

January 7, 2024  
As You Are Going: "Don't Just Stand There"  
Acts 1:1-11  
Vernon Advent Christian Church

[Intro]

I want us to put ourselves in the shoes of the disciples. It had been a difficult time for them. One day they had followed Jesus through the streets of Jerusalem as He rode on a donkey. The crowds had lined the streets with palm branches shouting "Hosanna, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord." The disciples had thought this was it. Jesus would rise to the political and military power they had envisioned when they first began to follow Him. And they, the faithful disciples, would be His key advisors.

But then it all came crashing down. How could things have gone so wrong so quickly? One week Jesus is being proclaimed as the Messiah, the next week the very same people are shouting, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" How could it be? Their Teacher and Leader, the one who had fed the five thousand, the one who had raised Lazarus from the dead, the one who had given sight to the blind and made the lame walk, the one who commanded the sea to be still, and it listened, was now being taken off by these pagan Romans to be crucified, like a common criminal? As they stood around the outskirts of the crowds that surrounded the cross, it was their darkest moment. No wonder they fled and hid in silence, confused, ashamed, frightened, with shattered hopes.

Then, in the days following the unexpected happened. Several of those who followed Jesus claimed that they had seen Him alive. Some thought the Jews had stolen His body, others knew they had seen Him, they were certain. At first they couldn't believe it, could it be true, or was it just a cruel hoax? Gathered together in an upper room, they locked the doors, fearful that they would suffer the same fate as Jesus. And then He appeared, with the doors were locked, no one could get in, but there He was resurrected from the dead. They touched His hands, they heard His voice, they saw His face. Jesus was alive, He had conquered death.

The passage we will read today tells us that Jesus appeared several other times to his followers over a period of 40 days. One of those times was the gathering on a hillside in Galilee that we looked at last week when Jesus gave the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations. Afterwards, somewhere along the way, Jesus instructed his followers to travel back to Jerusalem and wait for him there. There he met them again and gave them the words that we will look at today before he ascended into heaven. And what were the last words of Jesus to his disciples before he ascended? If you are able to stand, please stand with me as I read the Word of God.

[Read Acts 1:1-11]

So, right off the bat, we're given an introduction into the Book of Acts where we will be camped out for the next couple months. We told from the very beginning that this is a "part two" or a "sequel" to another work. (Read vs. 1) When we turn to the first verse of the Gospel of Luke we find this, "Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught." (Luke 1:1-4) From this we can deduce that Luke and Acts were meant to be one work in two volumes written by none

other than Luke himself, who was a companion of Paul. In the last few chapters of the Book of Acts we find that Paul is arrested by the Jews in Jerusalem and he was held in prison for 2 years before he makes his way to Rome and it is believed that it was during this time that Luke interviewed all of his eyewitnesses for his Gospel and the first few chapters of Acts and compiled it all together with his own firsthand account and then wrote both books.

Now, the name Theophilus is mentioned as the recipient of both books and his identity is unknown. The name simply means, "God-lover" and so some have guessed that it is a code name for Christians in general who were under the threat of persecution. However, because the title "most excellent" is used in Luke's gospel, I tend to believe that it was an individual and, as some have speculated, if Luke did write during Paul's time in Jewish prison, it could have been letters written as a defense of Paul's ministry to someone important enough to make a difference. Either way, Luke sets out to give us a detailed account of what occurred after the resurrection of Christ.

Let's pick it up at verse 4. (Read) So essentially, after being with them, instructing them and commissioning them to go and make disciples, he holds them back. He puts the reins on them so to speak and He says, "Don't leave Jerusalem." Get going, but wait. Wait for what? "Wait for what the Father had promised" which He said, "You heard of from me. And what's promise? When Jesus met in the upper room with his disciples for the Passover before he was crucified he taught them many things in which we refer to as the "upper room discourse" recorded in John 13-17. One of the things that Jesus mentions again and again is God the Father's promise of the Holy Spirit. In John 14:16-17 Jesus said, "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.." In 14:26, Jesus says, "The helper, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, He will teach you all things. Bring to your remembrance all that I said to you."

Again, ch. 15:26, "When the helper comes whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father. He will testify of me." This is why Jesus can say in Ch. 16:7, "I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away. If I don't go away, the helper will not come. If I go, I will send Him to you."

All that to say that's what was promised by the Father and reiterated by the Lord himself. So what is the promise of the Father? The promise of the Father is the coming of the Holy Spirit, which Jesus also spoke of, which they heard from Jesus himself.

Then He goes on in vs. 5. "...for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." I don't want you to see that word as associated necessarily with water there. This is simply a word that means immersed or literally submerged. You're going to be submerged with the Holy Spirit not many days from now, and of course, he was talking about the day of Pentecost, which was just a few days in the future, 10 days to be exact. I want to mention something to you that I think is so very important. This is not a request to the apostles to somehow get baptized in the Holy Spirit. This isn't Jesus telling them to seek it, pray for it, plead for it. This is a statement of fact. It will happen by the hand of God not something that they could cause to happen.

Now, let's go back to the disciples for a moment. Their heads must have been spinning. What did Jesus mean? And what about the Kingdom that Jesus was supposed to establish which is where their questions go in vs. 6. "So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" They were expecting the kingdom promised

to Abraham, the kingdom promised to David, with all the promises that were reiterated to the prophets. They were expecting that Israel would be restored, that Israel would be saved, the new covenant of Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36 would be fulfilled and the throne of David would be elevated again.

And Jesus answered and said to them in vs. 7, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.” In other words, Jesus is telling his disciples, and us, that’s not what we are to be worrying about. It’s going to happen. The kingdom Jesus was announcing to them was much bigger than anything they could imagine without the boundaries of space and time. All the kingdom promises would come to pass. Perfect salvation and restoration would come. All the kingdom promises would be fulfilled. But we are to leave that part up to God. We are to be about the business of going, and as we are going, we are to make disciples by sharing the gospel and teaching them what it means to follow Christ. But we cannot accomplish this task on our own and this is what Jesus wants us to understand. We need the power of the Holy Spirit that indwells every believer at the moment of salvation. Then, and only then, can we live lives obedient to what God has called each of us to.

Now all that leads us to the mission. And what is this mission? Vs. 8, after the power comes on you, after the Holy Spirit comes, “you will be my witnesses.” Notice he says, “You will be.” Again, we find another statement of fact. The word witness here is a very interesting word. It’s *martyr* in the Greek, and it’s where we get our English word martyr. What’s the connection? The connection is that the word witness came to be the word martyr because so many witnesses to the gospel died. The word came to describe one who dies for their testimony because so many did. You remember when Jesus said, “If any man will come after me,” He then said, “Let him deny himself and take up your cross.” To truly follow Jesus you have to be willing to give up your own life. This is a question we all must ask ourselves. “Am I willing to put my life on the line for what I believe?” “Am I willing to take on the consequences, whatever they may be, for the sake of the gospel?”

There is a double meaning here. Another meaning of the word witness is “one who has seen or heard something” and “one who furnishes evidence.” A witness is someone who can say, “I know this is true.” In a court of law, a witness swears on a Bible and promises to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Jesus tells the disciples that they will be His witnesses. He expected His disciples to go into a world where people did not know about Him, and to give a truthful account of what they had seen, heard, and experienced. Since they had witnessed how he lived, what he taught, his suffering, death, burial, and resurrection, they were to go out and give a truthful testimony about all that they had seen and heard. Brothers and sisters, Jesus is expecting all of us, His followers, to do the same. We are to testify to the truth about Jesus and how He has changed our lives. Every Christian is part of God’s mission in the world. In addition to our testimony, we should show Christ through our actions. We are His witnesses and therefore must speak and live so that others will glorify God when they hear our message and see how we live it out.

Brothers and sisters, let us be Christ’s witnesses. Nobody can be a better witness concerning your life than you. No one else can tell your story of how you came to Christ; sharing your story is your mission. Each of us are expected to share with others how Christ has changed our lives. And that’s what being a witness is all about.

Now the question is, “Where should we go to witness?” Again, vs.8, “you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Interestingly, this verse sets the outline for the rest of the book of Acts. The work of the Holy Spirit in

Jerusalem in chapters 1-7. The work of the Holy Spirit in Judea and Samaria in chapters 8-12. And then the work of the Holy Spirit as the Gospel message spread to the ends of the earth in chapters 13-28. Now before we talk about the application of this particular verse, I want us to, again, go back to what would have been going on in the minds of the disciples as they first heard these words of Jesus.

Jerusalem was probably the place that they least wanted to be at that moment. Why? Because we have to remember, that was the place where, barely over a month before, Jesus had been arrested and crucified. The disciples had been hiding out for fear of being associated with Jesus and arrested themselves or worse. And now, not only was Jesus telling them to go back into Jerusalem and wait for the promised Holy Spirit, but that the mission to make disciples would start there as well. What must have been going through their minds?

Judea and Samaria would have been preferred because it meant the countryside and out of the cities where the threat of persecution was. And they would have preferred Judea over Samaria because that meant going to Jewish people who looked and thought like they did. But Jesus also went a little further, not just geographically, when he included Samaria. Even though Jesus himself ministered with the disciples in Samaria, the Samaritans were still thought of as less than and half breeds. Was Jesus really calling them to leave their comfort zone and go and bring the message to people who they thought didn't deserve it.

The ends of the earth is just what it sounds like. Jesus was calling them to bring the Gospel to everyone, everywhere. These men had never left home. They had only ever made the familiar journey to Jerusalem for the feasts and that was it, other than the last few years traveling with Jesus. But that was still in Israel their homeland. An where was the ends of the earth anyways? They had no way of knowing. But that was the point. They were to trust Jesus with the plan and simply were asked for their obedience to go.

Now, we don't live in Israel, and so how does the mission now apply to us? If God's Word is living and active, and not just a history book, what are we take as our mission from this passage.

Where is our Jerusalem? This represents those closest to you. Your family, neighbors and coworkers with whom we have regular contact in our daily lives. We speak their language and know their culture. So, this should be the most natural place for us to start sharing what Christ has done for us. Sometimes going simply means starting a conversation with a loved one who needs Jesus. Or sharing with a neighbor what God has done for you. It's all about capturing the idea of being mission-minded starting in our homes and neighborhoods.

What about Judea? These are people who like us and talk like us but are not in our immediate circles of relationships. They could be our co-workers, neighbors, other parents whose kids are in the same school, etc. We need to share Christ with them.

How about Samaria? These are people whose lifestyle, culture, or economic standing is different than ours but who live in close proximity to us. We should not only reach out to those who are like us, but we must also seek to reach those who are not like us.

The ends of the Earth is, again, literally the end of the earth. We might be intimidated when we consider the challenge of going to the "ends of the earth" to share the Good News. But by the power of the Holy Spirit, it is possible for us to be involved in reaching the ends of the earth for Christ. Some of us have had the opportunity go to other countries on mission trips to share the love of Jesus. But not everyone has the opportunity to go. But we can all be involved. We have a missions conference every year where we focus on different ministries around the world and how we can be involved. We have our annual Penny Crusade fundraiser in which we

take several weeks to raise money for our missionaries around the world. There are also various collections throughout the year that go out to the various ministries we support. Just because we aren't called to physically go doesn't mean that we aren't to be involved with our prayer support and our giving.

One more final thought as we close. In vs. 9 we read, "as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

The verb here for "looking" is very strong. The angels were asking, "Why are you transfixed, or gazing into the sky, as if you're losing Him." In other words, don't just stand there. You haven't lost him for he is with you just as he promised. And what's more? He's coming again and you now have a mission to do. The promise of his coming gives a timeframe. And because we don't know when that is going to be, it may even be today, we should be motivated to bring the message of Jesus to as many people as possible before that happens and its too late. Our mission is go, and as you are going, make disciples. Let's pray and prepare our hearts for communion.