet wherever they went, they carried God's life-giving Word. We should not pretend that we know why God allows every trial. Still, we can know this: no hardship lies outside His wisdom. An unwanted change may place us beside someone we would never have met otherwise.

Yet Christ did more than send His scattered people into new places. He also gave them a message to carry. His providence put the witnesses where He wanted them, and His Word gave them something clear to say.

Verse 4 tells us,

Acts 8:4

⁴Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.

The apostles stayed in Jerusalem, which means that sharing the Gospel was not their work alone. Christ still gives pastors and teachers to serve His church. When the church gathers, we hear God's Word, receive the sacraments, pray, and worship. Then, when we leave, it is the call of every Christian to carry the Good News of Christ into homes, workplaces, hospitals, and neighborhoods.

And what did these scattered believers say? They did not need to know every answer before speaking about Jesus. They only needed to know the heart of the Gospel: God is holy. We are sinners, and we cannot save ourselves. The eternal Son of God became truly human. He obeyed God perfectly, died in the place of sinners, and rose from the grave. Everyone who turns from sin and trusts in Him is forgiven, counted righteous, welcomed into God's family, and given eternal life.

The power is not in how we'll we speak. The power is in the Gospel.

God's Word now takes this wide view of the scattered church and brings it down to one faithful witness. He turns our attention to Philip and shows us what clear, Christ-centered preaching looks like in one place.

Verse 5 says,

Acts 8:5

⁵ Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ

This appears to be the same Philip who was chosen in Acts 6 to help care for widows who were being overlooked. Later we will see him called 'Philip the evangelist. The man who had faithfully served at tables was now faithfully preaching in a new place. The reality is that the Lord uses those who care for people, and He uses those who proclaim His Word. In both kinds of service, faithfulness matters.

And notice what Philip preached: he 'proclaimed' Christ. He spoke like a messenger sent by a king. A messenger does not invent the king's words; he delivers them. Philip announced that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the crucified and risen Lord, and the only Savior. Christian ministry is not a vague message meant only to make us feel better. It is the clear good news that the Son of God carried our sin, defeated death, and now calls everyone to turn from sin and believe in Him.

And when this message is preached and received, it does more than save separate individuals. Christ begins to tear down old walls and bring former enemies together as one people.

That is why Samaria matters so much in this passage. Jews and Samaritans had been divided by religious and ethnic hatred for hundreds of years. John tells us that ‘Jews have no dealings with Samaritans’. Yet Jesus had already crossed that barrier. He spoke with the Samaritan woman and told her that He was the Messiah. Now His Gospel was crossing that same barrier and entering Samaria with power.

This is what Christ does. He brings together people who would not normally come together. He does not create unity by treating truth as unimportant. He creates unity by bringing sinners back to God through His blood and making them one body. Christ ‘is our peace,’ and He has broken down the wall of hatred. So, we should hold to Biblical truth with honesty and kindness, remembering that our deepest unity is found in one Lord, one faith, and one God and Father of all.

As the gospel crossed this old barrier, Christ gave clear signs that confirmed Philip’s message.

Verse 6 says

Acts 8:6-7

⁶ And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. ⁷ For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed.

They heard his words, and they saw the works that followed. Evil spirits came out, and many people who could not walk were healed. These signs did not replace the Gospel; they confirmed it and revealed the power of the risen Christ. Hebrews 2 says that God confirmed the message of salvation through signs, wonders, and gifts of the Holy Spirit. Every miracle pointed beyond Philip to Jesus, the King whose kingdom was entering enemy ground.

So, the lesson is not that the church should chase after amazing signs. The lesson is that Jesus is alive, His compassion is real, and His power reaches both body and soul. We depend on His complete written Word. We pray for His mercy. We stand against darkness. And through it all, we proclaim Christ, the One to whom every sign points.

Those signs displayed the mercy and power of the risen Christ. But God’s Word does not leave us with the signs themselves. It leads us to their result: a city that had known darkness was now filled with joy.

The passage ends with these beautiful words:

Acts 8:8**⁸ So there was much joy in that city.**

Notice the movement of the passage. There is great persecution in verse 1. There is deep sorrow in verse 2. Then, in verse 8, there is much joy. The sorrow is not ignored or denied. Rather, Christ uses even that sorrow as part of the way the Gospel reaches Samaria. Calvin said that this joy grows from faith and peace with God. It is the 'good news of great joy' announced when Jesus was born: sins are forgiven, chains are broken, outsiders are welcomed, and Christ is received.

And this joy did not belong to Philip alone. It spread through the city. Homes changed because hearts changed. Troubled people were set free. The helpless were helped. Old hatred began to lose its hold. We should long to see this kind of change in our own community—not power or praise for ourselves, but the good that comes when Jesus rules human hearts. We cannot create revival, but we can preach Christ, love our neighbors, and ask God to make His Word bear fruit.

Still, some may hear about this joy and wonder, 'What if I cannot see it in my own life yet?' Perhaps you are still waiting, grieving, and trying to understand what God is doing. This passage gives hope not only to those who can already see the good result, but also to those who are still living through the scattering.

Perhaps right now you feel more like the believers fleeing Jerusalem than the people rejoicing in Samaria. Your grief may still be fresh, and God's purpose may still be hard to see. Those believers could not see Samaria's joy while they were running for their lives, but Christ could see the whole story. He knew where they would go. He knew whom they would meet. He knew how His Word would spread. So when you cannot see His hand, trust His heart.

With that hope before us, how should we respond? The risen Christ rules over the suffering of His church. He sends His scattered people with His Word. And He brings joy out of sorrow. Therefore, let us respond with trust, witness, and worship.

First, trust Christ's plan. His rule does not remove the pain of suffering, but it assures us that our suffering is never wasted.

Second, carry Christ's Word. God has placed each of us among particular neighbors, family members, friends, and co-workers. Speak naturally, humbly, and clearly about Jesus.

Third, proclaim Christ Himself. Guilty and helpless sinners can be forgiven. God can count us righteous, welcome us into His family, and make us new by His Spirit—all because Jesus died and rose again.

That call is for the church, but the good news in this passage is also for anyone who has not yet come to Christ. Before we end with encouragement for believers, hear the mercy that Christ offers to every sinner.

If you are not yet trusting in Christ, this Gospel joy is offered to you today. Saul's part in Stephen's death shows how deep human sin can go, but Saul's later conversion shows that God's mercy goes deeper still. Turn from your sin and come to Jesus. Do not trust in your own goodness, your church background, or your ability to repair your life. Christ's perfect life, His death for sinners, and His resurrection are enough. 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved'

And now, to all who belong to Christ: take courage. The church may suffer, but she is not alone. Christ's servants may be scattered, but they are still safe in His hand. The Word may be spoken through weak voices, but it remains the Word of the living God. Jesus said, 'I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it'. Acts 8 shows Him keeping that promise. Stephen is buried. Saul attacks. Believers flee. Philip preaches. Samaritans listen. Prisoners are set free. A city rejoices. And over it all stands the risen Christ.

So let us worship Christ when the road is clear, and let us worship Him when the road is hard. Let us trust Him in Jerusalem, and let us speak of Him in Samaria. Let us grieve with hope, suffer with faith, and witness with love. The enemy may scatter the church, but Christ sends His people. The world may fight against the Gospel, but 'the Word of God is not bound'. May the Lord keep us faithful where He has placed us, ready to go wherever He sends us, and joyful in the salvation we have in Jesus Christ. And as we go, may we be the Salt of the earth and the Light of the world, so that others may see Christ in us and give glory to our Father in heaven.

Let us pray,

Almighty and gracious God, You have spoken to us through Your Word and called us again to the grace offered in Jesus Christ. Do not let us leave what we have heard behind when we leave this place. By Your Holy Spirit, root Your truth deeply in our hearts, so that it may bear fruit in our lives.

Keep us humble, faithful, and ready to serve. Help each of us to honour You in our calling, to love our neighbours, and to speak of Christ with courage and kindness. When the way is difficult, teach us to rest in Your power and to persevere in faith.

Preserve us in the love You have shown us in Your only Son. Keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, whose blood has purchased our salvation, until at last You bring us into the

eternal rest prepared for Your people. Hear us, merciful Father, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Adapted from a prayer of John Calvin

Invitation to Offering

As an act of worship and gratitude to God, you are invited to place your offering in the offering box at the back of the church, as you leave today. We now offer our thanks to the Lord for His abundant grace and faithful provision through song and prayer.

Offering Hymn #830: "Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow"

Praise God from Whom all blessings flow,
Praise Him, all creatures here below:
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

Offering Prayer

Closing Hymn #722: "Lord Whose Love" (V 1,3,4)

Lord, whose love in humble service
bore the weight of human need,
who upon the cross, forsaken,
worked your mercy's perfect deed:
we, your servants, bring the worship
not of voice alone, but heart;
consecrating to your purpose
every gift which you impart.

As we worship, grant us vision,
till your love's revealing light
in its height and depth and greatness
dawns upon our quickened sight,
making known the needs and burdens
your compassion bids us bear,
stirring us to tireless striving,
your abundant life to share.

Called by worship to your service,
forth in your dear name we go,
to the child, the youth, the aged,
love in living deeds to show;

hope and health, good will and comfort,
counsel, aid and peace we give,
that your servants, Lord, in freedom
may your mercy know and live.

Pastoral Prayer

Sovereign and gracious Father, we thank You that Jesus Christ is risen and reigning. When the church seems weak and the world seems strong, remind us that Your purpose cannot fail and Your Word cannot be bound.

We pray for Christ's church throughout the world, especially for believers who suffer because they confess His name. Protect them, strengthen their faith, provide what they need, and give them courage to speak the gospel with love. Use even hardship to spread the good news and gather Your people.

We pray for our own congregation. Comfort those who grieve, heal the sick according to Your wise will, encourage those who are lonely, provide for those facing financial need, guide those making hard decisions, and draw near to all whose future feels uncertain. Help us trust Your heart when we cannot see Your hand.

Give us open doors to speak about Jesus in our homes, workplaces, schools, and community. Keep our message clear: Christ died for sinners and rose again; everyone who repents and believes in Him will be saved. Break down sinful pride and old divisions. Make us truthful, gentle, welcoming, and faithful.

We pray for those who govern. Give them wisdom, justice, humility, and concern for the good of all. Restrain evil, protect the vulnerable, and grant us freedom to live quiet and godly lives.

Lord, bring gospel joy to our town. Save those who do not yet know Christ. Restore those who have wandered. Build Your church, not for our praise, but for the glory of Your name.

We also thank You for the fellowship meal after the service. Bless the food to our use and us to Your service. Bless those who prepared and provided it, and let our time around the tables deepen our love for one another. May our conversation be gracious, our welcome be warm, and our fellowship reflect the unity and joy we have in Christ.

We ask all this through Jesus Christ, our only Saviour and Mediator. **Amen.**

Benediction

Now may the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good that you may do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. **Amen.**