

## Waiting and Witnessing in Faith

Ascension Day – 5/14/26 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Acts 1:1-11 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 4, “[Jesus] ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, He said, ‘you heard from Me’. ...

v. 8, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and as far as the end of the earth.”

### Introduction

✘ Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

✘ In those verses there, you and I, as Jesus’ current-day disciples; we have received from Him both a promise and a command. The promise – “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.” And the command – (which is stated more like a guaranteed statement of fact), “you will be My witnesses... as far as the end of the earth.”

→ It’s almost as if Jesus gathered His team of disciples around Him that day in a sort of football huddle and gave them the play like a quarterback would. “James and John, you take Jerusalem; Peter, Thomas and Bartholomew, you take Judea; Matthew, Philip and Simon, you take Samaria; and Mark, you go find Barnabas and Paul and go to the ends of the earth! Ready? Break!

✘ So, what if we were to do that today? Strucks, Haiars, Merritt and Drehers, you take Ft. Lupton; Malwitz’s, Lips, Tweden, you take Weld County north; Deepes, Heusinkveld, Tiscarenos, Kimballs you take the Tri-town area; Besel’s you’ve got Broomfield; and everyone together, let’s get out there and take the Gospel of Jesus Christ as far as the end of the earth. Ok, ready? Break!

→ If Jesus were here this evening in the flesh and gave us that command and then left, ascending up into the clouds, I suspect that we, like the disciples in our text, would be looking up into the sky with our mouths gaped wide open.

✘ Those disciples had seen Jesus do many incredible things. I suspect they were staring up into the clouds not only because they were awed by Jesus’ ascension, but also quite frankly, because He had given them a tall order. The thought of witnessing to the entire world about Jesus is an overwhelming idea. And yet it is a command from our Lord to us today, just as it was for the disciples back then.

→ There’s much that we can learn from what Scripture tells us about how the disciples and the other early Christians reacted, to help us understand our lives as Christ’s witnesses today.

### I. Waiting in faith

✘ The first thing Jesus told His disciples to do in verse four was to “wait.” Not to just sit around twiddling their thumbs, but to wait for the promised Holy Spirit, whom Jesus said would come to them in a very special and powerful way on Pentecost. We’ll be celebrating that special event 10 days from now.

→ But this was Jesus’ promise of grace and power to equip His people to bear witness to all that Jesus has done and promises still to do for them in their lives. For you and me, the Holy Spirit has already come. We have received Him in all of His power in His Word and in the Sacrament of Baptism; when He brought us to faith at our conversion. So, today we wait not for the Holy Spirit to come, but for Christ’s promised return.

✘ And just as it was for the disciples in our text, so it is for us. Waiting as Christ's people of the resurrection, is not a time of inactivity. No, this waiting is very active. In the verses immediately after our text, we read how the disciples returned to Jerusalem, gathered along with the women who were also following Jesus and "were devoting themselves (together constantly) to prayer" (Acts 1:13-14). In verses 52-53 of our Gospel Reading we're told that "they worshiped [Jesus] and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God" (Lk. 24).

→ We get that part today, don't we? We gather together with our fellow brothers and sisters in the faith and we find great comfort, strength and joy in our mutual pray and worship. Yes, just like those first century disciples you and I live here, in a loving and encouraging relationship with one another in Christ's body. And we pray; we pray for an increase in faith; for courage and wisdom in our witness; for patience and strength when Satan attacks us with all of the troubles and temptations of life. And especially, we pray for the Lord's presence to be always evident to us in the midst of this world's ups and downs.

✘ And just as we are right now, we live in that all-important relationship of gathering together regularly in worship and praise of our God. And while we wait for Jesus' return, we worship. And worship is anything but inactivity – both for us and for God. Jesus has promised us that in worship, He initiates things as He comes to be with us in very special and unique ways. In "the Divine Service" God serves us first with His gifts. He promises in Matthew 18:20, "Where two or three are gathered in My name, there am I among them." Then after we humbly confession our sin, He pronounces through His mouthpiece, the Pastor, that He has done all that is needed so that our sins are forgiven. He proclaims and teaches us in His Word where we are both convicted of our sin in His Law and assured of our forgiveness in His Gospel. And of course, He feeds and strengthens us in our faith through the proper administration of His body and blood. All of that is God's activity in worship.

→ But there is more. In "the Divine Service" God invites and enables us to respond to His gifts in actively serving Him as we confess our faith in the Creed; and bring our concerns before His throne and encourage each other in our prayers; and we sing hymns and spiritual songs as expressions of our mediation and praise to God alone.

✘ Those early disciples ... they give us a great example to follow in our lives now today as Christians. Acts 2:42 says, "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." That very active "waiting" describes three crucial activities: 1<sup>st</sup>) diligently focusing on the pure doctrine that Jesus gave His apostles' to pass on to us and to all generations moving forward; 2<sup>nd</sup>) persistently supporting each other as "family" in the fellowship of believers; and 3<sup>rd</sup>) intense dedication and active appreciation of Christ's gift in "the breaking of bread" (i.e. Holy Communion) and "the prayers", which was their way of referring to the established liturgy and order of worship that was already developing at that time.

✘ In all of this "waiting" for the Lord you and I have the same promise as Jesus gave to His disciples at His ascension. We have the promise of His Holy Spirit; that is, the assurance of His grace and power working within and around us in all that we do.

## II. Witnessing in Faith

✘ Yes, almost 2000 years have passed since then, but Jesus' command, promise and work in and for us has not changed since the day He went up in the clouds to take up His throne in heaven.

→ And that means that "waiting" in faith is not all that Christ has called us to be about right now. He doesn't leave us just a few options or questions to consider taking up as His people. No, He gives us this command in verse eight, "...you will be My witnesses," both close to home and "as

far as the end of the earth.” In the account of our Gospel Reading He says, “Repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations” (Luke 24:47).

→ So, how can Jesus give this command with such certainty? How does He know that we will do it? It’s because the training, the message and the power to carry it all out is given freely to us as His gift. Jesus doesn’t just make a command and then leave us alone. No, we are sent out with the tools and the message and the power that we need to accomplish His crucial, life-giving task.

✘ In fact, in tonight’s Gospel Reading, Jesus tells His disciples exactly what the message of theirs and our witness should be. It’s His salvation story from Scripture, presented together in law and gospel. He “said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things’” (Lk. 24:46-48).

→ Now, I know the temptation might be to think, “Sure those disciples back then witnessed all that Jesus did and taught, but not me.” Yet my friends, you and I are witnesses of these things too. We have seen them happen in our own lives. Aren’t we convinced of their truthfulness because Jesus has opened our minds to understand His Holy Word just as He did His disciples (Luke 24:45).

→ Through our parents; our Sunday School teachers; our pastors and other witnesses; haven’t we learned of and “seen” Christ’s love and saving work inside of and around us? One of the greatest gifts that God gives to us is the gift of Christian parents, or friends or neighbors who have witnessed to us about Jesus! That includes things like the reading of the Bible; teaching us how to pray and even disciplining or correcting us when God’s laws have been broken. But it is also the non-verbal and unplanned witness that believers shared with us and others as we watched how they reacted to that hostile neighbor; or dealt with trials and suffering in their lives; and yes, especially how they reacted when they were themselves found to be wrong and sinful.

→ This is how Jesus worked through His witnesses to bring us into faith and salvation. And it is how He promises to work through us now as we share our witness of Jesus to others today so that Jesus can save them by His grace as well.

✘ You see, to be a “witness” is simply to tell and describe what we have seen firsthand in our lives. It’s nothing more than sharing the ways that Jesus has worked personally in your life. “Yeah right pastor,” you might say. “My life has just been packed with trouble and tough breaks and suffering. How’s that going to be an attractive witness for Christ?” But you see, it’s exactly into those kinds of lives and struggles that Jesus comes with His Spirit of power; with His Word of Law and Gospel; with His sacraments; and through His church and He miraculously performs His life-changing work.

→ When my neighbor sees in me a peace and strength that outlasts and overcomes the extreme grief and troubles that I face, then he sees a witness to Jesus. When my co-worker hears my words of forgiveness and sees that I have no interest in revenge when I am treated unfairly, she receives a witness to the grace and power of God’s unconditional love. And when I actually admit my guilt and deep sorrow over the wrong that I have committed toward my spouse or my family or someone else, then I am witnessing to the confidence and assurance that I have in the saving power of Jesus.

→ Yes, whatever our situation may be, as Christ’s redeemed children; you and I have seen firsthand the working out of repentance and the forgiveness of sins in our own lives. And yes, Jesus has commanded us, but it is a command that is actually a great privilege and joy for us to

share that witness “as far as the end of the earth” (v. 8). To be most accurate to the text, Jesus tells us that, because we are His disciples by His gracious work in bringing us to faith, then we will, just instinctively, share that witness “as far as the end of the earth.”

## **Conclusion**

⌘ Look, Jesus may have ascended to His throne, but because He is our reigning and victorious King, we have the most precious gift ever given! We have Jesus, the very Son of God, as our Savior from sin, death and the devil. And we have His Spirit who grants us faith and life for eternity. We have the Gospel, which as Paul said in Romans 1:16, “I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.”

➔ May that be your witness and mine as well, in Ft. Lupton and the surrounding area; in Colorado; in the United States; and “as far as the end of the earth.” Ready? Break! Amen.