



Sunday, May 24, 2020

Easter 7 Sermon | Acts 1:6-14

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It's the end of the long season of Eastertide. This is the Seventh Sunday in Easter: seven Sundays to make a perfect week of Sundays. But like a great Netflix drama, this season ends with – a cliffhanger.

It turns out, this week, that the last words of Jesus actually were not: “It is finished,”ⁱ but “Follow me.”ⁱⁱ Not “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”ⁱⁱⁱ but “all power and authority has been given to me: GO! And make disciples!”^{iv} And as Luke reports, not “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit”^v but “The Holy Spirit will come upon you with power, and you will be my witnesses – in Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”^{vii}

In Jesus' day, “the ends of the earth” were fairly clear: Spain, India, Ethiopia – and that first generation went that far. But in our day, what does it mean to be Jesus' witnesses “in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth?”

“Jerusalem” is the place we come together, where we gather, to continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers.^{viii} It's a place where we're safe, and we learn to tell the Story. It may happen in our beautiful buildings; it may happen in living rooms; it may happen on Zoom. It's where we begin to name the places that we see Christ in the world. We learn to pray out loud. We learn to confess, and hear that we are forgiven. We learn to tell the stories of our own growth: how we learned that giving away ten percent of our income actually frees us. It's the place where we name, and tell, the Story. And it's the place where we really learn to love.

For us, maybe “Judea” is just our larger circle – our social circle, our business circle, the people we know at school. How, in those places, are we prepared to give an account of the hope that is in us?^{ix} Well, surely it is not by threatening, or challenging, or shoving anything down anybody's throat. Instead, it's learning to tell the stories that maybe we learned back in “Jerusalem,” in ways that make sense to people. For instance, we one were walking in darkness – things seemed cloudy and gloomy – and now, through faith, we find light, and hope. Perhaps we were distracted, and feeling like we weren't grounded, and we found spiritual practices that helped us to find a pace in our lives and a sense of meaning and



rhythm that has changed everything. Maybe there was a time that we lived in fear, and now through confidence and faith, we live in hope and patience. Speaking the words of faith in that larger arena – in “Judea” makes a difference. Using the words of faith– love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, patience, gentleness faithfulness, self-control – when people hear that language, they want to hear more!

But – when we get to Samaria – we have to cross the tracks – to the other part of town, or the other part of the world. I don’t know what tracks run through your town. I don’t know what track run through my own heart, sometimes. But I know that when we cross the tracks, sometimes it works much better to begin with actions, instead of with words. Those actions may be delivering soup and bread, or other kinds of groceries and supplies. They may begin with just giving more than you need to give. They may begin with checking on neighbors – making phone calls, and making sure the lights are going off and going on. Or it may begin with making the world a little bit safer and calmer by wearing a mask when you’re out in public. Peace.

In Jesus’ day, it was pretty clear where “the ends of the earth” were: Spain and the ocean, India to the east, Ethiopia – and that first generation of apostles went to those places, bringing the Good News to those corners of the earth. Generation after generation continued the same work, covering the earth – but still with plenty of places to go. By the 20th century, it seemed that the ends of the earth might be galaxies, suns, and the planets in their courses – and we went there, and took the Good News with us.

Now, in the 21st century, we find ourselves locked at home. Where are the ends of the earth now – and how do we get there? Well, I don’t know about you, but it feels to me like the ends of the earth have come right into the house, via the internet. We’re connected in ways we never imagined before – for worship, for study, for fellowship, for friendship, for work. And the Good News belongs in this world too. “The Holy Spirit will come in power, and you will be my witnesses.”

Let’s figure this out. How do we bring the hope that is in us to a world connected in a new and unusual way? Because the world needs to hear the Good News of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, the sure and certain hope of the Resurrection, and our relationship with a God who loves us beyond all imagining.

The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and you will be Christ’s witnesses.
Alleluia – Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.

ⁱ John 19:30

ⁱⁱ John 21:19

ⁱⁱⁱ Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34

^{iv} Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15

^v Luke 23:46

^{vi} Acts 1:8

^{vii} Acts 2:42, Baptismal Covenant BCP 304

^{viii} 1 Peter 3:15