

June 18, 2017 “The Defining Reality” Acts 1:1-26

This series has been about the resurrection of Jesus, on the Sunday, the first day of the week, 3 days after the crucifixion. Jesus died directly as a result of crucifixion. HIS body was claimed by Joseph of Arimathea who saw to it that Jesus was properly buried. Joseph donated his own prepared tomb for the purpose. But as sound an historical reality as the crucifixion at the hands of the Romans, is the fact of HIS resurrection on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day. Every Sunday you and I gather to worship. In fact Sunday worship by Christians throughout the world is a celebration of the anniversary of the resurrection. This is first and foremost (our worship service today and every Sunday)... this is an anniversary celebration of Easter. We worship in light of the resurrection of Jesus. For us, Jesus resurrection is a defining reality.

The resurrection defines Jesus. It is not about HIS claims, the churches' claims or our claims. The resurrection defines Jesus as the living Son of the living God. It defines HIM as our savior from sin. It defines HIM as the Lord.

Jesus' resurrection also defines us. We are believers. We are HIS followers, HIS disciples in our time. We worship Him and we seek to serve Him. We are as soldiers under HIS command. When we say we will follow HIM, we are confessing and claiming in the strongest terms possible that HE

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has the right, to commit us as troops to the battle for the heart of the world. Sadly we and the church as an institution have moments when that is forgotten in the rush to be relevant, current and modern.

It is my claim in this series that Jesus resurrection occurred on what we call Easter morning. The risen Lord and Redeemer than appeared a number of times to HIS disciples in the days and weeks that followed. Luke who ends his gospel account with the resurrection of Jesus and HIS ascension into heaven opens his second letter to Theophilus in the same fashion. He reminds Theophilus that his former letter, (we call it the Gospel of Luke), told what Jesus did and what HE taught, “until HE was taken up into heaven.” Luke immediately goes on to say, Jesus, after his suffering “showed HIMSELF to these men and gave many convincing proofs that HE was alive.” (Acts 1:3)

It takes a 20<sup>th</sup> century skeptical approach to ask the question, “Many convincing proofs to whom?” Clearly, the singular fair answer to that question is, to the disciples HE had gathered during HIS ministry, to the disciples who witnessed HIS death and burial, HE gave many convincing proofs that HE was alive. What Luke is writing to share with Theophilus, in this second letter, is what happened next. Academics who teach in places like Knox College, Toronto call it the first chapter of the

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history of the church. That those same disciples were so involved in what can only be called a miracle filled, marvelous adventure is testimony to the truth that they believed Jesus is alive. HIS being alive is what defines what they did, where they went and how they lived.

I do not think Luke had any idea of how dramatic we would find this one little comment which is what I have been trying to share in the last several weeks since Easter 2017 on April the 16<sup>th</sup>. “Jesus appeared to them over a period of 40 days and spoke about the Kingdom of God.” What we saw as we reviewed those appearances was this. First they were startled and found it hard to believe their eyes. Thomas having not seen Jesus found it hard to believe their words. But when he saw Jesus in the upper room, his confession of faith was 100 per cent. “My Lord, and my God.” With each new experience of the risen Christ, the disciples became more and more committed.

As Luke tells us here in the opening chapter of his second letter, “On one occasion, while HE was eating with them, Jesus gave them this command: ‘Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you heard me speak about. For John (that is John the Baptist) John baptized

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with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

First of all we need to notice this is not the incident in Galilee where the disciples ate fish and bread with Jesus for breakfast, following the catch of 153 fish. This is yet another incident in the number of appearances Jesus made during the 40 days. It takes place in Jerusalem. And this time they are instructed to remain there until the gift of the Holy Spirit is given to them. Jesus tells them it will be in a few days time.

They have heard Jesus tell them they are going to receive this gift of the Spirit a number of times. While we tend to focus on the “upper room” experience as the place and time where and when they received the celebration of the Lord’s supper or communion, but in John 14, as part of the upper room discourse Jesus tells the disciples the Spirit of Truth will be given to them by His Father. Here in Acts chapter 1, Luke tells us it is about to occur.

The disciples like ourselves are filled with questions. There are so many things they want to know, and they have a sense of urgency, that the time when they can ask face to face is coming to a close. They want to know if Jesus is about to establish His Kingdom on earth and in Israel. Our Lord tells them, it is not for them to know when that will occur. But HE

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tells them what is about to occur. They will be filled with the Spirit in the very city where Jesus was crucified. And then they will be His witnesses. To what? To HIS resurrection. In Jerusalem. Right at home. In Judea...near to home and among their own people the Jews. And in Samaria, mission among a different people, who have a different religion, and a different culture...and even to the ends of the earth...to Gentiles, to parts of the world like India and places like Madras in Thomas's case.

The resurrection of Jesus defines the followers of Jesus. It defines us. I included in the reading this morning the verses in which Peter leads the disciples (a group of about 120) to make their first big decision...Jesus has left them and ascended into heaven. The gift of the Holy Spirit has not yet been given. And yet, Peter is emerging as the very leader that Jesus chose him to be. Peter relates the sad story of how Judas died. And Peter challenges them to elect someone from among their number to take his place as a member of the 12.

Listen to the qualifications Peter lists they should be looking for in Judas's replacement. 1) someone who has been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us. Some who spent the 3 years of Jesus ministry with us. 2) someone who saw both the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist, and the ascension of Jesus into heaven. 3) someone

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who can become a witness with us of HIS resurrection. Someone who saw Jesus alive, risen from the dead. Someone who has seen what Peter, and Thomas, and John and the rest have seen. Someone who believes Jesus is alive. Two candidates were proposed. Joseph Barsabbas and Matthias. They prayed for the Lord to lead them. And Joseph and Matthias drew straws. And Matthias became the 12 witness to the resurrection of Jesus.

Jesus resurrection defines HIM. But, this is important...HIS resurrection also defines us. We have become witnesses to these things. Praise God. Let us pray.

Lord of Glory, Risen King;

Grant that we might serve you faithfully. Grant that we might serve those among whom you give us the privilege to witness to your Lordship, lovingly, compassionately, and faithfully. Grant that our fellowship might be characterized by an awareness that you are with us and in the midst of us. Leading us and guiding us, help us to serve you as believers. Amen.