

**Acts 1:1-11 & Luke 24:44-53 + Mission for His Witnesses + Series: Jesus Lives! So What?  
Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY  
7th Sunday of Easter: The Ascension of Our Lord + 13 May 2018**

**CIR HIRI!**<sup>1</sup>

The courtroom is hushed. The witness makes her way to the stand. The evidence is stacking up against the defendant, but the witness needs to testify about what she had seen and heard. She had seen the murder take place, but it wasn't the defendant who had committed that terrible crime. In fact, the defendant had actually tried to save the victim. On the basis of this testimony and others, the jury declares the defendant not guilty. That witness made a life-changing, even life-saving difference for that defendant.

A small group of disciples gather on the Mount of Olives just outside of Jerusalem. Their teacher stands in their midst, giving them final commands and promises. He raises his scarred hands to bless them and literally lifts into the air rising higher and higher. The disciples watch until a cloud covers him and they can no longer see him. As they stare into the sky, two men dressed in white come by and ask them why they're staring into the sky. Jesus will come back. So the disciples head back down to Jerusalem, recalling how Jesus had told them, **"You will be my witnesses."** Their testimony will transform the lives and eternities of countless people from that moment on.

This morning we celebrate what took place on that spring day when our Lord Jesus triumphantly ascended into heaven. Jesus had prepared his disciples before sending them out to be his witnesses, but now he send us out giving his **MISSION TO HIS WITNESSES**.

What's the point of a witness? Well, a witness has one purpose—to testify about the truth. A witness needs to speak honestly and completely about what they have seen and heard. Jesus' disciples were definitely witnesses. These eleven men had formed Jesus' inner circle from the earliest days of his earthly ministry. For three years, they had followed Jesus, sitting at his feet and listening to his teaching both in public and in private. They had seen him perform many amazing miracles—casting out demons, healing lepers, healing the blind, the deaf, the mute, and the paralyzed. They even saw him raise the dead on a few occasions.

They had seen Jesus grow in popularity and opposition. They had joined Jesus in the Upper Room and participated in the first Lord's Supper. They had seen him betrayed and arrested. They had witnessed his suffering and death by crucifixion. They had seen his lifeless body placed in a tomb, and three days later saw Jesus in the flesh alive. Luke tells us, **"After he had suffered, he also presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God."** They had heard and seen more than enough to fill 27 books of the Bible, but for what purpose?

First, they were to recognize the fulfillment of the entire Old Testament. While he was still with them, Jesus told his disciples, **"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."**

During his ministry, Jesus had told his disciples that he had come to fulfill the entire Old Testament. He had said, **"These are the Scriptures that testify about me...If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me."** (John 5:39,46 NIV) The Lord had used Moses to write about Jesus 1,500 years before Christ walked the earth. Through Moses, the Lord recounted the first promises of the Savior, laid out his holy Law, which none except Christ could fulfill, and promised the coming of a prophet even greater than Moses.

After Moses, the Lord raised up other prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah, who fleshed out the picture of the coming Messiah with vivid descriptions of the Suffering Servant and the Lord Our Righteousness. God used King David and other psalmists to complete the beautiful masterpiece of the Messiah—describing events from his birth to betrayal to ascension, even putting words in his mouth like **"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"** (Psalm 22:1) When the prophet Malachi wrote his last sentence, the prophetic picture of the Old Testament was complete. Only one person in all of history could fit its description from beginning to end—Jesus Christ—and the disciples had witnessed it all.

...But the disciples didn't understand. Even after seeing their risen Lord, the disciples still didn't understand what they were being sent to do. Luke tells us that Jesus **"opened their minds to understand the Scriptures."** On

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<sup>1</sup> "Christ is risen!" "He is risen indeed!" This is known as the *Paschal Greeting*, one of the oldest and most widespread traditions in the Christian church. Throughout the weeks of the Easter season, whenever the minister says to the people, "Christ is risen!", they respond loudly and boldly, "He is risen indeed!"

their own, those disciples never would've connected Jesus to the Old Testament. Only through Christ opening their hearts and minds could they understand the mission he had for them.

That mission consisted of sharing this message with the world. ***"This is what is written: The Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead the third day, and repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in his name to all the nations..."*** Jesus reminded them of what they had heard and seen. It was not for Jesus to proclaim that message any longer. His disciples would be his witnesses to the world. ***"You are witnesses of these things."***

After forty days preparing his disciples for their mission, Jesus led them out to the Mount of Olives near the village of Bethany. Even then, some of the disciples didn't quite understand the mission that Jesus had for them. ***"Lord, are you restoring the kingdom to Israel at this time?"*** They didn't understand that Jesus' mission of saving the world was finished, even as their mission of being witnesses was just beginning. Left on their own, the disciples would've failed miserably, but Jesus promised to give them power from on high. He promised to send them his Holy Spirit.

***"It is not for you to know times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*** Jesus would send his Holy Spirit, who would grant them heavenly wisdom and boldness to testify to the truth.

The time, however, had come for Jesus to visibly depart from this world. The time had come for his disciples to take over as his witnesses. Luke tells us, ***"After he had said this, he was taken up as they were watching, and a cloud took him out of their sight."*** In time, the Lord fulfilled his promise to send his Holy Spirit, who blessed their work as the gospel spread to the ends of the earth. You and I are evidence of the Holy Spirit's blessing on the testimony of Christ's first witnesses. We sit here because the generations that followed testified to the same truth. ***"This is what is written: The Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead the third day, and repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in his name to all the nations..."***

Who was Christ's witness to you? A mother or father? A grandparent? A pastor? A friend? Whoever witnessed to you testified about the real and only Savior from your real sin and your real guilt. From God's Word, they testified to you that Jesus has fulfilled all of Scripture. From God's Word, they testified to you how he willingly set aside the full use of his glory and power to be what you could not, to live perfectly in every stage of life from infancy to adulthood. From God's Word, they testified to you how Jesus suffered and died to forgive your sins. From God's Word, they testified to you how Jesus conquered death, how he now rules and guides all things for your good, and how he will someday bring you home to heaven to be with him for all eternity.

They were witnesses to you and the Lord blessed their witness, but now it is your turn and mine to testify to what we have seen and heard. No, we weren't physically there when Jesus was born of a virgin in a Bethlehem stable, but we know his peace. We weren't physically there when Jesus healed the sick, cast out demons, or raised the dead, but we know how he has healed our sin-sick souls. We weren't physically there when Jesus suffered and died, but we know his forgiveness. We weren't physically there at the empty tomb, behind locked doors with his disciples, or on the Mount of Olives when he ascended into heaven, but we know he has raised us from death to life. Through his Word, through the testimony of his first witnesses, we have seen and heard it all. Now it is our turn, with the Spirit's help, to be Christ's witnesses.

...But why us? Why not send angels to carry out his mission? Why not do it himself? A non-biblical story is told of Jesus' return to heaven. When he got there amidst the victory songs of saints and angels, an angel asked the Lord, "So who's going to do the work now?" Jesus responded, "My disciples will be my witnesses." The angel asked him, "If they fail, what's your plan?" Jesus said to him, "I have no other plan." By God's grace, the plan has not failed in 2,000 years and it's not about to fail.

In the past 2,000 years, the Lord has sent out his good news to the world through weak human vessels like us, and countless souls are still saved! Jesus commits that gospel to us, but time is slipping away. After all, angels did tell his disciples, ***"Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come in the same way you have seen him going into heaven."***

So when will Jesus return? We don't know, but we know he will return. Therefore, we dare not waste the time God has given us to testify to others about our Savior. With the Spirit's help, we proclaim the gospel in all its fullness and all its purity. We are Christ's witnesses sent to this present generation, and we have Christ's ironclad guarantees: ***"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me...and surely I am with you always,"***

***to the very end of the age.***” (Matthew 28:18,20) Dear friends, we have seen our ascended Lord! We have heard his Word and the great things he’s done for us! Now we go as his witnesses to the world confident because **CIR HIRI!** Amen.