

# Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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May 25, 2006  
Ascension Worship  
Luke 24:44-53  
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Acts 1:1-11  
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 47  
Second Lesson: Ephesians 1:16-23  
Gospel: Luke 24:44-53

## You Will Be My Witnesses

Think of how many times in your life that your parents told you that you **will** do something. Did you ever hear that phrase “**you will**”? Maybe sitting at the dining room table—“**You will** finish your vegetables before you get up and go do whatever it is that you want to do.” “**You will** clean your room before you go outside and play.” How many times in your life did you ever hear, “**You will** finish that bowl of ice cream”? Probably not much at all, right?

So when our Savior comes this evening as we celebrate his ascension and he says to us, “**You will be my witnesses**” –which one do you hear: “Do I have to?” or “Try and stop me!” Which is it?

This evening we see how some reacted—120 or so believers that were gathered together in Jerusalem. I think since they didn’t have freezers, sharing the Gospel was their bowl of ice cream because you see them respond even though they didn’t have complete knowledge. Think of how many times Jesus spent after his resurrection just teaching a Bible study with these folks, yet you couldn’t stop them from talking about what they had seen and heard. What they knew, they shared. You couldn’t stop them. The fact that we are sitting here tonight is evidence that they took the impossible command of “*you will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth*” (Acts 1:8) seriously and carried it out.

This evening we consider our roll in carrying the Gospel forward because Christ says to us, just as certainly as he said to those 120 gathered on that mountainside, “you will be my witnesses” to us also today. He tells us and prepares us to be witnesses the same way he did to those first New Testament believers—with minds opened by Scripture and then with mouths opened in joy to praise God and speak his truths.

Do you ever stop to think about that? Go through the Gospel and just read what Jesus does after he rises from the dead. What did he do with those two guys that he was walking with on the way to Emmaus? Do you remember those guys—downcast, shoulders slumped, shuffling along, moping, depressed, confused, dazed, eyes glazed over because they just didn’t get what happened. They figured Jesus was the Messiah and now he is dead and in the grave. And there are all these crazy rumors about the grave being empty. Who knows what is going on? They can’t get it. What did Jesus do when he appeared and walked with them? Did he say, “Hey guys. Look! It’s me! I’m alive! Touch me. Stick your hand in my side and put your fingers in the nail holes.

Come on. Figure it out. It's me!" If that is what your Bible says, throw it out because that is not what happened.

It says that *he opened their minds so that they could understand the Scriptures* (Luke 24:45). He talked with them and showed them, after he spoke some pretty stinging words to them, *"How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!"* (Luke 24:25). He said that they were fools and should have known better. They should have known what was going to happen. And then, beginning with Moses and the Prophets, he explained to them how all this had to happen. And later on, when he disappeared from their sight, if you read it, the first thing out of their mouths wasn't, "Hey, that was Jesus sitting across the table from us!" The first words out of their mouths were, *"Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"* (Luke 24:32). As he met with the disciples in the locked room that first Easter evening, the same thing. Of course he let them know it was him, but he has a Bible study with them and opened Scriptures so they could understand what their eyes had seen and what their ears had heard because their feeble minds couldn't get it.

Do you want evidence of that? Look at what we read this evening. *"Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"* (Acts 1:6). It is not an earthly kingdom people! Wouldn't you just want to scream that if you were standing there? But Jesus doesn't and he is patient and loving with them, but they still didn't get it. Their minds were still so low in their expectations because their minds weren't filled with the Scriptures. And what do we see this evening? He takes them out to the hillside and is about to leave them—what is the last thing he wants to do with them? "Okay, gentlemen. Listen again. Moses, the Psalms, the Prophets—let's go over it all again. Here is what had to happen. I had to die. I had to rise again so that you would know that the sacrifice for sin was acceptable to the Father. And already in the Old Testament you read through all those Psalms, people, and it says, go to the islands, go to the nations and preach to them the good news." He talks about how the nations would flock to his banner throughout the Old Testament. It is in there people. And he takes them one by one, hand by hand, and leads them through another Bible study to show them that this is what had to happen and also to show them what had to happen next--*repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem* (Luke 24:47). "Okay guys, you are going to start in Jerusalem and you are going to go where you are a little more comfortable, Judea. You are going to go where you are really uncomfortable, where you really don't want to be, Samaria. And then you are going to go to the ends of the earth, and don't tell me it is impossible, because with God all things are possible." And that is what they did.

Their minds were opened by Scripture so they stopped seeing with their eyes and started seeing with the heart of faith and believing what God had promised. If God had promised them that they would be blessed when they would be persecuted, then that is what they would do. If they were persecuted, they wouldn't shrivel up and fade away and blow away like a leaf in the wind. They would say, *"we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard"* (Acts 4:20). That is what Scripture told them they were always supposed to do and they were the ones that were privileged to watch it so they were going to share it.

These guys sat at Jesus' feet for three straight years, and yet in the 40 days after his resurrection, before his ascension, he holds one intensive Bible study after another. Do you think they kind of said, "Oh, Jesus. Do we have to do this stuff now? Can't we do something a little more practical than just study the Bible?" I hope they didn't because it seems to be that is what our Lord and Savior, the one who created the earth, the one who laid its foundations, the one who said, "Thus far to the waters you can come and no farther" as we heard in our Bible study of Job last week—that is what he decided was best for them. It makes you kind of wonder what is best for us.

When have we had enough? When do we know God well enough? When do we know his Scriptures well enough so that we can speak them clearly and confidently? We know Scriptures well enough to speak them clearly and confidently when we know any message of Scripture because he has called us to speak what we know to be true. So as much as we know to be true we are prepared to speak. To speak it in love, to speak it because *"there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved"* (Acts 4:12). Then the Gospel centers on the name of Jesus Christ. We have that message and we know that so we have something to share, but when do we ever know him well enough? When do we ever face the fears of life and say, "I am not worried. I have Christ by my side." I don't know about you, but I don't always say that. I fall short of that noble goal. That is why I need God to strengthen me through the Word and through the Sacrament by going back to my baptism in repentance, by digging into his Word so he opens my mind so I can understand what his plan is, so I can see his hand in my daily life when he opens those doors for me where I can say to someone, "You know. I can see how troubled and worried you are. When I am worried, here is where I turn." And you can share the love of Christ with them in a very natural, non-threatening way.

If Christ is a word that is only to be spoken within the walls of churches, then a lot of people better start changing their vocabulary because I hear it an awful lot outside of church. The only problem is that usually it isn't to God's glory! You and I can speak it to God's glory. That is why we want to get into the Word, on our own, with our families, with other Christians and at worship so that our minds can be opened by Scriptures so that we can see the role that we play in God's plan to share that Word with each other and with the world.

Think about it—even in the Great Commission God commanded Bible study, didn't he? *"...teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you"* (Matthew 28:20). It seems like it is on his mind a lot. Probably because when our mind is opened by Scripture, he knows it will open our mouths to speak with joy. Here are these guys that have the wrong answer while they are sitting there with their mouths hanging open as Jesus ascends into heaven. They are still saying the wrong things, but get them back into Jerusalem and what do they do? They can't help talking about the joy that they have, because the one who has made all the promises kept all the promises. *"Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms"* (Luke 24:44). That is what he told them. Then he left. He told them everything had been fulfilled. He told them in the future everything would be fulfilled when he said, *"surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age"* (Matthew 28:20).

They could put their trust in that because their minds had been opened by Scriptures. When he said, *"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you"* (Hebrews 13:5), they could put it in the bank and put their trust in it because their minds had been opened by Scriptures.

And after those minds were opened, their mouths were opened to praise. The same guys that ran away and hid in the darkness of night when Jesus was betrayed on Maundy Thursday are the same guys that stood up to the mob that had seized Jesus and said, "No, we can't stop talking about him. We can't stop talking about what we have seen and heard. Threaten us with prison, threaten us with what you may, but our mouths are going to be open to praise God as we speak his glory." Why? Because they understood so clearly why Jesus had come and what he had done. The Gospel, the good news about who Jesus is and what he had done, wasn't just something that was for them to know that they were forgiven and God would be with them. It was something they knew was for everyone and they wanted everyone to know that and they wanted everyone to have that same kind of joy.

The joy that God brings is not a joy that is finite. It is not like taking a scoop out of a bucket of God's joy and putting it into another bucket and that causing there to be any less for us. It is infinite. It is limitless. And when God speaks to our hearts with his Scriptures and opens our minds, there is going to be no other natural result except that he is going to open our mouths to speak his praises—not because we have to, not because we have to do it before we can go out and play, not because we have to do it before we can go visit our friends, not because we have to do it or we are going to be grounded, but because it is our bowl of ice cream.