**Preaching Notes**

**Ascension B. 2015**

**Luke 24:44-53 & Acts 1:1-11**

I am dealing with these two lessons together because the story from Acts is, for the most part, simply a re-telling of what happened in the story from Luke.

At the end of Luke’s gospel it says that the disciples spent the time from when Jesus ascended until the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem, worshiping Christ and continually blessing God in the temple.

The beginning of the book of Acts picks up the story right where Luke left off at the end of his gospel. This is because the writer of the book of Acts is widely considered to be same person who wrote the book of Luke. Both books are addressed to a person by the name of Theophilus,and in both books it as if Luke is writing a letter to tell him the entire story, everything that had happened and which he had seen himself, about this man named Jesus Christ.

In the first chapter of Acts, then, Luke recounts pretty much the very same story he tells in the final chapter of his Gospel. There are a few added details that don’t appear in the gospel version, but basically it is the same story of how Jesus rose from the dead after the crucifixion, appeared to the disciples, taught them, and instructed them to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit to come and clothe them from on high, and then he ascended into the heavens right before their very eyes.

Luke says that the disciples are witnesses to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As witnesses their job is to go and tell others about what they have seen. They have borne witness to the fact that he is the promised Messiah. They have experienced personally the power of God’s redeeming love shown in Jesus. They have received a divine blessing. Their eyes have been opened to the truth of God. Jesus is, for them personally, Lord and Savior! They are to proclaim the Good News that in Jesus Christ the promises of God have been opened to all people.

What would have happened if the first disciples had not gone and shared what they had witnessed with others? What if, instead of expecting on Pentecost to receive that power from on high, they had instead chosen to go back to their previous lives, to head home, rather than wait out the fifty days in Jerusalem? What if they had said, “Well, Peter’s the best speaker among us. He can go. He can be the one to proclaim the Good News. God has not equipped the rest of us adequately for that work. We’re tired and disappointed and scared, and so we quit. We’re outta here. We’re going home. Best of luck to you Peter!”

My friends, we live in a day and age when too many disciples of Jesus Christ are simply skirting their duty to give their witness. They are leaving the work of proclaiming the Good News to the ends of the earth to the “preacher” or the “teacher” or the “evangelist.” What is the result? Too many people are going through life without ever hearing any reason why they might consider learning about who this man Jesus was and is. Maybe those of us who live in relative peace and prosperity can get away with sitting silently and comfortably in our pews, praying for one another, but there are places in the world where people are being killed for their unwillingness to be silent about what they have experienced being followers of Jesus Christ.

* What will happen to the faith established in his name if every man, woman and child who calls him or herself a disciple of Jesus Christ continues to say and do nothing, not even give basic witness to their faith, while our brothers and sisters living in the very cradle where the faith was born, and who refuse to give up their witness and convert to another faith, are being systematically killed?
* What will happen if we say nothing and do nothing while our ancient texts being held in the care of these historic orthodox churches located in Iraq, Syria, Libya, Egypt, and other places are destroyed?
* What will happen if we who are witnesses do not proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth?

What will happen if we stop thinking it is our responsibility to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ? I’ll tell you what will happen: the Christian faith will cease to exist. We must not let this happen. Not on our watch!

Ascension Sunday is a time to get down to brass tacks and impel our members to give their witness to *somebody*. It is the time to talk about how we today, as disciples of Jesus Christ, are called to give our witness by proclaiming the Good News to the ends of the earth. It is our time. It is our responsibility, to give witness to the redeeming love that we have seen, felt, known, and experienced in Jesus Christ.

And when I write “our” be sure to understand that I don’t mean just you, the preacher. I mean every single person sitting in your pews.

* Each one who calls Jesus Christ his or her Savior has a story to tell of why that is so.
* Each follower has experienced personally the transforming power of God’s love.
* Each member of your church has received the same divine blessing that the first disciples received, and each one has been clothed with the power of the Holy Spirit from on high.
* Each one is a witness to the Good News of Jesus Christ and is called to proclaim it to the ends of the earth.

We are witnesses, and of course this is a great day to tell your own story, to give your personal witness of how you came to have faith in Jesus Christ. But it can’t end with you. Your story must equip and compel others to tell their stories! How can you help your members take on their own responsibility to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth? How can you help them to share their story to the ends of their neighborhood? How can you enable them to talk about their faith with the members of their family and with each other?

**Ephesians 1:15-23**

Apparently there have been some visitors to the church in Ephesus who have witnessed the faith and love exhibited by congregation, and these visitors have shared what they saw and experienced in that faith community with Paul. So significant was the impression the people of Ephesus made on these witnesses that they inspired Paul to pray unceasingly for them!

When visitors come to your church what do they see? What do they experience that might inspire them to go and tell others, to witness to the faith they have seen in your congregation?

Do they see a church on fire for Christ? Do they feel a spirit of wisdom and revelation that inspires hope? Do they experience the riches of his glorious inheritance? Do they come into the presence of the living Lord through the body that gathers locally in his name?

When people come into our churches, no matter where these churches are in the world, no matter how large or how small, traditional or modern, whether they have praise bands or piano or organ, they should see and experience the power of the living Lord in such a way that they find themselves compelled to go and tell others that they have witnessed faith and love in this place. If this is not happening in the community you serve, what can you do in order to create this kind of environment? If people do not see the fire of the Holy Spirit in your house of worship, what can you do to kindle the embers of faith so that they burst forth into a mighty and powerful flame that spreads the good news of Jesus Christ in your community?