

Theme: - Witness to the world

A witness is somebody who knows the truth about a situation, or an event, because they have seen it with their own eyes, or heard it from a reliable source, and who are willing to talk about it. You cannot be a witness if you do not tell people what you know. And I'm sure there are one or two people here in church, or from those listening online, who have been witnesses in a court of law, and know how important it is to report accurately on what you saw or heard. In our case we are witnesses to the truth about Christ's life, death, and resurrection through the eyes of faith, and which we can also read about in the New Testament much of which was written by actual eyewitnesses of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

Just before our reading is the story of two men and Jesus on the road to Emmaus and after Jesus had, "Vanished from their sight," verse 31, the two men rushed back to Jerusalem to be witnesses to the other disciples about their journey and encounter with Jesus, and it was while they were talking about their journey experience to the other disciples that Jesus came and stood among them. We are then told that the Disciples were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost, it was then in verses 39 to 43 that Jesus demonstrated his resurrected body by inviting the disciples to look at him and to touch him and also by eating food in their presence.

We now pick up the story at verse 44 the start of our reading, and here Jesus takes the next step in revealing who he is by first reminding the disciples of what he said to them earlier when he was travelling with them throughout Galilee teaching them about the kingdom of heaven. We are not told which words he used to convince them of who he was, but there are some words he said just before his death, which he could have used to convince them.

For example, he could have used the words as recorded in Luke chapter 9 verse 22, which reads, "The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."

These extraordinary words would clearly have been remembered by the disciples. And also, the words in chapter 18 starting at verse 31 which reads, "Then he took the twelve aside and said to them. 'See we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished.' "For he will be handed over to the Gentiles; and he will be mocked and insulted and spat upon." "After they have flogged him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise again." These words too would remind them of what he said about himself.

Having been reminded of Jesus' predictions when he was with them about himself of being flogged, killed, and on the third day rise again, they probably felt more relaxed, but still absolutely astonished at the miraculous events that they were living through and witnessing. But then in verse 45 we are told, "Then he opened their eyes to understand the scriptures." By the scriptures of course he was talking about the Old Testament, there were no other scriptures at that time. Also, in referring back to the Old Testament Jesus became the link between the Old Testament and the New Testament, because as Jesus said as recorded by

Matthew in chapter 5 verse 17, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfil.”

Again, we are not told what he said to them about the scriptures, and this time it is much more difficult to say what Jesus may have said, because of the size of the Old Testament. But as a possible example Jesus could have spoken to them about Isaiah chapter 53 verses 7 to 9 which reads, “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.” “By a perversion of justice, he was taken away. Who could have imagined his future? For he was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people.” “They made his grave with the wicked and his tomb with the rich, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.” And Luke tells us in his book of Acts chapter 8 verses 29 to 35, that it was those very verses that the Ethiopian Eunuch was reading when the spirit told Philip to go and join him. “Then Philip began to speak, and starting with the scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus.”

Having been reminded of those words from Isaiah, and I’m sure many other examples as well, the disciples must have suddenly seen the whole picture fall into place, a bit like a person who completes a jigsaw puzzle can suddenly see the whole amazing picture. Now after such a revelation I’m not at all surprised that the disciples worshipped him as we are told in the last two verses of our reading, verses 52 and 53. But in verse 46 of our reading, just to make certain that they fully understood what he was telling them, Jesus tells them again, that it was always the case that the Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day. He was making it clear to them that his death and resurrection was not a surprise to him or to God but was always God’s plan from the very beginning.

But what was the purpose of all this drama? It was that Jesus, in his sacrifice on the cross would take all our sins on himself, of all those who are repentant, and who believe and trust in Him, so that we at the last day will be able to stand before God blameless; and that is the essence of the new covenant that Christ made with us on the cross at Calvary. The gospel of John 3:16 reads, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” And in verse 47 Jesus tells all his disciples, meaning all of us as well, “that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem,” “and that you are witnesses of these things.” And ‘You’ means everyone because the word ‘you’ is plural, you and I are witnesses to Christ’s resurrection and ascension through faith, and as such we are to preach repentance and remission of sins, and the easiest place to start is in our own families not only by what we say but also by what we do.

Looking around the congregation today I’m probably speaking more to grandparents than to parents, but grandparents also have an important role in seeing their grandchildren, or great grandchildren being brought up as Christians, because as Jesus said, “You are witnesses of these things.”

In verse 49 Jesus said, “See I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so, stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.” We are not alone in the

task that Christ left for us, indeed commanded us to undertake, because the power from on high that Jesus referred to is the Holy Spirit. But the original word, which my Jerusalem Bible uses for Holy Spirit is, 'Paraclete,' and Paraclete is the Greek word for the Holy Spirit, and can mean Advocate, Counsellor, Comforter, Helper, or guide, all five descriptions point to the supporting and enabling role of the Holy Spirit. So, when we use the phrase 'Holy Spirit,' we mean all those things, because the Holy Spirit is our Advocate, standing up for us and pleading our case before God when we are in trouble through sin. He is our Counsellor giving us good advice when we need it; he is our Comforter giving us encouragement when we feel inadequate or lost; and he is our Helper when things get on top of us, and we don't know which way to turn, and he is our guide guiding us into all truth, and who will give us the words we need when we witness to him to our children, grandchildren, or great grandchildren.

And it will always be a good thing to remind ourselves that we are not alone by saying to ourselves a short prayer, and the one I use quite often reads, "Lord Jesus Son of the living God,' renew your Holy Spirit within me so that I may be a witness to your love and saving power, Amen. In fact, "Lord Jesus Son of the living God," can always precede whatever you want to pray, it's a good introduction to prayer.

Having commissioned them, and all generations who have faith and trust in Christ, into the work as witnesses to the gospel of repentance and forgiveness, he led them as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them, and it was then that he ascended into heaven. Jesus' mission on earth was completed when he was taken up to heaven, and one day he will return, but in the meantime, he has not abandoned us but has sent the Holy Spirit to us to help us and guide us in our work as his disciples.

The message this morning is one we have heard on many occasions, which is, that we are not alone when we witness to Christ to those around us, because as Christ sent the Holy Spirit to the disciples 2,000 years ago to help them in their witness, so Christ has also sent the Holy Spirit to every generation since, to help us in our work as witnesses to the gospel.

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