

WITNESSES, NOT EXPERTS

Acts 1:6-11

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LISTEN: <http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/witnesses-not-experts/>

This picture was taken from the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, looking down on the Garden of Gethsemane in the foreground and the Eastern Wall of the Old City of Jerusalem in the distance. We learn from v. 12 that this Mountain of Olives was where Jesus ascended. Last Thursday, 40 days after Easter, was Ascension Day, recognizing the occasion when the Risen Christ ascended back to the right hand of the Father.

Why is the Ascension important? Because it's the difference between Jesus being limited to one place and time and Jesus being unlimited. Martin Luther once said, "While Christ was on earth he was far away from us, but now that he is in heaven, he is close to us." Dietrich Bonhoeffer added that means Christ is no longer king of the Jews but rather king of the whole world [*The Collected Sermons of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. Isabel Best, p. 77]. Isn't that what Jesus was saying in John 16:7? "It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you, but if I go, I will send him to you."

And that Holy Spirit comes to empower us as witnesses (v. 8). By the way, this banner at the front is NOT upside down! Several people have asked. This is not an angel. This is the Holy Spirit coming down! The Greek word for power is *dunamis*, from which we get our word for dynamite. What God commands, God always makes possible.

So let's talk a little while about our faith-sharing, or witnessing. We are witnesses, not experts. When we're the expert, the pressure is on us—to do it perfectly, to control the outcome. When we are witnesses, the pressure is off. All we have to do is share what we experience and know. Scripture calls us witnesses, not experts. Once, when I pastored in St. Joseph, MO, some vandals broke into one of our church buses and were arrested. I was called to testify at their trial. I waited all day to be called. When I was, all I could tell was what the police told me. It was inadmissible. It was hearsay. (I could have told them that. I watch TV!). We can only share what we have experienced firsthand.

A little girl once asked her mother how we are supposed to ask Jesus to come into our lives. "If he did that, he would be sticking out all over!" Yes! Witnesses!

Did you hear the disciples' question in v. 6 and Jesus' response in v. 7? Don't be so consumed with guessing details about my Second Coming that you forget to bear witness to my First Coming! And note the angel's words in v. 11. "Why are you standing around gawking up to the sky? Get busy!"

Did you know that polls show that of the people who come to church for the first time (or the first time in a long while), 75-90% attend because someone invited them? A friend, co-worker, relative. We all have influence and are called to be stewards of that influence. And our witness is authentic because it's not about being perfect, or being an expert, but about our hope ("this same

Jesus...will come again...”). Do you realize that some lives that are very near you are empty, aching to have a hope, an anchor, a future? Witnesses.

Sometimes we forget that the gifts, talents, careers, financial blessings we have are not merely for us to enjoy. And they are not merely for us to amuse ourselves with on Sundays. I have a shelf in my study at home. It is full of baseball memorabilia, mostly Royals memorabilia. I have about five autographed baseballs on one shelf. My grandson Quintin was wanting us to go out and play catch one day. He hesitantly asked, “Do you have any baseballs we can actually use?” Is that how God sees us? We are on our Sunday shelf, when what God really wants are witnesses, people God can actually use in real life.

The earliest witnesses were not professional clergy or PhDs in organizational behavior. They were just folks. Fishermen, accountants, farmers, homemakers. And they were far from perfect. Simon Peter publicly denied Christ. Mary Magdalene literally had her own demons. Yet God used them as the earliest witnesses, not experts. I’ve noticed how every spring, Jefferson City residents get excited about “large item trash pick-up day.” You may leave on the curb almost anything. And some folks troll the neighborhood. They’ll ask, “You gonna throw this away? I could use this!” Sometimes we feel hauled to the curb and useless. But God reclaims us and says, “I can use you!”