



Sunday May 21, 2023
Luke 24:44-53 (Seventh Sunday of Easter)

Ascension Lutheran Church
Pastor Tony Acompañado

Being a witness comes with a fair amount of responsibility. If you witness a crime or an accident, then there's an expectation that you'll make a statement to the police, and you might even be called to testify in court. If you're asked to be a witness for a friend's wedding, then you'll have to sign the marriage license indicating that you were there and saw the commitment pledged between two people. And if you're lucky enough to get tickets to the Super Bowl, the Olympics, the Final Four, or even attend a presidential inauguration then your family and friends will expect you to give them details about all the activities that took place.

But witnesses aren't worth a whole lot if they keep what they've seen or heard to themselves. After all, the whole point of being a witness is to share what someone has seen or heard. The very definition of a witness suggests an action is associated with it – to testify to or give evidence about something one has seen or heard.

Well, that same expectation applies to the people who have been witnesses of Jesus' works. The original disciples were witnesses of what Jesus did and said, and *we*, who have witnessed that work through eyes of faith – we too stand alongside them. And *because* we've seen and heard what he has done – as Jesus' witnesses, we're called to share this with the rest of the world.

In today's Gospel lesson we're invited to consider the closing words of Luke's Gospel which tell of the very end of Jesus' earthly ministry. We've been following Jesus since his humble birth in a stable, and we've journeyed with him as he grew into a man who had to endure repeated challenges to his identity and his actions, along with the constant temptations of the world to sin and turn away from God.

As Jesus lived out that faithful obedience to God's will, he was also *teaching* his disciples. This group of followers was with Jesus nearly every moment of every day. They saw his miracles. They heard his preaching. They witnessed his grace, love, and mercy in action. And while deep down they believed that Jesus was who he said he was – the promised and long-awaited Messiah – they weren't always so confident in what he was going to do or how he was going to do it.

But can you really blame them for their questions and doubts? Try to put yourself in their shoes – and let's assume that Jesus *is* the promised Messiah who's come to rescue God's people. What's must going through your head on Maundy Thursday evening when Jesus is betrayed by Judas and arrested? And what about on Good Friday as a mob entices the Roman governor to condemn a man that even he himself admitted was innocent? What's going through your head as the one you thought was going to fix everything ends up crucified, dead, and buried?

Then there's the emotional rollercoaster of that first Easter morning. Just as the disciples might have been starting to process that their dear friend and teacher was gone – the tomb where his lifeless body lay is suddenly empty, angels are bringing messages, and Jesus himself is appearing in front of them in a locked room.

For 40 days, Jesus has spent time with his disciples assuring them that they can put their fears and doubts to rest, that he's no longer dead – but alive. He's also been making it clear just *why* all of these things had to happen. It wasn't to restore Israel by getting it out from under the oppressive rule of the Roman Empire. And it wasn't to show everyone how to live a morally good life so that they would make God happy with them.

No – Jesus summed up his teaching really well just before his ascension: *“that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.”* Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, *“Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”*

Everything Jesus accomplished he did so repentance and the assurance of the forgiveness of sins could be proclaimed in his name. And in doing so he proved the depth of God's grace and love once and for all.



Sunday May 21, 2023
Luke 24:44-53 (Seventh Sunday of Easter)

Ascension Lutheran Church
Pastor Tony Acompañado

Jesus is clear – there is nothing left to accomplish. There is nothing that needs to be done by anyone to earn God’s forgiveness. It is simply out of God’s boundless love and by God’s amazing grace and mercy that we have received God’s forgiveness and redemption. Through Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, God has destroyed the power of death and brought redemption to the world.

And guess who were witnesses of these things? That’s right – Jesus’ disciples. But even if they didn’t fully comprehend and process what was going on at the time, they nevertheless saw them. As Jesus “*open[s] their minds to understand the Scriptures,*” they begin to understand the full implications of what Jesus accomplished during his time on earth. And now, as Jesus prepares to leave them and go back to be with God the Father – that gift that the Father promised, will come to be with them and help them with all that lies ahead.

And God has done the same for you and me. On our own, we can’t fully comprehend everything God has done and continues to do. We can’t fully comprehend the gift of eternal life. We can’t fully comprehend that Jesus died and rose to pay for our sins. In our sinfulness, we want to make ourselves the authors of our own salvation. We want to have at least some part, if not every part, in our forgiveness. We want to earn eternal life.

But Jesus comes to us and says, “*No. That’s not how it works.*” He opens our minds to understand the Scriptures and then we see just how powerless we really are. And the Holy Spirit comes to us and creates faith in our hearts to understand and trust that Jesus did it all.

Even though we might not have ever set foot in Jerusalem, even though we didn’t live during the time of Pontius Pilate, and we never met or stood shoulder to shoulder with any of the original disciples, we have become just as much witnesses of these things as they were. Because we’ve seen them through eyes of faith. We’ve seen them played out in the pages of Scripture.

And because those disciples were witnesses of these things, they had work to do. Jesus said, *You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised, so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.*”

Next weekend as we celebrate Pentecost we will come to see that these witnesses *will witness*. This timid group of men will go out to boldly confess Jesus and proclaim his gift of forgiveness. Like the shepherds before them on that first Christmas evening, they will tell of the things they had seen and heard – things just as they had been promised.

And now that brings it back to us. My friends, *we have work to do*. We have work to do right here in Waukesha. We have work to do in our state, across our nation, and around the world. In every place – to all people – we have been called to share what we have witnessed. Because there are people that don’t know Jesus. There are people who have forgotten Jesus. There are people that think that they know Jesus but are mistaken about who he is or what he’s done. Jesus reminds us that they all need to hear. And you and I are the ones called to share it with them.

So what do we do now that we have this job of sharing this message with others. Well, first let me assure you that it doesn’t have to be difficult, and it doesn’t have to be scary. All you have to do is tell what you have seen and heard. Be a witness of what you know to be true. Live this truth and share it with everyone you encounter. It really is that simple. Invite someone to worship or a Bible or book study. Open your door and your heart to the least and the lost. Invite someone to study God’s Word with you. Serve in your community. Be kinder and gentler with your family and friends. Support global partnerships. Donate to your local food pantry. Learn a few words or phrases in Spanish... ***live and speak love always.***

See – you and me – ***WE*** are God’s witnesses. We’ve seen and heard what Jesus has done, and now we’ve been given the blessing and responsibility as *his witnesses* to share it with the world around us. People of Ascension, what a gift we have been given – now go out and share it! Thanks be to God! Amen.