



"Serving Christ as a REAL Witness"

by Matthew Christians

based on Acts 1:12-14
Seventh Sunday of Easter
May 4, 2008

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

If you look on the inside of the bulletin, you'll see the first reading that was read a couple minutes ago... I'd like to start out this message today by reading that lesson again together (well, not TOGETHER... you listen... and I'll read it). Okay, just for a little background. This reading starts takes place right after the Ascension has taken place. Jesus has returned to heaven and now the disciples head back to Jerusalem. Jesus ascended from a site about three or four miles outside of Jerusalem (the distance that a Jew was allowed to walk on a Sabbath— any longer a trip was considered "work" and that wasn't allowed according to the way the Pharisees interpreted the Old Testament). Anyway, let's go ahead.

¹²Then [the apostles] returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. ¹³And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying. [That's likely the same upper room where they had the Lord's Supper celebrated on Maundy Thursday... the Upper Room, remember? They're now going back to that same room where they stayed

before. The reading goes on. Those present were]: *Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James.* [That Judas is not Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Jesus, but Jude, the Son of James.] ¹⁴*All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.*

That's the first half of our text for today. At face value, it's not very interesting, is it? The gist of the reading is: the disciples went for a three mile walk, then arrived home, and here's the names of the eleven who went for the walk. End of reading. Real page turner, isn't it? But, you know, it may not sound like much, but I think there's an important message to be gleaned from this little bit of Scripture. It's a message about serving God where we are, where God has placed us. It's a message about being in the right place at the right time. The right place at the right time.

Have you ever been in the WRONG place at the wrong time? You ever find yourself at a place where you shouldn't be, and you shouldn't be there at that particular moment? A couple of years ago in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, there's a story about three teenagers who were looking a car to steal. They wanted a van so that they could put their musical instruments in the back. And so they looked around for a van and they thought they'd found a really good one and they began to break into it. It was then, as they're working at jimmying the lock to get inside when the three police officers—who were inside the van doing a stakeout!— decided to come out and make their presence known. Needless to say, those teenagers were in the wrong place at the wrong time and were immediately placed under arrest and hauled off to the police station. Isn't that great?!?

In our own lives, there are times for each of us when we find ourselves in the wrong place at the wrong time. When we find ourselves going the wrong direction. You know maybe you've taken a wrong turn, and seconds later you're in a fender-bender! An accident because you weren't where you were supposed to be. You end up at the wrong place at the wrong time. I've always been intrigued by First Kings chapter 19 which

gives the story of Elijah out in the desert after his great victory over the priests of Baal. Do you remember that story? It's a great contest between the prophet of God and the false prophets of Baal. The contest was to see who could start a fire and burn a sacrifice just by prayer. The followers of Baal go first and of course can't light the fire. Elijah goes second. But to demonstrate how great the power of the true God is, before he prays for fire he douses the altar and the sacrifice completely with water. And then when Elijah prays, God's sends a lightning down and pretty much just atomizes the sacrifice... He doesn't just start a little fire, He starts a FIRE! that even boils away the water in the trench. It's awesome! A great victory over the prophets of Baal.

But the thing that really intrigues me is this: how does Elijah respond to this miracle? He runs away. He runs away because Jezebel, the queen of Israel who was a follower of Baal, vows to have Elijah killed. God demonstrates His power in a visible, tangible way, and Elijah just runs away. He runs out in the desert and throws himself a pity party. "Oh, poor me," he says. "Nobody's following me. I do this wonderful miracle and now Jezebel's after me and I'm the last righteous man left in Israel..." It's "poor me, poor me, poor me." And then God comes.

You know the first thing God says to Elijah? He says, "*What are you doing here, Elijah?*" (1Kings 19:9). It's as if He said, "Elijah, you're in the wrong place, at the wrong time! You're not supposed to be here. You're supposed to be carrying out the mission that I have for you... my plan that I've laid out for your life."

Well, in case you haven't figured it out, what I've been trying to say is that there is a right place for each of us, a right time for all God's people. When the disciples went back to that upper room after the Ascension, when they simply went and waited as Jesus had told them to do, that was the right thing for them to do. They were in the right time and the right place. It might not seem very exciting, but they were exactly where God wanted them to be. By simply going and waiting, they were doing exactly what God wanted them to do.

I know, it doesn't seem all that exciting, does it? But oftentimes the things God

would have us be about are NOT all that exciting. It was God's will that the disciples go home and wait and by doing that, they were putting themselves in the very center of God's will.

Oh, how I... how I pray... in my life for those moments when I sense "this is just where God wants me to be. This is His will for my life and I'm here and I'm doing it. There's no rush like that, or greater than that, for a Christian. I hope that can be true of you, too. To know God's will and to sense in your life that you're doing it. Some of you aren't there... you need to get there. You need to get doing what God wants you to do. Not the sinful thing you're doing over and over again, but the thing that God wants you to do. To do God's will, and to do it in the right time and the right place for you.

And we do want that, don't we? We want to strive as much as we can to be in sync with the Lord's time. To be where He wants us to be at this time. For some of you, at this time in your life, you're meant to be a parent more than anything else. And I know there are days when you're thinking about it how it'd be great to be doing something else besides parenting these three or four little kids. But... maybe that's the time for you. Maybe it's a time in your life when you have to wait to get to where you really want in your career. But it's important for you to sense "I'm in touch with God's timing" the way the eleven disciples did after the Ascension of Jesus. And I'm going to make the most of THIS time that God's given me. I'm gonna bloom in THIS moment! In THIS place! for God.

So the question for you is: what DOES God want you to do in this time and in this place where you are? How can I know for certain whether or not I am in touch with God's place and God's timing for my life? Well... God won't pass you a note in school that says, "make sure to ask out Betty Lou Who because she's the one for you"... that's not the way He works. But He DOES give you direction. He has a complete revelation for you about what His will is for His people. A will that you can apply to your own life and your own time.

Listen to Martin Luther's explanation to the third petition of the Lord's Prayer, from the Small Catechism. You've heard these words before —some of you have

committed these words to heart— and I think they're appropriate right now: *"Thy Will be Done"* (Matt. 6:10b), Jesus teaches us to pray. And we know what it means. This is our prayer that the *"The good and gracious will of God ... be done among us."* But the question is "how?" HOW is God's will done among us? And this is what Luther wrote: *"God's will is done when He breaks and hinders every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature, which do not want us to hallow God's name or let His kingdom come; and when [God] strengthens and keeps us firm in His Word and faith until we die. This is His good and gracious will."*

What this means for us on a daily basis is that, if we would wish to know God's will for our lives, it's that we must be in His Word. We must be reading our Bibles day in and day out, and then coming to Church to hear it explained and preached. God speaks to us, you see, through His Word. If you are going to look to and trust in, and receive guidance from God about how to be in the right place at the right time, you have to give Him a chance to tell you. You have to listen to Him. And He doesn't speak to us in dreams (those days are long past): no, *"in these last days,* (Hebrews chapter one): *"In these last days, God has spoken to us through His Son"* Jesus Christ (v.2), who gives us the Bible which is His final testimony: His Last Will and Testament for this dying world... and for your life.

To be a REAL witness to Christ in this day and age... in fact, to be a REAL witness to Christ in ANY day and age... you need to stop and listen. Listen to God's Word. Listen to what He has to say and then apply it to your own life, your own situation. *"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven"* (Ecclesiastes 3):

a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to reap; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.

There are different and varied times in everyone's life. It's important to understand that... and to respond to that. The question is: how do we know which time it is? I'm not going to stand up here today and tell you that every person in this room must knock on their next-door neighbor's house tomorrow and say such and such in order to witness to Christ... that may not be the right time and the right place for you. In all things, of course, we DO wish to follow Christ's command to *"make disciples of all nations,"* (Matt. 28:20) *"to be a witness to his resurrection"* (Acts 1:22)... but the timing, the place... that is different and unique for each one of us.

So... you've heard me say it before. I'll say it again. Read your Bibles. I sound like a broken record sometimes, don't I? [in mocking monotone]: "read your Bibles. Read your Bibles. Read your Bibles." But I mean it... every day. I mean, EVERY DAY! Make it a priority to come to Church on Sunday and be served by the Lord with His Word and His Sacraments. And then, Monday through Saturday, open up that under-used book we all have on our bookshelves (if you don't have one on your bookshelf, talk to me and we'll get you one!)

Through His Word, God will show you the way. He will show you His Way: the way of the truth, the way of Christ. He will reveal to you His own *"good and gracious will."* God the Father said it from heaven when Jesus was baptized: *"This is my beloved Son, Listen to Him"* (Mark 9:7b). Listen to Him through His Word and you will see His will. Doing His will, in loving response to God's love and mercy... This is how you can—in the best sense of the word— be a REAL witness to Christ Jesus our Lord. Know it. Believe it. Amen? Amen.

May the peace of God –which surpasses understanding– guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

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