

Luke 24:44-53

The Ascension

Sunday May 28, 2017

I want to give you some background to the scripture that was just read in order to orient yourself in the events surrounding the resurrection, ascension of Jesus, and the giving of the Holy Spirit.

This event was on the day of Jesus' resurrection towards the evening. The women had discovered the empty tomb in the morning, and that had actually convinced very few that Jesus had risen. Then Jesus appeared to the two on the road to Emmaus and then finally Jesus appeared here in this story in the Upper Room.

This was the third post-resurrection appearance on Easter day to those who were going to be eyewitnesses of these events and the life and teachings of Jesus. It is the first ascension of Jesus that was recorded by Luke. The Second and final ascension of Jesus into heaven, that is recorded by Luke, we read in Acts 1:1-11.

Now this passage that was just read is divided into three parts. **In the first part Jesus reiterates that his life, death and resurrection were in fulfillment of prophecy.** Last week's phrase from 1 Corinthians put it this way "according to the scriptures."

In verse 44 he says, *"These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled."*

Jesus then specified what that prophecy was in verses 46 & 47, *"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."*

This passage confirms that Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection were in fulfillment of prophecy and when we witness to anyone about these things our witnessing is in fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy. You, literally, when you share with another in word and deed about Jesus you fulfill the prophecy that we read about here.

That is **the second part or division in this reading, the fact that Jesus here commissions us to be his witnesses.** Verse 48 reads, **“You are witnesses of these things.”** Not only does Jesus prophesy that we will be his witnesses he gives that as our calling and purpose in life as his followers.

The third and final section is **Jesus Ascension and the disciples response of worship.** Many ask, “what is the big deal about Jesus’ ascension?” Well, before Jesus ascended and sent the Holy Spirit his ministry was limited to the area that his physical body was and his physical voice could be heard.

With his ascension into heaven and the sending of the Holy Spirit, which we celebrate next week, Jesus can now be present at all times, to all people in all places. It is how Jesus fulfills his promise to be with all of us always!

Now only those in the Upper Room and those that saw Jesus from His Resurrection to his Ascension could be “witnesses” in the sense of “eyewitnesses”.

Everyone else from the 2nd generation of Christians on, we can only be “witnesses” in the sense that we “testify to the gospel story”. But “as in the first century, so now, the most convincing proof of the resurrection is the daily witness of believers that the Christ still lives and the work of his Kingdom continues.” New International Bible Commentary on Luke

What you say and what you do matter tremendously in the salvation of others. Now witnessing is not what some think. When you determine that you are a witness and you need to witness to others you are not, I repeat, you are not bringing Jesus to them. Jesus is already with them and in them.

In a “Grace” study I led a prison chaplain pointed this out. She said, “I am not bringing Jesus into prison. I am meeting Jesus there. Jesus is already in prison in the prisoners that are there for Jesus said, “I was in prison and you visited me... whatever you did to the least of these my brethren you did to me.”

When we witness to people by what we do and by what we say we bring to life or enliven what is already within them. Remember in the 2nd chapter of Acts it says, *“the Spirit has been poured out on all flesh.”*

You, when you share the love of God with another in words and deeds, you are bringing to mind and awareness what they already have, but are unaware of and maybe even hostile to at first. But when people experience our love in word and deed this brings out what God has already given them.

This means that every person you come into contact with, the meeting is not accidental if you are seeking to witness to Christ. Another way of saying this is that every relationship we have or begin is a sacred relationship. The Holy and I mean The Holy is there!!

C. S. Lewis wrote when two people meet, *“The immortal in me meets the immortal in you.”*

These are the **“Divine appointments”** I have often spoken about.”

So what is “witnessing”. First of all I believe it is a desire and a calling. It is also an “awareness”. We all have “the calling” to witness, there is no question about that from this scripture. That is what Christ has commissioned us to do. But what many of us lack is claiming that calling, developing a desire to do it, and being aware that we can do it. Once we have the desire and determination to do it great things, mysterious and deeply spiritual things will happen.

We will be put in places and with people who need Jesus to be brought out and acknowledged in them, and we will be the person to do it!!! **Persons of Peace** will appear in your lives and they will be open to the invitation, the witness of Jesus in your life that you bring them.

Now remember a person of peace: **Likes you, Welcomes you, Serves you and Listens to you.** That’s how you can determine if when meeting someone whether it is a divine appointment to pay particular attention to.

Now we may acknowledge our desire and calling but still feel we can't do it. We are shy or unsure of ourselves. But let me assure you when called you will have the power. You will know what to say and or what to do.

You see the Disciples still did not grasp what Jesus wanted them to do. They certainly knew what they wanted to do. They wanted to rule with power, so in fact they asked Jesus in Acts 1:6, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" Jesus gives them an emphatic "No", and then tells them and us what sort of power he has to give.

Verse 8 says, "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." Jesus gave us power to witness. He gave us our purpose as witnessing. It is the last thing he said to us before he ascended into heaven.

We often just need to be aware of this in our lives and how this works in the life of others.

Most of you know that my mom is 93 and my dad is in hospice care at the age of 97. My mom for various personal and health reasons has had a pretty miserable time over the last 2 years. She broke her hip on her 91st birthday, she has had a host of painful health problems, she had to leave her home of 47 yrs. and move into a one bedroom assisted living place and then a one room nursing home situation.

So she has asked me many times over the last 2 years, "Why am I still here?" "Why hasn't Jesus called me home?"

I know many here have asked the same question and the best answer I could give my mom and you is that your work is not done.

There is a person out there that needs to know of the love of God and you are the only person to do it. They need to know not just about the love of God. They need to know more than just the story of the love

of God demonstrated by Jesus on the cross. They need to personally, physically know and see, feel and touch the love of God through you!

We can know things intellectually, but to know them experientially means so much more. And this can be as simply as a kind word or as elaborate as inviting someone to join with you in a special family meal.

You see when we invite people, people of peace into our lives they will be able to see feel and be touched by the love of God. They will experience it through us.

My mom as you can guess is very limited in how she can show the love of God to others, when she is now the person receiving so much care and not giving it. But she tries very hard, even when she doesn't feel like it, to be kind to those who help her. She is often very impatient but tries not to let it show. She has friends, grandkids and great grandkids that she stays in contact with and tries so hard to show her love and care. And when asked she will tell you where she's going when she dies, home to God and why, her faith in Jesus.

And for those of us who are still active, we need to practice in our lives the Joy of the Lord. We need to love what we do for God and invite others into our lives in order to see that love in action.

If you work on landscaping in the church invite someone you meet into that great group of people who try to keep the desert at bay here and while doing it enjoy fellowship and coffee. Have them come beside you and see what God does here.

Meet a stranger on Sunday morning? Make them a friend, a person of peace, welcome them, like them, listen to them, serve them by taking them to lunch. You folks already know this. What I am actually working with here at Vista is a gifted group of people who I hope become more aware of what God has already given them.

On Sunday's the talking, talking, talking before service and during the greeting time and often on into the quiet time for the prelude is pure gold for God. It is the Joy of the Lord in action. It is attractive and

positive and so inviting for those looking for the love and acceptance of God. It was said of the early Christians “**See how they love one another.**”

This is said of you here. If you could read the feedback cards, we get back from our first time visitors, they often reference how friendly and like a big family Vista Church is. Yes, I often say, “Sunday is like a big family reunion.”

Witnessing is being invitational and so many of you are so good at this I am just trying to help you become more aware of your calling, your purpose, your power, and ability to naturally and positively be witnesses for God. The Joy of the Lord is indeed our strength.

I urge you to capitalize on your strength for this weekend we remember the sacrifice of those in the military who fought and died for the freedom that we have to practice our faith openly and invite others in.

In the middle of the night on Friday I woke up thinking about this message and realized another meaning of the word **witness was martyr.**

So many early Christians died as a witness to their faith that the Greek word for witness came to also mean martyr. On Friday 28 Coptic Christians were murdered for their faith. More than 100 have been murdered in Egypt since Palm Sunday. I was struck by how much we hesitate to witness for our faith and yet so many others die as witnesses for Jesus. It makes me ask where is our courage? Why don't we seek to share more when the largest price we might pay is an odd look or disparaging comment?

Now as I went back through my sermons for today's message I realized I preached on this same passage 5 years ago when I was starting my first Huddle group. I have led 5 other Huddles in that time. And what I have been doing in all those groups for all those years is inviting people into my life.

My hope is that they see God there and experience God's love there and that anything they see and experience that is not of God they forget.

But that is the bottom line for the Huddle group experience and even the church experience. It is inviting people in to experience the love of God and learn how to better pass that love onto others. It's a form of witnessing.

This is my last public invitation to join the huddle I will be starting this week for the next year. The other huddles are already full. But if you would like to enter into my life in a deeper manner, experience God in a deeper manner to be more aware of what he wants you to do; then join me and let me know you will be joining me this Thursday at 1:30pm. We will meet once in June, twice in July and then probably hit a 3 times a month stride starting in August or September.

What is God saying, and whatcha going to do?

In Jesus' name amen.