

## **Sermon: Now it is our turn!**

We began celebrating this season of Resurrection on Easter Sunday, with the first few verses of Luke 24. Today, we hear the end of that chapter. The gospel writers aren't clear on how much time passes between the joy of Easter morning and Christ's ascension into heaven, but all four Gospel writers agree that Jesus gave his disciples an assignment before he left them.

We often use the words from the Apostles Creed to affirm our faith before Communion. It is a creed that is a foundational statement of Christian faith, summarizing core beliefs about God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. It emphasizes the humanity of Jesus, his death, and resurrection, and ultimately, his promise of eternal life.

Whenever we repeat these words, I wonder if we really pay attention to the mystery they describe. I wonder if we realize how each element of the life of Jesus affirms both his divine and human natures, how each phrase we repeat when we say, "I believe" connects the earthly life of Jesus to everything that had come before, and everything that would follow.

Today, we hear in our Gospel from Luke, how Jesus repeats what he has been telling them – and us – all along: since the beginning of creation, God's plan has been clear.

Every bit of his life and ministry is the answer to Old Testament questions, the fulfillment of Old Testament promises. It all comes down to this: Jesus is the Son of God, the Saviour of the world.

Like the disciples, we might say, "So, what now Lord? Now that you have topped every miracle in the history of God's people, now that you have even defeated death itself, what's next? Are you finally going to restore the kingdom?"

Wouldn't it be great for Jesus to just swoop in and make everything right? Especially after the chaos of the world around us, wouldn't it seem to be just about time for the Kingdom of Christ to finally start working?

But Jesus lifts his hands and basically says, "It's up to you. You are going to be my witnesses." And he's gone.

I don't know about you, but if I had been standing there, looking up at the soles of Jesus' feet disappearing into the clouds, my gut reaction would probably have been something like, "Wait a minute! What?! How can we possibly do that?"

But that isn't what the disciples did. Instead, "they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God".

Every time I read this passage, I wonder about the transformation that happened to the disciples between Easter morning and the ascension. They have become completely different people. This is even more amazing when you realize that in this version of the ascension, Luke still has us gathered with the disciples on Easter night, not 40 days later, as we find in the Acts version of the story. We have scarcely made it back to the room where the disciples have gathered, we have only just heard Cleopas and his friend, who encountered Jesus on the road to Emmaus. We have barely just seen Jesus reappear in our midst and ask for a piece of fish to prove he isn't a ghost.

To me, it isn't really the timeframe that matters. It's what happens to the disciples, those followers of Jesus who were scared out of their wits on Easter morning, and here we find them worshiping Jesus, returning to Jerusalem with great joy, and continually blessing God in the temple. They had already lost Jesus once, on the cross. And their sorrow at his death is completely understandable. But now, when they lose him a second time, they rejoice! What happened to them in the meantime?

They became witnesses.  
They knew they had seen God.

When Luke says they worshipped Jesus as he ascended, he doesn't use that word lightly. In fact, this is the only time in Luke's entire gospel when the disciples worship Jesus.

This new understanding that Jesus is God required a completely new understanding of who the disciples had become. Not only did the disciples become aware that God was redeeming all of creation through Jesus, but they also realized they had a role to play in that redemptive work. "You are going to be my witnesses," Jesus tells them. You are going to show the world what you now know to be true.

And despite us not being there to witness it in person, we are witnessing it in spirit and God's written Word.

God is not asking us to add more things to our "To Do" list. God is asking us to make a new "To Be" list. Not that we need more items to check off, but that each item on our "To Be" list will make us more like Jesus.

Christ calls us to be hungrier for the Word of God, to be more aware of the needs we see around us, and to be more present with God, and more attentive to God's still, small voice throughout the activities and routines of our day.

Instead of doing more for Christ, we are to be more like Christ. And that is our witness.

But we cannot be witnesses on our own. In fact, we can't be Christ's witnesses under our own power at all. If we depended on our own strength and will, we would only be witnessing to ourselves, not Christ.

Jesus told his followers they would be "clothed with power from on high."

Christ expects great things of us, and has given us the Holy Spirit to accomplish that work.

This is the central theme of Ascension: Jesus has completed his work on earth. Now it's our turn. He leaves, but not without reassuring us that this is not the end, but the beginning.

Christ calls us to live into our faith, willing to share good news, certainly, but aware that our very lives are the witness we bear. How we live shows Jesus to others. We have not been given this grace to keep it locked up for ourselves. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are witnesses to what we now know: that Jesus is the Son of God, who calls us to repentance and forgives our sins.

So, the disciples returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and they were continually in the temple, blessing God. Isn't that an interesting way to put it, "blessing" God? Jesus had blessed them as he left their sight. Now they were blessing God in the temple, as they waited to be clothed with the power of the Holy Spirit. That narrow band of time, the bridge between what was and what will be, has come to completion.

What lies ahead is the Kingdom of God, in which we all participate, to which we all belong. As our lives bear witness to this good news, we are called to receive Christ's blessing, to accept the power of the Holy Spirit working in and through us, changing us as it did those first disciples. And we are called to worship Jesus, the only Son of the Living God. Now, it is our turn. Amen