

Sunday, May 17, 2020 – Acts 1:1-12

In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach ² until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. ³ After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. ⁴ On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. ⁵ For John baptized with^[a] water, but in a few days you will be baptized with^[b] the Holy Spirit.”

⁶ Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

⁷ He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

⁹ After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

¹⁰ They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ¹¹ “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.

¹² Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day’s walk^[c] from the city.

And this is the word of God, for the people of God. And all God's people said Amen.

It is now the fifth Sunday of Easter; time is going a lot faster than I thought. And we're concluding our sermon series on This Is Love with a love that does not leave us alone. Acts describes how the message of the gospel, that good news about Jesus' death and resurrection spread from Jerusalem to Rome, and from the Jews to the Gentiles, that's us. And it records this unstoppable move of God. In the midst of persecution, the workings of the Spirit through men and women who place their lives in the care of God. So, we're going look at these verses and, and move forward with that.

I want you to consider that, especially in this season the things that trouble us the most is that we're separated. And we don't see each other, like we want to unless of course we're fortunate enough to have Zoom, or something like that. But it troubles us to be alone. And those feelings

of loneliness sink in, and sometimes they're hard to shake. Even those of us that are on the phone and constantly, notice while we're in home, that there are days where you just can't seem to get moving on those things you want to do.

You want to walk the dog. Oh, we can wait till after lunch. You want to clean the bathroom, like can wait till tomorrow. You want to go find out if your neighbor needs something from the grocery store and, well, if they don't need it right away, I guess that might wait too. We just don't always have the "get up and go", it sort of got up and went.

And so, we deal with that, on an everyday basis and it's been going on for just two months and it seems like a whole lot longer than that doesn't it. And we talked about this last week for a while that probably the most worrisome thing that the disciples faced when Jesus got them up there on Mount was the fact that he was going to leave them. And they didn't know what to do about that. They didn't know what life would look like. They didn't know what they would do. They didn't know what would change. That sounds familiar, doesn't it? Jesus disciples in this age, don't know what life is going to look like. They don't know what's going to change. They don't know what to expect.

So, Jesus says something that he's been doing the whole time he's been with them. He's reassuring them. And he leaves them promises. You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. Well it's not Pentecost yet, but it's coming. And he promises them, that He will send them a helper. Boy, do we need to helper. Do we need to know that we're not alone?

I want you to know I came across this in the hymnal when I was picking out the hymns for this week and the reason I chose Jesus Loves Me, you know that's a child's hymn, or so we think, is that we all need to be reminded of that. It's good to be reminded of that and it doesn't matter how old we are. And I find that the older I get, doesn't matter how old we are, there's still a time when you want to just curl up in the arms of your Abba, Father, and spend time and let him hold you, and talk to you, and comfort you in ways that nobody else can.

Well there's a hymn in our hymnal. And it's six whole versus long, it's not the longest hymn in history, but it reads this:

There's a spirit in the air telling Christians everywhere to praise the love that Christ revealed living, working in our world. Lose your shyness find your tongue. Tell the world what God has done. God in Christ has come to stay. Live tomorrow's life today.

God in Christ has come to stay. We're not alone. When believers break the bread, when a hungry child has been fed. Praise the love that Christ revealed living, working in our world. Still the Spirit leads the fight. Seeing wrong setting right. God in Christ has come to stay, live tomorrow's life today.

When a stranger's not alone. When the homeless find a home. Praise the love the Christ revealed and living, working in our world. May the spirit fill our praise, guide our

thoughts and change our ways. God in Christ has come to stay. Live tomorrow's life today.

Now you see, the disciples thought everything was pretty much over. Jesus was going to go and this is now the second time that they thought that, they watched Jesus die. Surely, they thought everything was over at that point. And now they know that Jesus is leaving them and they stand there, I imagine somewhat dumbfounded. As they watched Jesus ascent from the mount. What are they going to do?

Well, Luke, wrote this to the Theophilus and it's believed that the Theophilus is a pretty important businessman perhaps because he does refer to him in the original text as my excellent Theophilus. And he says, I wrote about all the things that Jesus said, and all the things that Jesus did. And that was to teach you. And I wrote about that until the day he was taken up to heaven, after he gave instructions to us about the Holy Spirit.

Acts as kind of the sequel, if you will. You've got Matthew, Mark, Luke and John which is Jesus One. And then you've got Acts, which is Jesus Two. And all the things that happened in the early church because of the love and the presence of Jesus, with them.

So, Luke states his reasons for writing and he says, I'm telling you these things, so that you might know that Jesus rose from the dead, there are infallible proofs that Jesus rose from the dead. They didn't hide his body somewhere. They didn't steal him and taken somewhere. It's not just a dream. And then he begins to talk with them. Jesus begins to talk with his disciples and He records this.

Well, why is it important to record this? Because it's important that those early followers know that Jesus is not just disappearing into thin air and everything that occurred with them before is a pipe dream and now it's all over and go your merry way. That's not what Jesus is doing. So, Luke undertakes to draw an account of those things that have happened, the things that have been already fulfilled among us that were promised by God.

And then he begins to investigate, everything from the beginning. He's very organized, and he investigates, everything that has happened. He gathers the accounts of eyewitnesses and writes down the gospel for the Theophilus so that he can know with certainty that everything that he had heard is the truth. He is being taught. Theophilus is a believer and Luke writes to strengthen his faith in Jesus. And Luke, he is the doctor, so you can best believe that all those things that he records are to the T. Because he's used to crossing his T's and dotting his I's. He strengthens his faith so that we can be certain of the things that we've been taught.

So, in this day and age, don't we need to strengthen our faith? Don't we need to hang in there on days when things look really sour and sad and disheartening? Yes, we do. So, if our faith is just grounded on stories, we really don't have anywhere to turn. But Luke writes to the Theophilus about history. He writes to him about things that are well known, things that are proven, and things that the people have been promised that have now been fulfilled.

Luke writes to him in this way so that he can be certain. We need certainty in our faith. You know, when we are little, it's good enough to know all the nice little Bible stories, and those Bible stories are true, by the way. But it's good enough to know those, and we grow up to a certain age thinking, Yes Jesus Loves Me. That's what we know.

But we can't always just live on that. Sometimes we need to look at history. Sometimes we need to remember the things that God has done. Now it's great if you can get into a Bible study, and you can do Bible study online, and you can study all of the Old Testament. And then it's great that you can move into the New Testament. We have the privilege that many early believers do not have. We have this whole book.

And so, we can look at history we can look at all the promises that God made to his people before Jesus. And then we can see how Jesus fulfilled them, and that is an awesome thing. But you know what, that's not enough either. Because I don't know about you, but I haven't really ridden a horse into battle. And I haven't had a sword fight with a Roman soldier. And I haven't tried to kill Goliath. But it's important that we look at our history, our personal history. Because when we look at our personal history, we see how God has moved in our lives and knowing that God has moved in our lives, then it strengthens our faith.

So, it's important that we understand Yes, Jesus loves Me. And it's important that we understand those stories from the Old Testament that lead into the New Testament and they come to life as the spirit causes them to jump off the page when we're reading them. And it's also important to apply faith to our own lives and to see where our faith has taken us. We are not the same people that we were when we first came to faith in Jesus, things have changed.

We came to Jesus, not knowing what was coming ahead. A lot of the times we still don't know what's coming. But truthfully as we look back over our lives, we can now see situations and say, oh. Oh, that's what God was doing, and he brought me here. For this place, for this time. Our faith is rooted and grounded in history, not some cleverly devised children's tale. The apostles were all eyewitnesses of what happened that day. What are you eyewitnesses to?

I can guarantee you, your eyewitnesses to something. You saw God move in your life. Jesus shows himself repeatedly, and he gives them convincing proofs that he's alive, over a period of 40 days. And they were strengthened by the presence of Jesus. So Theophilus can be assured that Jesus really is risen, and is with them. It's not some spiritual tale, it's not a fable, not some kind of hallucination. Jesus ate with them. A figment of your imagination does not share fish, and bread, a figment of your imagination does not say touch me, because you wouldn't be able to.

And Luke emphasizes this, that they had fellowship together over meals, that Jesus met two disciples on the road to Emmaus and shared a meal with them and opened the scriptures to them, and they recognized who he was. And then, that he appeared before the disciples numerous times. They were startled and frightened they, thought he was a ghost, they didn't

know what to do. And Jesus said, "Why are you so troubled? Look at my hands and my feet. Put your hand in my side where the spear was. It is me."

When people went to Cornelius' house. The story appears in Acts chapter 10 he said this we are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree. But God raised Him from the dead on the third day. I am then, God caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people but there were witnesses that God had already chosen. And it's proven that he was seen by over 500.

Jesus was alive. Jesus made his appearances on person. He had meals with them on purpose. The result of all those experiences was that the disciples came to believe absolutely in the resurrection of Jesus. And that assurance gave them the boldness to preach the gospel. It gave them the boldness to reach out to those who were in need, even to the very people that crucified him.

In the midst of our uncertainty and our fears, seeing his presence makes all the difference in the world. And if it was true from the disciples, then it's true for us today. No, we cannot see his physical body in front of us. But through presence of the Holy Spirit, we feel his nearness. Through the goodness of other people among us, we sense his love as we reach out.

The quiet confidence that is found in the presence of the risen Christ is not only for the disciples, it's for us. It's for our peace, regardless of what our circumstances are. We can take all the precautionary measures we want, but ultimately, it's God's presence, that's our peace. We pray and trust his will.

So, Luke went on then to highlight a second thing, in the assurance that Christ brought to them. Jesus said don't leave Jerusalem. Don't run. Don't go into hiding. Do not leave Jerusalem, stay in Jerusalem in wait. Oh, don't we love the word wait, you know. God answers our prayers; yes no and wait. Wait, wait, is the hardest one for us to put up with, because we can't have it now. We live in an instant mashed potato society. We love our microwaves. We can run out to the kitchen grab a jar of that instant coffee, that tastes nothing like the real brew but in a pinch, it's okay. We can open a packet of instant hot chocolate. On a cold winter day when our children come in from playing in the snow. We love minute rice. All those things that we have we are so accustomed to having things instantly. And let me tell you what those cell phones and computers have only made that worse in us.

And so, when we do that, when we wait, that's when God comes to us. He sends His Holy Spirit into their lives and we'll be talking more about that at Pentecost, but Jesus could not leave them alone. He left, someone with them. The third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit to be their helper, to be their teacher, to be their guide, to be that one that they can trust. He is the same one that inspired the prophets of old, and he was left with them, so that they would not be alone. He is their wisdom. And so, in times of difficulty, in times when we're seeking answers, in times when we need a guide, in times when we need direction, God has left us a

helper. The one that is promised, not just to the disciples, but to us as well. Jesus didn't give them a plan, he gave them a person, the Holy Spirit.

It's always good to get a plan you know; I'm waiting for a plan. I'm just longing for the Bishop to send me a plan. But the problem is, no two churches are like. So that means that somewhere in that plan, I need the Holy Spirit. It's great, to have a plan, but think for a moment, what really is a help to you in times of difficulty. I can hand you a plan. I can hand you a list of Scripture verses a mile long tell you to read them in times of difficulty. You know if you go into some of your Bibles there's a list somewhere in there that says well you should read this when you're upset, you should read that when you're downhearted, then you should read this when you're feeling ill, and you shouldn't read this when you need peace, and on and on it goes and they're wonderful scriptures and you should read them. Or is it more helpful if I come and sit with you and talk through them. If a Sunday school teacher sits with you and talks through them. If a friend sits with you and talks through them. We don't need a plan as much as we need a person. And the person of the spirit comes to us and turns the situation around.

Jesus says in John 14, all that I have spoken while still with you but the counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name will teach you all things, and he will not remind you of everything I said. He is the counselor, the Comforter, the one that comes alongside and walks with us. We're very assured today that God's work will be done and accomplished, even in these crazy situations. Not because we have a plan, but because we have a person.

When the disciples received the power of the Spirit, they became Jesus' witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea, Samaria, and eventually all over the world. It's 2020. As believers in Christ, the testament of the Lord's work through the Spirit is still true. He still moves us. He still teaches us. The message of the gospel didn't stop with that first generation, it moved onward from that time to this very day. And the work continues, until Jesus comes, because it's not about a good plan. It's about a person.

They were strengthened by the hope of the returning Christ. You see, Jesus was leaving, but he was not leaving them alone. He left them with the guidance of the Spirit. Acts 1:9-11 says this, "After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes and the cloud hid them from their sight. They were looking intently up to the sky to see what's going when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. Men of Galilee, they said, why do you stand there looking into the sky. This same Jesus who has been taken from you into to heaven, will come back in the same way that you could see him go. This same Jesus will return. This same Jesus will be with us again."

And that was their hope and their motivation for doing everything they did. It's also our hope, and I hope our motivation. The end is certain. The end has already been determined. Jesus will return and when he does, he'll establish His Kingdom fully. We've already heard about it from Zachariah, that Christ will return and set up His glorious kingdom, and from other prophets. Nobody knows when he's coming but everyone lives with the anticipation that he is coming.

No matter what transpires between now and then, from now to his return, nothing changes. We can be assured of his presence, the work of his spirit in our lives. We can be filled with the Spirit so that we can do His will in our own lives, and do the work of God in the world. We rely on God's presence with us. Because Jesus did not leave us alone.

In the meantime, especially during times like this, we should cry out come Lord Jesus. Because on that day, faithful ones will be gathered by the Good Shepherd. They will have overcome all their adversaries by the power of God. And that's our enduring hope. So, we can be assured and strengthened in our faith today, that God has not left us alone, never will leave us alone. That we have the benefit of the presence of the spirit in our lives, and the enduring hope of being in the presence of Christ for all eternity. We are never alone. Amen.