

It had been a rough week for the disciples. They had entered into Jerusalem for the feast of Passover expecting this to finally be the time in which Jesus would begin to rule as king. But then they watched as He was treated not as a king, but as a criminal. He was arrested and tried in a rushed and biased trial. Then they watched as He hung on the cross. They had left everything to follow this one, and now He was gone.

But on this Sunday, there had been some strange rumors floating around. A group of women claimed that they had been to Jesus' tomb in the morning and did not find him. They said that an angel had proclaimed that He had risen from the dead. Surely these women were just delirious after the long exhausting week. Peter had gone and found the empty tomb, but could only wonder what had happened. But then came another message, Simeon and Cleopas had been on the road to Emmaus, and they said that Jesus himself had appeared to them. The rumors were certainly starting to gain a little credence. Could all these people be wrong? Well just as they were talking about all this something happened that no one could have expected. Jesus appeared. He explained to them that everything that had happened was just exactly as the law, the prophets, and the psalms had said that it would happen. He told them that He had to die and rise three days later. Thank God, the rumors were true, Jesus had risen.

Then Jesus told them that there was still once large chunk of prophecy that had yet to be fulfilled. The story of Jesus had to be brought to the entire world, starting in Jerusalem. They were witnesses of everything and now they needed to witness to the world that more might receive the forgiveness of Jesus. Yes, witnesses must witness Jesus said. He gave them one last instruction before he left: wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit was given, until they had been clothed with power. Our text ends by telling us that they followed His instruction. Until Pentecost, the disciples were in the temple praising and blessing God. They stayed in the city and in the temple.

But as our second reading reminded us, on Pentecost they went out clothed in power and spread the message of Christ to the world.

What about us? Where are we? Are we in the temple praising and blessing God or are we going out to spread the message? I have a feeling that all too often we as Lutherans are stuck in the temple so to speak. We are very comfortable gathering in church to praise and bless God. But as far as getting out and spreading the message of Christ, we are often much more likely to stay in church, rather than go out into a world that seems so godless with our message about the true God. But for us that live on this side of Pentecost, we have not been called to stay in the temple, to stay in our churches with the message about Jesus. Oh no doubt, we still gather in church to be reminded of all our Lord did and to be strengthened by His Supper. But then we are to go out with the message we have just heard. We come to witness the events of Jesus life. And that makes us witnesses. And as Jesus told the disciples he reminds us, “Witnesses must witness.”

Imagine with me a scene that has become quite common on TV dramas and in real life in general. The courtroom is filled for what has been billed the case of the century. The court case goes on for days. Back and forth the two sides debate the facts. Then after court one day, the announcement is made. The defense team has acquired a star witness. The prosecution is down-trodden. They know that the information that this witness has will change the whole case. After several more days of testimony, the time has come. The defense calls the star witness. The gathered crowd is on the edge of their seats. The prosecution looks for a way to object to the information that is about to be shared. The defense lawyer begins with a simple question, “What did you see?” The witness take a deep breath and then another. The anticipation grows. “What did you see?” the defense lawyer repeats. The star witness sits silent. The defense team gets a little anxious, “What did you see?” But the star witness won’t say anything. He is dismissed from the stand since he makes no statement. The whole courtroom is astonished, now the truth will never be known, because the witness has been silent.

All too often we are like that witness on the stand. We have seen everything: Jesus’ death, His resurrection, and His ascension to the throne. We have been clothed

with power from on high on the day of our baptism when we received the Holy Spirit. We have been reminded of all of these events time and time again in church. And we have been strengthened by His Supper to speak. But yet when our world asks, “What did you see?” We are silent. Even when they beg with their hopelessness and wayward lives, we remain silent. And God is astonished; because he knows that if we are silent the truth may never be known because the star witness has been silent.

Today on this mission Sunday, we must return to our Lord and admit that we have been silent when we should have spoken. We must admit that some people that needed the Gospel might have been robbed of the truth by our neglect to witness. We return and admit that we have not often enough left the church with the message which we heard here and shared it.

And as we confess, we are reminded of the same message we have failed to share. Our sins of silence are forgiven by Jesus death and resurrection. Since Jesus fulfilled all the scriptures, we have forgiveness for each time we have failed to witness when asked what we have seen. And again as Jesus forgives us, we are clothed anew with power from on high to go out and share the message which we have just received.

For most of you, you will not be called to share in front of a large crowd like the one gathered on Pentecost day. More likely you will be called to share at your job to a co-worker, in your school to one of your friends, or in your home with one or two people that God has placed into your life who do not know the forgiveness that Jesus can give. When the opportunity is given, you will be given the words to speak. As our Old Testament lesson teaches, we simply declare the deeds of our God and tell the world that God is in our midst. We simply tell the world those things that we have witnessed. As witnesses, we witness. May God strengthen each of us this day that we might witness boldly this week and every week! We pray in the words of the hymn Thy Strong Word today, “Give us lips to sing thy glory, tongues thy mercies to proclaim, throats that shout the hope that fills us, mouths to speak thy holy name. Alleluia! Alleluia! May the light which thou dost send fill our songs with alleluias, alleluias without end!” Amen.