

Acts 1:1-11
Don't Just Stand There!
Ascension Sunday, May 1st, 2016

Today our scripture reading ends with the 11 Apostles just staring off into space after Jesus ascended into heaven. Two angels then come and remind them to stop standing there and staring off into space, Jesus will come back just like he promised.



Despite the wonder and awe of the ascension God calls the disciples back to earth to get down to the mission of Jesus Christ and specifically the work of His Church.

A side note is that there are two ascensions noted in the two scriptures read today. The first was on the evening of Easter, which we read of in Luke 24 and the second from Acts 1, 40 days after Easter. Jesus appeared and disappeared from his disciples for a period of 40 days.

Jesus' final ascension that we read of in Acts 1 was 10 days before Pentecost, which is 2 weeks from today. Jesus ascended into heaven; so he could send the Holy Spirit to empower all believers everywhere to do his work.

Today I am specifically addressing the work that Jesus commissioned his church, you and I, to do on this day we remember his ascension into heaven.

Eventually I am going to teach about how we are instructed by God to rest, to abide in Jesus' presence. The Sabbath rest is one of the 10 Commandments up there with not stealing, lying and murdering. But that resting and abiding is so that we can work. A New Testament Theologian put it this way about "rest and work" in the New Testament, **"There is nothing so dangerous as to be useless in the New Testament."**

Because, think about this in the teachings of Jesus: in the teaching of Jesus as the vine, the ones that don't bear fruit are gathered together and burned.

In the parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins, the ones who did not bring oil, which symbolizes good works, were locked out of the wedding feast.

In the parable of the Talents the one who buried his talent and did not use it got that talent taken away and he was punished.

In the parable of the Sheep and Goats at the Final Judgment the ones who did not feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick, etc came under judgment.

We rest in order to work and we are enjoined by the angels of God not to just stand around staring off into space waiting for Jesus to return. God has plans for us. We have work to do.

Remember the circle of repentance and belief I have spoken about these last couple of weeks? It is very clear that action, works are part of belief. Faith in the New Testament is a verb.

Now what is that work? In Luke 24:47 Jesus is very specific as he gave us our mission, our work, **“repentance in his name and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”**

In Acts 1:8 Jesus expands on what he had said earlier, **“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”**

This is the work we are to do. In these words are our commissioning and mission. In these words are our ordination and our mission. We are empowered by the Holy Spirit to witness to the forgiveness and new life that comes in Jesus Christ. In Luke Jesus' words were spoken to the 11 apostles and we through them. In Acts 1 his words were reinforced as the mission of we the Church.

Often, we like the disciples get our attention focused away from what God wants, and what's really important. In the Acts passage it is obvious the apostles still thought Jesus was going to establish an earthly kingdom, and very soon for they asked him, "Lord, are you going to establish the KINGDOM of ISREAL at this time?"

Jesus of course says no. And reading their minds that they wanted the power to rule says he will indeed give them power: the Holy Spirit. But the power that comes with the Holy Spirit is not power to rule and dominate, but the power to witness.

"But you shall receive POWER when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be my WITNESSES in Jerusalem, in all Judea, and Samaria and to the ends of the earth."

We are to witness. We are empowered to witness. And the basic message we are to proclaim is the Gospel that Jesus summarized in Luke, "repentance in his name and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem."

We as Christians will witness, preach and teach to ends of the earth; and from Jerusalem, Tucson is the "ends of the earth."

In the two passages read today we are hearing our commissioning; and when we act on it, we live out the promise and power of Jesus' words.

And today if I could give you anything I would give you encouragement and permission. I would give you permission to take your talents and use them both within the church in ministry, and without the church in mission to the world as Jesus' witnesses.

Many I feel "just stand there" and don't do much for Christ not because they are paralyzed by awe like the disciples, not because they are lazy, not because they are unfaithful or unbelieving or unconverted; BUT because they feel unqualified and unworthy to minister in the name of Jesus Christ.

Feeling unqualified and unworthy is why I think many Christians don't take this Great Commission to heart and act on it.

But you are called, you are commissioned, you are given the power and the authority to witness in Christ's name. I will say to you what was said to me at my ordination **"Take thou authority."** Or simply, **"Take authority."**

I know how you feel. It took me several years after I first heard those words to take them to heart, to claim those words and the power of the Holy Spirit that came with them.

You see when I was ordained an "elder in the church", not a "minister" and I will get into shortly why I say this. When I was ordained I knelt on a huge stage with about a 1000 people in the audience. The Bishop and several other pastors laid hands on me and prayed and the Bishop said, "Take thou authority to preach, baptize, administer the sacraments, and order the life of the Church."

But that phrase "take thou authority" took me awhile to exercise for I felt unqualified and unworthy to do the work that God called me to do.

But over the years I've grown into that phrase and take the authority that was given me that day. And even more importantly the authority that was given at my baptism.

All baptized Christians: all of you are **"ministers"** of our Lord Jesus Christ. You are inheritors of the commission and mission and power you heard in the verses read today.

Your ordination was your baptism. At that time you were given the authority and power to be Christ's witnesses from here to the ends of the earth.

Lay people are the ministers of the church. Pastors like me and Jon and Allen; we are ordained elders in the church.

You as ministers in the church are called to do all that we do, and can by our church law do all that we do, except for the words of consecration in the sacrament of Holy Communion. You actually, if dire circumstances are present, can and should baptize people in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.



You are ordained of God in your baptism to be his ministers to be his witnesses in all the earth.

I wish for you an experience like I had of all the pomp and circumstance of my ordination to an Elder that helped pound it into my head and being that God had given me authority and power.

But instead I turn you over to the power of Jesus' words. **“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea, and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.”**

You may feel you are unqualified. You may feel you are unworthy for the ministry and mission of Jesus, but it is not you who make you qualified and worthy. When I was ordained an elder I had 4 years of college and 5 years of Seminary and almost 9 years of lay ministry.

Did all those things qualify me and make me worthy? No....God did. He did it when he forgave my sin. He did it when the gifts of the Holy Spirit given in my baptism became manifest in my ministry.

It may seem like a cliché, but it is true, **“God does not call the qualified, but qualifies the called.”** And we do not make ourselves worthy; Christ's sacrifice on the cross makes us worthy.

So today, I encourage you claim your ordination. Claim your authority to be Jesus' witnesses and as you act, as you do the work that your rest prepared you for: experience the power of the Holy Spirit in your life.

So where do 'works' and 'witness' intersect? Remember **"There is nothing so dangerous as to be useless in the New Testament."**

Do all those parables and stories mean that we are saved by our works? If we are judged when we don't do works are we then saved by our works? Well, if so, the cross of Christ was useless.

No, if you read the NT you will see that Jesus did some mighty incredible, miraculous works. But those works were not only miracles, they were signs; signs that he was the Messiah and the Kingdom was in their midst. I have seen here at Vista that works and witness go together naturally.

Vista is involved in many good works where signs are literally present that point to the church and our faith in God.

The following pictures are signs of God working among us and us working with God in word and deed.

Here are some of the pieces of clothing that Creative Hands produces that are given to many children in the area.



In almost all of them there is a little tag showing that they were produced by a mission of Vista Church.

Many of these items are sent to the Loving Threads Community Clothing Bank. And here are Dee and Benith standing in front of a sign for that community mission.



Signs were to grab the attention of the people so that Jesus could point through the miracle to the Gospel, the good news that repentance and forgiveness of sin is witnessed in his name.

Here is a picture of Youth Day by Impact at Coronado School.



There were plenty of flyers and a beautiful sign banner that pointed to the Church here. The table was so placed that if anyone asked where the church was they could point over their shoulder to the church building. Our Creative Camp was heavily promoted here. Through art the children will be pointed to God. See Barbara or Barbara if you would like to help.

Our Summer interns will be helping and we need places for them to stay this summer. Homes where you can help drive them to their ministry to work. Talk to me afterward. The commitment would be for a month either June or July. If you do this your life will be a living witness to a young person.

When we grasp that witness and works go together we have events like our Walk to Bethlehem where we invite the entire community in.



Events like the Walk to Bethlehem are to bless our community. And on a deeper level an opportunity to connect with people of peace, and follow up on the stranger in our midst, which we do. People of Peace are the people God brings into our lives that we have a natural connection too. It is a connection established by the Holy Spirit between us and them. I will speak more on this later but basically the concept of the People of Peace is that God calls us into relationship with people who will welcome us and are open to the love of God that is evident in our lives.

There are many more “signs” Vista does where witness is tied to works and I will just list a few to show you where you can be involved if you are looking for a mission

Family First



Agua Prieta



Snak Pak



And here's a new one our Prayer Shawl ministry. One has already been delivered to Grant Robinson this week. Here's his. Note the tag, the sign.



Pocket Prayer Shawls are available in a basket next to the prayer book that you can take to a loved one in need of prayer and being reminded of God's presence.



There are many more ways Vista Church ties our witness to our works and thus becomes a sign of the love of God and the presence of The Kingdom of God.

And so remember as Col. 3:17, says, "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

Word and deed together in Jesus' name is our work, our commission and our mission.

Amen.