

"From Come and See to Go and Tell"

Ascension Day + Easter 7 – 6/2/2019 – Lk 24:44-53 + Acts 16:16-34/C

Luke 24:44-53

Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God. Grace and peace to you from God the Creator, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Looking back, three years is a long time. Already we have placed a marker in our own recent history at "before Covid," forever gauging a three-year time span by the intrusion of a virus into our otherwise normal and routine lives. So now we have a personal, real-time example of the length of time that Jesus spent in public ministry with a small group of followers called disciples. Just three years before returning to be with God, Jesus met Peter, James and John by the sea, Matthew by a Roman tax table, and freed Mary Magdalene from being possessed of seven demons. His verbal call to *follow me* grew and grew until it became a "heart call," a claim on their relationship and their very lives. They experienced something we, too, can know - that once our hearts get involved - time itself can race or stop, but it rarely feels like normal 24/7 time again.

For three years the disciples were completely unhooked from the rat race their lives had been as they struggled to survive, to provide for their families, to keep faithful under the rule of an oppressive regime. Unhooking from time is a state we rarely achieve - except for prolonged vacations or funerals that are scheduled hastily, wedding weekends or reunions of close friends or family, or sudden, unexpected accidents or illnesses - because it takes something powerful to change the course of our lives. It takes something that deeply affects *us* to alter our course and convince us to give in to something bigger than ourselves - to surrender to something out of our control.

The disciples followed Jesus - each for their own reasons - none of which we know. Did they need new friends? Were they sick and tired of being sick and tired? Was the world moving faster than they wanted or away from what they remembered fondly from their past? Or were they drawn to the invitation to "come and see" for the new ideas, the miraculous experiences? Could they have imagined the emotional rollercoaster of Holy Week, or the glorious revealing of Easter's victory over the power of Death itself?

Maybe they needed something different in their lives so they could either move on or check out. Maybe Peter, Judas, Thomas and the rest were just trying to find out who they really *were*, what *they* were *made of*. Whatever their reasons, the verbal call to "Come and See" became a call to their hearts, so they followed Jesus with their bodies and their souls.

Last Thursday was Ascension Day - the 40th day of Easter - the day Jesus returned to heaven. (My Facebook meme said "Ascension, the day Jesus began working from home." But why would he hang around any longer after his mission had been accomplished? Well, 40 days does have a certain meaning in the Bible - 40 days provides a time period for the faithful as they adapt to a New Life: Noah waiting for flood waters to recede; the Israelites wandering towards a

Promised Land; Elijah anticipating his call as a prophet; Moses expecting the Law to be given; Jesus, preparing for his ministry. It was also a Time of Revelation, which allowed the disciples to adjust from knowing the Lord as “Jesus of Nazareth” to recognizing him as “the Risen Christ.” I can imagine that took some getting used to. So, this was time for them to adapt to Jesus as GOD, rather than the “much more comfortable” *God Incarnate* (enfleshed) that they had known for three years.

In a similar way, it might take us **all** of the seven weeks of the Easter season to get used to the idea that God has a vision for us, just as we have a vision of God. We must adjust to the fact that 40 days after Easter, Jesus said goodbye to his life in human form. 40 days after Easter, his wilderness wandering was done, and he made his own Ex-odus (ex= out; odus = the way) literally, “the way out” to return to his Father. And 40 days after Easter, those who had stopped their life in this world, for him, began to **see the truth** - that Jesus had returned to the Father because his work here was finished - and that only through his return to the right hand of God could Jesus open the way for our work to begin. Work that is empowered by the Spirit of the “GOD who comes” - the God who has been in our skin, who knows what life in **this world** is all about.

Some of you will remember his final words in Matthew “*Go, therefore, and make disciples*” but others may hear more deeply, Luke’s Jesus, and want to **wait** in the city until they are *clothed with power from on high*. In just ten more days that power would come. Jews would gather for Pentecost, already a festival for celebrating the giving of the Law - and the followers of Jesus would be given the power to change lives on that same day - imagine the feeling of receiving that kind of power! It would be like falling in love and **wanting** your life to change! It would be true power that moves us all beyond ourselves to care and concern for others.

And that is exactly what happened to that ragtag band of disciples: fishermen, tax collectors, craftsmen, women of means, those who were healed, or raised, or forgiven, those whose hearts had been given to the Son of God in their own unique way. We hear their stories in the continuation of Luke’s Gospel, known as the book of the Acts of the Apostles, or simply Acts. And the disciples were making disciples through the power of God’s Holy Spirit.

Last week we heard about Paul, originally an enemy of the Jesus movement until he met Jesus for himself. He saw visions and dreamed dreams and was called over and over again, not simply to *Come and See*, but to *Go and Do* - to spread the love and mercy that God has for the whole world. Last week we heard about a trip to Macedonia, and a whole household being baptized, and then Paul and his companions receiving hospitality from a woman merchant named Lydia, who traded in purple cloth. Lydia’s household was also baptized, and today, a jailer who had the good fortune to be responsible for some of God’s best messengers, also found a way to overcome his daily fears and be set free himself by the power of God’s love and mercy. Another household brought into God’s kingdom through baptism - one of the means of grace.

So are you ready to leave the *Come and See* mode and move forward into *Go and Tell*? Just think about who is out there right now that needs Advent and you to be the messenger of Jesus and his love in their lives? Let me share a story that you may have heard me tell, but bears repeating. I belong to a small group of women clergy that meet once a month for lunch - been doing it for many years. One of them was sharing recently about a dinner she had just attended. It was a coalition of non-profit organizations in and around KC, and she was seated at a table for 10. She knew none of the other nine. So, the evening was spent sharing stories of their work and their lives, and she was incredibly impressed with how God’s work was being done with such compassion through so many different groups. Finally, someone asked, “where do you all go to church?” And none of them - except my friend - *none of them go to church anymore*. Now, I wonder if today’s atheists, agnostics, and non-religious folks are not really telling the whole truth - and what I hope is that they are NOT indifferent to God, but that maybe they just haven’t found a place that feeds their hearts...a place where God makes sense and God’s people actually live out what makes a difference; what has meaning in the

world. Maybe you work within a group such as this. Maybe they might like to hear about God in your life, and just need to talk about God in theirs.

Or consider an article I just read about why bringing young families into your church is not the magic answer to your problem...or some such title. The point was that young adults and children need a “container” where they can develop relationships with other generations and with a God who is calling them to grow in faith in a safe place. Young families want to participate in a place where sharing their big questions about faith and life will be heard, and elders will help them navigate these unprecedented times. They need a village because their extended families are not here and they need moral support. They want spiritual friends, people who talk about their faith and will show up when they need help.

In other words – it’s time to follow Jesus – the Jesus who came to show us how to love one another. When he left us in charge of that task, I believe that he was seriously expecting us to participate in it. So, whether you are in the Come and See or Go and Tell phase of your spiritual journey, I hope that you will realize that the joy of living *faith with meaning* is in sharing the way you have been loved by God. It’s not rocket science – it’s actually pretty simply. And as we look toward the power of Pentecost next Sunday, may we all listen very carefully to what God has been saying directly to you – since the day you were baptized.

So I’ll close with a lovely prayer by Bishop Steven Charleston, one of my favorite elder sages: “Hear the holy voice, hear what it is trying to say, even as louder voices command the stage, even as they seek to control the message of our time. Hear the holy voice within you, not the partisan voice that shouts at you, not the fearful voice that whispers in your ear, but the holy voice that you recognize. You know what it is and you know from where it comes. It is steady and confident. It is encouraging and healing. It is wise and kind. It is your personal connection to the Spirit, the one you have had since you were born. It is older than politics and more reliable than news. It is the holy voice of timeless truth and endless vision. Listen: it is the holy voice speaking directly to you.”
Come and See. Go and Do. Love One Another. Amen.

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RESOURCES: “Why bringing in young families is not a magic bullet for your congregation” Laura Stephens-Reed, coach – May 20,2022 post; Bp. Steven Charleston 5.24.2022 Facebook post