

"You Are My Witnesses"

Luke 24:44-53

Based on LWML Sunday Sermon Materials by The Rev. Dr. Dien Taylor

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20th Sunday After Pentecost (LWML Sunday)

"You are my witnesses," Jesus says. It is a simple statement. Yet, at the same time, a calling and an honor for which we feel unworthy and ill-prepared. We are merely weak and sinful human beings who shy away from witnessing to the truth faith. However, by the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, our Lord has called us His witnesses as people who simply share what He has given to us so that all would know the Father's saving love. "You are my witnesses" then is not only a statement of fact, but Christ's call to our real identity for the true confession of the faith in words and deeds.

In today's Gospel, after the resurrection, Jesus spoke to His disciples so that they could understand the Holy Scriptures He fulfilled. He tells them why He came into the world, namely to suffer, die and rise from the dead to save us from sin, death and the devil. He tells them, "You are witnesses of these things," not only in the sense that they saw these events transpire, but now they would be the ones sent out so "that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem." He promises power for this calling through the Holy Spirit Whom He would send to them in 50 days on the day of Pentecost. "You are my witnesses," Christ says to His disciples.

Christ Jesus our Lord speaks to us today. *How are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?*, as St. Paul wrote to the church in Rome. Jesus raises up pastors to preach the Word of God in season and out of season.

Pastors are sent by God to preach and teach the Law, proclaiming what God expects of His people in their thoughts, words, and deeds. The Word of Law shows us our sin, our blatant and rebellious disregard for Christ's life and teaching and our ego-driven rejection of all His promises. It shows how deaf we are to Christ's compassionate voice of forgiveness, life and salvation as we reject our identity and task as His witnesses.

Thankfully, though, our Lord raises up pastors who also proclaim the Gospel that releases us from the vale of sin and death and brings the peace of God that passes all understanding to us. The Good News that Christ came into the world as the bearer of the Father's abounding love to suffer and die for our sin that we might be forgiven and rise again so that we might live releases us from the bondage of suffering and death and gives us new life. As repentance and forgiveness of sins is proclaimed in His Name, the promised Holy Spirit continues to call, gather, enlighten and sanctify people in the one true faith. The Word – who is Christ – is shared so that God's people may embrace their true identity in His grace. "You are my witnesses," Christ says to us today.

Christ Jesus has spoken to the women of the Lutheran Women's Missionary League so that they might be His witnesses, too. Throughout the years, the *Lutheran Woman's Quarterly* has proclaimed the Word in Bible Studies that have been used by people all over the world. Through this Word, our Lord engages people for lives of witnessing. Mustard Seed devotions from the LWML left in hotel rooms, restaurants, and greeting cards show how the witness of Christ continues to permeate the world. "You are my witnesses," Christ says to His servants in the LWML.

Christ not only speaks to us so that we might be His witnesses; Christ also leads us out so that we are His witnesses. He does not send His people where He Himself has not gone. In today's Gospel, Jesus led His disciples out to Bethany. Previously, He had led them out of their prior vocations to follow Him. He led His disciples out of slavery to sin into the freedom of the Gospel; out of death and into life. He did this saving work as He died on the cross for our sin and rose from the dead so that that may live as His witnesses. As Christ leads out His disciples, He proclaims, "Go! You are my witnesses."

Christ continues to lead His Church out so that we may go as His witnesses. He does this when He brings us to the waters of Holy Baptism where we die to sin and rise to newness of life. Buried with Him in our baptism, we are united with Him in His resurrection witness. As He gathers His people at His altar to receive His precious Body and Blood to strengthen us for witness, Jesus leads His people out from the altar into the world that we might then witness to His love, mercy, and

salvation. As the Divine Service concludes inside the church building, divine service continues in the world outside the church building as the people of God go forth as witnesses. There is no need to fear being witnesses. The resurrected Christ has gone before us to prepare the way for us and now goes with us on the way. As Christ leads us out into the world, He lovingly comforts us saying, "Go! You are my witnesses."

Christ has led the Lutheran Women's Missionary League out into the world as witnesses. The pledge of the LWML, centered in Christ's initiative, shows forth this leading.

In fervent gratitude for the Savior's dying love and His blood-bought gift of redemption we dedicate ourselves to Him with all that we are and have; and in obedience to His call for workers in the harvest fields, we pledge Him our willing service wherever and whenever He has need of us. We consecrate to our Savior our hands to work for Him, our feet to go on His errands, our voice to sing His praises, our lips to proclaim His redeeming love, our silver and our gold to extend His Kingdom, our will to do His will, and every power of our life to the great task of bringing the lost and the erring into eternal fellowship with Him. Amen.

The women of the LWML, by the power and working of the Holy Spirit given through the Means of Grace, have been led by Christ out from their individual homes and local congregations to cities and countries far away. With money collected in mite boxes, the women of the LWML have supported pastors, missionaries, and others as they travel throughout the world, sharing His redeeming love, because they have heard the voice of Christ saying, "Go, You are my witnesses!"

In today's Gospel, immediately before He ascended into heaven, Christ lifted up his hands and blessed the disciples as He sent them out as witnesses to His death and resurrection. Eventually, they go to the entire world, sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with countless people as day by day more were added to the number of those being saved.

Even today, Christ lifts up His nail-pierced hands in love as He blesses us for His service in the world through our various vocations. He lifts up His hands to give us His life-giving Body and Blood to nurture, strengthen, bless, and keep us, giving us peace. Having been born again as witnesses and fed for the journey through the Blessed Sacraments, we are empowered to share the truth of His all-atoning loves as His witnesses through our vocations.

Today, we especially celebrate the goodness of God shown to us in Jesus Christ and through the LWML as they embody our Synodical theme of witness, mercy, and life together. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and many others have been blessed through the hands of women who have shared the gifts God has given them for the extension of His Kingdom as congregations have been founded, schools have been supported, special ministries such as deaf missions have been aided, outreach centers have been funded, and lives have been transformed as LWML'ers have confessed the truth of the Gospel by bearing witness to Christ in word and deed.

The witness of God's people brings hope to the nations and joy to the Church as we are His witnesses, individually and collectively. It begins in worship as Christ comes to us to speak to us, lead us out, and bless us, just as He did His disciples in today's Gospel. It continues in life as Christ speaks through us, leads through us, and blesses others through us. And it will culminate in endless joy as we look to the Day of His return when we who have been spoken to by Christ and who have been led out by Him are blessed to be raised from our graves and in our flesh to live in the joy of being His people forever. So, now, confessing the truth in love and serving the Lord with gladness, we rejoice as Christ graciously entrusts us with the Gospel in our ears, eyes, hands, and mouths saying, "You are my witnesses!" Amen.