

Luke 24:36b-48 Year B

April 22, 2012

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen.

Have you been a witness? The answer is yes. We are all witnesses whether we may know it or not. We witness to each other regarding so many different things. For instance, we witness about the movie we saw to our co-worker the next day or about the new restaurant we dined at recently to our friends. You see we are witnesses and witnessing is easy so it seems. We just speak about things we have seen, heard, and know.

Once again today, like last Sunday, we have a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus before His disciples. Our text follows the appearance of the risen Christ along the Emmaus road near Jerusalem as Jesus “came near and went with” 2 of His followers. At first they did not recognize Him as He walked and talked with them but as He taught them and finally shared a meal with them He opened their eyes in order to recognize Him. Shortly thereafter they went to Jerusalem, found the 11 (disciples) and their companions and witnessed, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” As Luke 24:35 states, “Then they told what had happened on the road, and how He had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.”

In a likewise manner, the group today in Luke is gathered and talking about this when Jesus suddenly appears and stands among them (v.36) bringing words of peace. Luke testifies that all gathered were startled and terrified thinking perhaps they were seeing a ghost. Like last week, Jesus confronts them on why doubts arise in their hearts and invites them to view and touch the wounds on His hands and feet. But then he goes one step further and eats with

them – certainly no ghost can consume a piece of fish. Jesus is not merely an image but is the risen Lord in flesh and blood. From there he goes on to recall the words He spoke prior to His death and resurrection and that everything Moses and the prophets had written have now been fulfilled. He opens their minds as to why He suffered, died, and rose on the third day and then He states, “repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed *in my name* to all nations ... You are witnesses of these things.”

While we aren’t direct witnesses to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ we are proclaimers of the good news of Jesus Christ. We are heralds of God’s love and testifiers to God’s presence in our lives and in the world. This past Monday the church council gathered at the Synod Center for Ministry in Iowa City to spend some time with Bishop Michael Burk. Many simply still refer to this building as the Synod office where our Bishop and his staff conduct day-to-day operations. Yet, it is much more than that as Bishop Burk lifted up. It is our space – the people of the Southeastern Iowa Synod. We are joined together in mission to give witness “*in the name of Jesus Christ*” to the good news.

In the midst of our discussion Bishop Burk spoke of some recent research being done within the church and lifted up something they have noticed along the way he referred to as 4 marks of vital congregations. The first one. Anyone care to guess? A community where the good news is proclaimed. In such a community people know that good news, it shapes their entire life together as people gathered “*in the name of Christ.*” Jesus is central to everything they do and everything they do is viewed as vital to the proclamation of the good news; even down to the ordering of the paper towels, tissues, and toiletry items. Yes, things we may not initially deem all that important to the proclamation of the good news. Yet, in such a congregation they

are viewed as vital to the work of the people of God to welcome the stranger and bear forth the redeeming love of Christ to all who enter. I know, on the surface, it seems a bit of a stretch or even silly. Yet, what would happen if we did talk this way or view everything we do as vital to the proclamation of the gospel and pose that question toward decisions we make and ministries we undertake. It's a question the Bishop challenged congregations to ask themselves. How does everything we do relate to proclaiming the good news? (*Brief pause to ponder*)

Each week I find myself doing routine things and all too easily I can forget just why I am doing them or how important they are to the life of our community and the proclamation of the gospel. For instance, the formation and production of the worship bulletin. With Paula's help we spend time each and every week preparing this. Yet, some weeks it just seems like another line item to cross off my list and sometimes, sadly, something I don't even look forward; especially, when the only comments I receive on the bulletin are usually when there is a mistake. And I wonder then, what message I am sending about the love of Christ lavishly poured out upon us? What is the witness to the good news I am proclaiming?

Looking through the lenses of the question posed by Bishop Burk and even those I just mentioned causes me to refocus this weekly undertaking as not simply another task that needs to be done but rather as an opportunity to help guide us in our worship of God and ultimately in the proclamation of the good news. These aren't merely words on paper. No they are God's words. For the people of God and they are the words that shape our witness in the world. They are words of forgiveness and words of grace. They are holy words from scripture and words of life. They are words printed on paper God has created and abundantly provided so that we can print them each and every week. They are the hands of God's people the Spirit has gathered to

hold them. As I view it this way, my mindset shifts from a mundane, tedious, and repetitive task to a vital ministry of the work we do together. Yes, there will still be mistakes yet these are joy-filled mistakes that give witness to the good news of Jesus Christ. He had died. He is risen. He will come again.