

**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church  
Watertown, WI**

**“You are My Witnesses”**

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April 18, 2021

*“Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things’” (Luke 24:45-48).*

Much of what we know is the result of eyewitnesses. We rely on what we’re told, and the more people that have witnessed an event, the more reliable we find their witness to be. For example, we know Abraham Lincoln was shot by John Wilkes Booth. Though we were not there to see it for ourselves, we believe it because Ford’s Theater was full of people who saw it happen. There were eyewitnesses. We have no reason to doubt them.

And so it is with Jesus. We were not there to observe his life, death, or resurrection, but through the Holy Spirit we have come to believe the word and testimony of the eyewitnesses. Remember, wherever he went, there were crowds following. Thousands observed his miracles. They saw him heal the man with the shriveled arm, and the paralytic man lying on a mat. They saw him raise from death the son of the widow at Nain, and they saw him call Lazarus out from his tomb. They knew things like that did not usually happen, and they found it extraordinary. Matthew 4, “And he went throughout all Galilee . . . proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them. And great crowds followed him . . .” (vv23-25).

They knew it wasn’t magic. No magician could restore a man’s shriveled arm simply by saying “stretch out your hand” (Lk. 6:10). No one accused Jesus of being a magician.

However, some eyewitnesses were hostile witnesses. In Matthew 9 after Jesus exorcized a demon, quote, “the crowd was amazed . . . but the Pharisees said, ‘It is by the prince of demons that he drives out demons’” (Mt. 9:33). They acknowledge his extraordinary power, but claim it comes from the devil.

Interesting enough, some years ago, archaeologists uncovered a report from the Sanhedrin, the Jewish governing body under Roman occupation. It says Jesus of Nazareth, quote, “will be stoned, because he has practiced sorcery and lured Israel into apostasy.” What is sorcery? Whereas a miracle comes from God, sorcery is a miracle that finds its origin in the devil . . . The Sanhedrin was not denying the miracles. (They couldn’t. There were too many eyewitnesses.) They were only discrediting the miracles as from the devil rather than God.

Remember, the crowds were also on hand to witness his suffering and death. They heard Pilate give the order that he should be flogged and crucified. They saw the soldiers carry it out. Many saw him breathe his last on the cross, and they saw the Roman centurion confirm and ensure his death by plunging a spear deep into his side.

Then they saw him living again, with all the marks of crucifixion but none of the effects! The Gospels say he appeared first to the women, and then to Peter and John, then to the twelve. Paul wrote, “After that, He appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still alive though some have fallen asleep.” (1 Cor. 15:4-8). Paul is saying to his readers, “Check it out for yourselves. If you don’t want to take my word for it, see them about it. Ask them what they saw.”

Last week we heard John’s version of when Jesus appeared before His disciples for the first time after the resurrection. We heard how Thomas was not initially an eyewitness, and therefore doubted until Jesus appeared before Him too. This week, we are hearing Luke’s version of when Jesus first appeared before His

disciples. Luke remembers how at first, they thought he was a ghost. To prove he wasn't, Jesus asked for a bite to eat, because ghosts don't eat. He allowed them to touch him and feel that he had substance and flesh, which ghosts don't have. They listened to him teach and preach. Ghosts don't do that. They also listen to him say, "Repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in [my] name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things."

What did they do? They do what eyewitnesses of extraordinary events always do. They start talking about it, not because some preacher is cajoling them but because they could not do otherwise. It's a perfectly normal human response.

If you had been in New York City on 9/11 you would have told many people about your experience. That's what most people do to process things. And that's precisely what happened when Jesus died and rose again. They talked about it, tried to wrap their arms around it. How could one who was so powerful be put to death? Why didn't he resist them? And now that he has overcome death, why doesn't he seek revenge? Why does he keep talking about forgiveness and reconciliation and making disciples of all nations?" The eyewitnesses surely talked and talked and talked and ultimately, by the Holy Spirit, many concluded He must be who He says He is: God's Son, our Savior.

Those eyewitnesses, they were the first evangelists: untrained for sure, and without having been sent. They simply told others what they had seen. It wasn't some sacred obligation. They couldn't help themselves. And I think we can trust the eyewitness accounts because these people really had no reason to mislead us or lie to us. They have no ulterior motives. They saw him die. They also saw him resurrected from the grave. They heard him preach and teach and they repeated what he said and did. We can trust them because when push came to shove, they were willing to die (and many did) for the truth of what they saw rather than renounce under threat of death what they knew to be the truth. Their consciences were held captive by the Truth.

In our text, Jesus says, "You are witnesses of these things." That's you and me now. You cannot give eye-witness testimony to Christ's death on the cross. But you can tell others what the grace of Jesus Christ means to you. You can tell them how good it feels to know that the One who created you also loves you, in spite of your sin, and forgives you. You can tell them how wonderful it is to be forgiven and at peace with God, not because you made your peace with Him, but because God has made peace with you.

You cannot describe to others the expression on Jesus' face when he said, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" But you can tell them that God has never forsaken you. He's always been with you. You know it and trust He will never, ever leave you nor forsake you.

You cannot give eyewitness testimony to His miracles, but you can tell others how God has certainly carried you through difficult times.

You were not an eyewitness when Jesus told Thomas, "Stop doubting and believe", but you can tell others how you are certainly not free of doubts, but that you do believe in God and trust in Him for forgiveness and mercy.

You cannot give eyewitness testimony of His resurrection, but you can tell others how you are so looking forward to your own resurrection, to be with the Lord and the angels and archangels and all the saints of God and to explore the far reaches that God has prepared for those who love Him.

You are witnesses of these things. You have a story, a story of how the grace of God in Jesus Christ has intersected with your life. It's a story only you can tell. And it's a story others need you to tell. You don't need to invent anything or exaggerate anything to make it seem spectacular. People can smell that from a mile away. Just tell it like it is. Tell them what God has done for you in Jesus Christ. "You are witnesses of these things." Amen.