

# Introduction

Today begins a journey. Over the next fifty days, our attention will focus on the Great Commission that Jesus has given to each of us.

**50 Days**—Why this number? The number 50 is referred to many times in Scripture. In regard to these devotions, it is connected to the length of time between Easter and Pentecost, two of the three major festivals of the Church. These devotions, as a part of the overall 50 Days Ablaze! can be used at any time throughout the year but were written originally for use between Easter and Pentecost.

Following His Resurrection, Jesus spent 40 days with His disciples, teaching them and reviewing all that they had learned and experienced. Following His Ascension, they waited 10 days until the Holy Spirit came upon them at Pentecost, empowering them to carry out the mission Jesus gave them:

*“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)*

The gift of the Holy Spirit was and is vital to the mission and the growth of the Church. It is by the Holy Spirit that God enables, empowers and guides the one, holy apostolic Christian Church on earth.

In the original language, the word for Spirit is “pneuma.” Primarily it means “wind” or “breath.” Today we get such words as pneumatic (as in pneumatic drill) from this root word. I share this not to bore you but to help shed some light on the role and purpose of the person of the Holy Spirit. Picture if you will the church as a sailing vessel. The Holy Spirit then is the wind that fills the sails, enabling the church to move toward its destination.

**Ablaze!**—is a worldwide Lutheran (LCMS) mission movement dedicated to sharing the Gospel with 100 million unreached or uncommitted people by the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation in 2017. The goal of Ablaze! is to ignite the world with the love of Christ Jesus. Ablaze! is not a program. It is not an answer. It is an invitation. Ablaze! invites you to carry the flame that burns in your heart to a world sitting in darkness.

The devotions over these 50 Days center on seven ways in which we are invited to respond to His mission: Learn, Pray, Give, Tell, Send, Go and Celebrate. It is my hope and prayer that as we journey through these 50 Days, like the men on their way to Emmaus, we will come to know Christ more deeply and that our hearts will burn within us as it did for those two companions of Jesus on that walk.

At the end of each devotion there is a prayer, a challenge, a suggested reading from God’s Word, and an excerpt from the Book of Concord. The prayer will provide you with an opportunity to gather your thoughts from the lesson and offer them up to God. Take some time to add your own thoughts to these prayers. The reading from the Word of God is intended to take us deeper into His teaching, providing us with something to meditate on during the day. The Book of Concord contains the confessional writings of the Lutheran Church. Selected readings are provided to remind us that these seven mission responses are not new. They are rooted in the teachings of the Church for centuries. The challenge is offered to do just that—to challenge us to apply the lesson to our hearts and lives and to put the teaching into practice. Altogether, they are meant to raise the bar in the hope that through this journey we can grow and mature toward the full stature of Christ Himself.

Welcome to the journey. Let’s begin our walk together with Jesus as our Teacher. In the end, it is my prayer that you and I will echo the thoughts of those two men who walked with Jesus, when they said, *“Were not our hearts burning within us while He talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” (Luke 24:32).*

The devotions will cover 50 Days, but may the journey continue for the rest of our lives.

To God Alone Be The Glory!  
Barry J. Keurulainen