

He Lives, We Live

Acts 1:6-14; John 17:1-11

As I prepared for this message, I realized the title should have read, "He Lives, We Live, We Share." In the scripture reading from the Acts of the Apostles, this new community that is developing around Jesus and the new governance that results, is to be a bold witness in the world, sustained by a disciplined life of pray. This text starts the church of Acts on an astonishing career of freedom and daring in the world.

We begin with Luke's account of the Ascension of the risen Christ and conclude with the response of the disciples. In verse 8, Jesus' instruction to the disciples is very clear; they are to be witnesses to others of his life, death, and resurrection. ⁸*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*"

Nothing can ever again be the same. Jesus will not be with them in physical form. It is to be a very personal transformation, for it will happen to THEM...to the disciples ...to those who follow Jesus. Verse 8 repeatedly uses the pronoun "you" indicating that authority will be given to them yet how that is to happen is not completely understood. However, they are not completely in the dark...fore they are told clearly that they are to be witnesses.

A minister friend shared with me an example of an unexpected witness she recently experienced. On a short road trip she stopped at a McDonalds drive thru. After placing her order, she pulled to the drive-up window to pay. She noticed an attractive, hand-carved cross hanging from the attendant's neck and said, "I liked your cross."

The attendant's reply shows how simple it is to share one's testimony. The attendant responded, "Thank you. I like the person who died on the cross for my sins. And I love the person who rose from the grave after having died on the cross."

My friend commented to me, "She could have left it at "Thank you." But her faithful witness touched me and it struck me that she did exactly what Jesus instructed in Acts.

⁹*When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.*

Can you imagine what was going through their minds on this first Day of Ascension, as Jesus gave this command, "You will receive power from the Holy Spirit. You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in Samaria, and in all Judea. And you will be my witnesses even to the ends of the earth."? And then he began to disappear in a cloud, rising upward? They are jarred from their upward gazing by the voices of "two men dressed in white" who promise that the Jesus who has left them so miraculously will, in no less wondrous fashion, come again.

The next part of this passage marks a time of retreat and reflection on the part of the disciples as they return to Jerusalem and enter into a time of prayer in the company of other followers of Jesus Christ, including members of Jesus' own family. Prayer and reflection upon what

they have witnessed and what Jesus has told to them. Prayer and reflection is about how they will fulfill Jesus' command to go forward into the world as witnesses to His life and Glory.

So often we are embarrassed by the command that Jesus gives us to be his witnesses. We see people who would benefit from knowing the love and grace of Jesus Christ but we avoid sharing the good news with them. A youth pastor and one of his young teens entered into a convenience store to pay for the gas they had put into the church van. As they approached the counter it was apparent that the clerk behind the counter had been crying. The youth leader said, "Has anybody told you that Jesus really loves you? Just as the Youth Leader got the words out of his mouth the teen turned on his heels, bolted out the door, and made b-line for the van.

The youth leader talked to the clerk for a few minutes. After she asked Christ into her heart, her whole face changed. When the youth Leader got into the van, the young teen, slumped in his seat and said, "Don't ever do that again!"

"Do what again?" asked the youth leader.

"Ask people if they know that Jesus loves them. Didn't you see how embarrassed that lady got?"

The Youth Leader responded, "You got more embarrassed than she did. I prayed with her, and she received Christ. Come on with me. You gotta see how radiant she is now with the love of God – complete contradiction of what she was just a few minutes before."

You see, Jesus lives and we live. We live because he lives. We do not fear ... because he lives. We do not dread ... because he lives. We need not worry ... because he lives. We live this life ... free of the chains that burden us, free of the guilt that the world wants to place on us, free of the pain others want us to feel, we live and witness to the glory of Jesus Christ not because we HAVE TO?... BUT because we GET to. He lives and, therefore, we live in joy... Not in anger. He lives ... And we live as forgiven people, and we forgive others because we are forgiven. He lives ... and we live as beloved people because we are loved. Praise the Lord. Amen.