

May we be faithful witnesses of Jesus Christ!

Acts 1:1-14

Last Sunday we heard the story of the resurrection, and after Jesus' resurrection, the disciples and those who followed Jesus were left wondering what next? Some encountered Jesus again but at first didn't recognize him. Until He did something that reminded them of something he had taught, or something that he had told them, and even after his death and resurrection Jesus again gathered his disciples and spent another 40 days with them according to the passage we heard today. In that time, Jesus reminded them of what he taught them. Jesus talked about the coming of the kin-dom of God, and I use the word kin-dom, not kingdom on purpose. And in true human form, the disciples didn't really listen to what Jesus was trying to again teach them. And instead were waiting for what they once had back in the day. But they really wanted, according to the scriptures to date, was for God to restore the *Kingdom* of Israel. In other words, the disciples remained committed to their original vision. But why? Why would they insist on holding onto something that had been destroyed? Did they do this out of fear? Did they do this out of a sense of comfort? Or sense of apathy? Did they learn anything from their time with Jesus?

The kingdom of Israel, if we look back on history, was founded on power and privilege. A kingdom is having power over. The kin-dom of God is founded on love, compassion, and sharing. Randle Mixon writes: "The coming reign of God will be characterized by love and it's cousins compassion and justice. Not power and privilege, wealth or might."¹ So the kin-dom of God is characterized by love, compassion, and justice. Even after spending another 40 days with Jesus, the disciples were still centred on themselves. But that is not what Jesus was asking of them, or calling us to do. Perhaps this is why Jesus insisted they stay in Jerusalem, until they received the power of the Holy Spirit. Maybe once they receive the power of the Holy Spirit, they would finally accept and hear what Jesus had been teaching them. What we discover from this passage today, is that we are not called to live out this ministry alone. The kin-dom of God will not exist on this Earth if only one person brings it to life. It only comes to life when we all work together. We see in the passage that the disciples stay together, and what did they do? They prayed, and they waited. They were commanded by Jesus to stay together, wait, and pray; But let's be honest, it's not in our nature to sit and wait. Most of us are not very patient, and I am the worst of the worst. William Willimon, who is a great preacher, once said "Waiting, an onerous burden for us, computerized and technically impatient moderns who live in an age of instant everything, is one of the toughest tasks of the Church. Our waiting implies that the things which need doing, are beyond our ability to accomplish solely by our own effort, our programs, and crusades. Some other empowerment is

¹ Randle Mixon, *Feasting on the Word*, Year A, Volume 2, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), p. 522.

needed, therefore the church waits and prays.”² What are we praying for you might ask. Like the disciples, I believe that we are praying for understanding, wisdom, guidance, and strength. So that we know what we’re being called to do in this world. So that we know what direction we are walking towards. We are told in the scriptures today that the disciples were constantly devoting themselves to prayer. This then leads to the question, why. Were they praying to prepare themselves for the Holy Spirit to descend upon them as Jesus said? Were they praying out of fear? Fear of the responsibility that Jesus was about to lay on their shoulders, the power of the Holy Spirit would be laid upon them. Were they praying for guidance because they felt hopeless and lost having lost their mentor? Jesus said “But you will receive the power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses. In Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the Earth.” What does it look like to be a witness of Jesus, and how do we do we do this? Is there a difference between witnessing and testifying?

I, personally as a youth, was terrified. I’d grown up in the united church, but some of my friends were a part of a different type of church where the expectation would be that you would stand up in front of the assembled faithful people and tell your faith story. You would testify to how Jesus had changed your life, and honestly speaking in front of people, I know this is ironic, speaking in front of people in a space like this terrified me to the point where I wouldn’t be able to speak. But to witness according to the dictionary says that “To witness is to have knowledge of something from observation or experience. To witness is to be a sign or proof of something. To witness is to openly profess one's religious faith.” When I was new to really understanding my faith, I didn’t feel that I was qualified enough to tell other people about who Jesus was or what Jesus did. I heard about missionaries going out and telling other people, I’ve witnessed people on the street corner preaching at me, and it honestly terrified me to the point I left the church as a teenager. But I’ve realized over the years that we can witness to God’s Good News in many ways, there isn’t just one way of doing this. We witness by sharing our stories of how the Holy Spirit is at work in and around us. We can tell other people about how God has transformed our lives. We can show other people what God’s kin-dom looks like through acts of love. We heard that in the story today of the person who came into this village and showed others through their actions how God would want us to love in this world. We heard a beautiful song at the very beginning about positivity. About finding the good. Finding the joy in those moments, and in the hymn we are going to sing after the sermon today, the last verse says “Christ has been revealed in hope, discovered in faith, and recovered in our acts of love.”

The apostle Paul who came after Jesus’ death and resurrection and ascension, which is the story we heard today, explains that Jesus Christ needs us. Paul proclaims that we are now the hands and feet of Christ. We are the body of Christ. So in other words, Christ has no body now but ours, every single one of us. The choices we make, how we live our lives, and how we share the gifts that we have been given, reveal Christ in the world. I’ve personally found over the years that preaching at people isn’t nearly as helpful transforming as sharing one’s experience. To hear a personal story about how God has made a difference in your life is what changes people. It’s what inspires people. Telling someone how to be a

² William Willimon, *Feasting on the Word*, Year A, Volume 2, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), p. 520.

Christian is nearly as effective as living and being an example of someone who loves, who forgives, who is compassionate, who shares in abundance. I was privileged as I often am this week, having been with the scripture reflection group as we were looking at this particular scripture, and in our time together I was a witness to the Spirit at work. As each person in that group started to share in a very vulnerable way their fears, their experiences of God, how the Spirit had changed them, how the Spirit had brought them to this moment. It was truly beautiful and I think we all left that time together full of hope. We experienced the kin-dom of God where all people are valued. Where all experiences were valued. Where everyone knew that they were beloved and chosen by God.

Our task this week then, is to truly be witnesses as Jesus called the disciples to be. How will you witness to how the Spirit, the Holy Spirit is working in and amongst you? Who will you share that with? How will you proclaim it? How will you live it? That is our task, and that is our joy. Go out into this world and serve it with love. Amen.