

Who Will Witness?

Questions from Acts: Part 6 “Who Will Witness?”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – May 12th 2024

7th Sunday of Easter/Mother’s Day

Readings: Acts 1:15-17, 21-26; 1 John 5:9-13; John 17:6-19

Reflection: Psalm 1

Greeting: God is indeed my salvation; I will trust and won’t be afraid. The Lord is my strength and my shield; He has become my salvation. Praise the Lord!

Prayer: Almighty God, we thank you for the gift of life that you have delivered to us, shown in the death of your Son. Help us to celebrate our Lord’s resurrection as a sign of everlasting life. As we proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ the Son, help us to share the gift of love we find in you our Heavenly Father, and guide us in the truth of your Holy Spirit. May we be one with each other as we are one in Christ Jesus. May we love you with our whole being, and may we share that love with one another. And may we be reminded of your redeeming grace and steadfast faithfulness all the days of our lives. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 1

Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked or take the path that sinners tread or sit in the seat of scoffers, but their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law they meditate day and night. They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper. The wicked are not so but are like chaff that the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous, for the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. (Psalm 1 NRSV)*

We read the words of Psalm 1, and we hear of the joy we find in following the Lord. That God will guide us in the path that brings us delight. How do you experience the joy of Christ in your day-to-day life? What are some ways that you can share the happiness that Christ brings you with others? Who can you lift up in your prayers this week? Who are you thankful for? How can you share the love of Christ with others in the week to come? What are you discovering as you live out your life in Christ?

Prayer: O God, our Holy One, our altar, our cloud: In the resurrection of your Son you have brought us into your temple. Accept the sacrifices we offer, and draw us into the fire of your Spirit. We thank you for all you have already done and the great love that has been shown to us. We lift up our joys and our concerns, bringing all things before you. We share with you the worries that we have spoken aloud. We share the celebrations that we have voiced together.

Help us to also share the silent pleadings from within. May we experience your grace in our laughter and our tears. May you strengthen us in sorrow and in rejoicing, knowing you are with us. And may you guide us in love, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Alleluia.

Prayer for Mother's Day: Lord, today we give thanks to you for the mothers in our lives. We give thanks for the moms, the grandmas, the aunts, the in-laws, and all those that have nurtured us and had a mother's care. We thank you for putting these people into our lives to help us, to guide us, to lead us, and to care for us. We give thanks for the love they have shown. We lift up our prayers for healing as we remember those who are no longer with us in this life. We lift up our prayers in thanks for those who are. We lift up prayers of hope for those just becoming mothers, that you may help them to grow in love. And may we always give thanks and lend our love so that we may help each other to grow in your love. And it is in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading is from Acts chapter 1, verses 15 through 17 and 21 through 26.

In those days Peter stood up among the brothers and sisters (together the crowd numbered about one hundred twenty persons) and said, "Brothers and sisters, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit through David foretold concerning Judas, who became a guide for those who arrested Jesus, for he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry. So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection." So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. Then they prayed and said, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place." And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was added to the eleven apostles.
(Acts 1:15-17, 21-26 NRSV*)

Our next reading is from 1 John chapter 5, verse 9 through 13.

If we receive human testimony, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has testified to his Son. Those who believe in the Son of God have the testimony in their hearts. Those who do not believe in God have made him a liar by not believing in the testimony that God has given concerning his Son. And this is the testimony: God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life. (1 John 5:9-13 NRSV*)

Our final reading is from John chapter 17, verse 6 through 19.

[Jesus said] "I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you, for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you, and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth." (John 17:6-19 NRSV)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

So, We are coming towards the end of our Easter series. This week we ask the question "who will witness?" We get a rather interesting story from Acts that sets up this question. One of the reasons I call it interesting is because it's one of those stories that happens early in Acts, but it's not one most people remember. And it's because it is replacing Judas so that the twelve are twelve again. This is the last time that we hear of the twelve apostles adding to their number. We don't have any other accounts of them replacing a member of the twelve. But we do get this early account. They feel that the twelve of the inner circle should be restored to being twelve, so they look for someone that has been with them from the beginning. This highlights a few things we may not think about. One comes from the image that we often get of Jesus and who was following him. We often think about the twelve and not many more people because that is what it looks like in paintings and in TV. But the truth is that there were others who were with them. There were the women who traveled with them who are vital to the story of Christ. There were other followers that travel with them who are learning as well. Remember that Jesus sent out upwards of seventy disciples to go and proclaim the kingdom. The twelve were the inner circle, but not the only ones. So, when they need to pick someone to replace Judas, they have to decide who will be a witness to Christ. They want somebody that was with them from the beginning. But when it comes time to decide who will be the new member of the twelve, they decide to cast lots, which is like rolling dice. They pray about this and ask God to show them who will be chosen. The lot falls on Matthias and he joins the eleven so that they will be twelve once more. I think one of the things that this shows is that they wanted to have this group there because they felt it was important to keep that inner circle. Part of it was because they wanted to be able to have everyone else know who they could reference, a leader among all of the people gathered. That they will be a witness to the other disciples so

that they can be a witness to others. We hear about this idea in our reading from John's letter. That those who believe in Christ will have the testimony of God in their hearts so that they can be a witness to Christ's love. What is it they can testify about? That God gave us eternal life and this life is in his Son. And this is just a simple thing that John is proclaiming here. That there is this idea that when we follow Christ that testimony is laid on our hearts so that we can bear witness to the truth of Christ and the life that we find in him. And we hear this as well from Jesus in our gospel reading from John. We hear about Christ being glorified in those who bear witness. He asks for protection for his followers so that they can continue to be a witness to God's love. That they will be in the world though they don't belong to the world. We might think about this as we discussed back in Lent, with how our selfish desires are represented by our attachment to this world and what we can get for ourselves. On the other hand, there is being not of this world but of Christ, with a focus on bringing God's kingdom to this world. That we are sent into the world to be a witness to Christ's love. That we are to be witnesses of God's grace.

I wanted think about this concept of being a witness because it really does encompass what it means to share a life in Christ. Because when we share a life in Christ, it means that we share everything that we have learned from Christ. Everything we have learned from studying Christ's teachings. Everything we have learned when we study the Bible together. Everything we learn in our lived experience of living a life in Christ. And I think I understand why the apostles really wanted to bring their number back up to twelve. Because in that they felt whole. They felt complete. But it also meant that when they were complete, that they could share the message they had been given and that others would know who to turn to so that they could learn more so they could share more. That they wanted somebody who would be a good witness in Christ, so that others could learn, others could grow, and others could become a witness to Christ's love, so that others could learn, and others could grow and then in turn become witnesses to Christ's love. As you can see, it's a cycle. But they want to start from a solid place with someone who experienced Christ firsthand. This got me to thinking about what it means to be a witness of Christ. Because I don't think we often realize that for many, the first meaningful experience they may have with understanding Christ is when we bear witness to that love and grace. We can downplay this by thinking that the Bible is out there for anyone to read so anyone can encounter Christ in that way. The problem there is that we underestimate just how much of a lived experience we share as part of a life in Christ. Because there are layers to studying scripture to be able to understand everything that's there. But one of the best ways we have is by seeing it lived out in others. I think about this because I think about the way that we learn. And it's easy if you think about this like children. Jesus told us that we needed to be like a child, and we know how children learn. When children learn they learn by example. Children don't learn to read by staring at a book until they can do it. Children learn to read when somebody reads to them.

This example comes to mind for me today because I was thinking about my mom. My mom read to me and my siblings all the time. I learned to have a great love of books from my parents. But I was thinking of my mom in this case because I remember summer reading becoming a community event one summer. She was reading *Treasure Island*. Friends came and wanted to play, but we had to say that we couldn't because we were going to read about pirates. We did not want to miss out on a pirate adventure. As it turns out, our friends also thought hearing about pirates would be cool. And suddenly friends were coming over to hear my mother read *Treasure Island*. My mother shared this gift of love with us, and it became a gift for the community. And they got to hear a story come to life. These weren't words on a page. This was an adventure. But we learned something about coming together as well. I know that I learned to love reading. To this day I am always looking for a new book suggestion, as I may read upwards of 70 books in a year. Now, you might be thinking "What's this have to do with the question who will witness? What does this have to do with our reading from Acts?" Well, here's the thing. They needed somebody who could be a good witness of Christ so that others could learn. Because the way they were going to learn about Christ is from the apostles. And so, these disciples would be learning and then going out to share. They would share Christ with others, proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ and his life, his death and his resurrection and what that means. That's where this idea of being a witness really comes in. Sometimes our real introduction to something is someone else sharing it with us. Just as my mother shared reading with the neighborhood, we are called to share Christ with those around us. Because it may be the first time that people experience Christ in a meaningful way. Because you can sit down and read about Jesus in the Bible, but it may not click until you see it what it looks like to live that message. It may not become real for somebody until they see how Christ's love transforms someone's life. You can read about Christ's life, death, and resurrection but when you hear it from someone who has lived it, it makes a difference. And I say this because I think we are called to bear witness to Christ in a way that goes beyond simply handing people Bibles and telling them to read about Jesus. My mom could have just said, "Read *Treasure Island*. It's a good book." Instead, she brought it to life. When she brought it to life, we wanted to share it with others. Others came and it was brought to life for them. I learned from her the importance of sharing that kind of community, and that still resonates with me with the way that I share Christ today.

Because I want to bring Christ to life for others. I don't just want to say God is love. I want that love to be something real others experience. I want my witness to be something that highlights the love and the grace that are available for all people. That I can show what it means to live a life in Christ and the way that it has transformed me and the way it can transform others for the good of the world. Because as a Methodist my goal is to share the good news of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Because I don't believe anything is too big. But I also know that the only way that's going to happen is if I myself can bear witness to God's love and God's grace. That I can bear witness to what it means to live a life in Christ and why it matters. Because anyone can sit down and read the Bible. But it means

something more when you experience it. And I think that's what we do here. We come together in worship to experience the love of Christ as a group together. That we are nourished by the word, and we are refreshed so that we may go out and we may share the good news so that others can experience it. That we go out to bear witness to God's love so that others may experience God's love in their lives. That we bear witness to the Holy Spirit so that others can experience the joy of the Holy Spirit in their lives. That we bear witness to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ so that others can understand that that love and that hope is there for them as well. And so, my challenge this week is that we all think about how we can be a witness to Christ. How we can be a witness to what his life means in our lives. That we may be a witness to what his death says about how we live. And that his resurrection be reflected in the hope that we have in our risen Savior in the way that we live. So that others may share in the joy that we have. That others may know that hope is for them. That all may understand the love of Christ that is there for all people. So let us be a witness and let us share the experience that we have in Christ. That all may know love, and all may know peace in our risen Savior. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Questions from Acts

Our Easter series explores questions that we will take from our readings from the Acts of the Apostles. Each week we will reflect on the early church and the lessons we learn from the questions that they press us to answer.

April 7th – Who Is In Need?

April 14th – Whose Power Is This?

April 21st – By What Name?

April 28th – What Is to Prevent Me?

May 5th – Can Anyone Withhold?

May 12th – Who Will Witness?

May 19th – What Does This Mean?

Prayer List

Rev Angie Lee	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Eric Veach
Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney
Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Lauren Stewart
Tom Finley	Laura Carlen	Rosie Chancellor	Chuck Hogan
Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Emily Blade	Tim Schnauz
Donna Carlen	Ernie Peters	Jess Shoot	Stanley Kiser
Corine Howard	Don Gilmore	Shirley Jester	Marsha Overton
Linda Carlen	Michael Nichols	Paul Cox	Taylor Waldorf
Harriet Tucker	Marlene Kincaid	Cara Dillier	Peggy Farley
Mandy Schumacher	Ann McMorris	Marci Cutts Smith	Jaydelyn Brassard
Pat Hayden Titus	Devona Dittamore	Nancy McElravy	Marie R.
Connie Brown	Thelma Ball	Stephanie Strewsbury	John Graves
Cathleen Carl	Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Leo Smith	Larry Thompson
Greg Williams	Jim & Kay Wells	Earl Sparks	

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