

June 5, 2011  
Easter 7

*"You Are Witnesses for the Kingdom of God"*

### **ACTS 1:1-14**

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*In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach <sup>2</sup>until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. <sup>3</sup> After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. <sup>4</sup> On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. <sup>5</sup> For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."*

*<sup>6</sup> So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"*

*<sup>7</sup> He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

*<sup>9</sup> After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.*

*<sup>10</sup> They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. <sup>11</sup> "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."*

*<sup>12</sup> Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city. <sup>13</sup> When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. <sup>14</sup> They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.*

After Jesus rose from the dead, he spent 40 days appearing to his disciples and talking to them about the kingdom of God. Remember how he appeared to his disciples behind closed doors and showed them the nail marks in his hands. Remember how he appeared to them along the Sea of Galilee where they miraculously caught a large number of fish. Jesus also spent time talking to them about the kingdom of God. Jesus began his ministry by talking about the kingdom of God. Here it says that he talked about the kingdom of God after his resurrection and until he ascended into heaven.

Jesus wants to fill your life and mine with the good news of his kingdom. This is the good news that God loved you so much that he had his Son Jesus come to this earth to rescue us from the punishment we deserve for our sin by giving his life on the cross. Jesus summed up this good news about God's kingdom with the words, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life." Little children and adults joyfully sing about the kingdom of God with the words, "Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so." The message of the kingdom of God is one simple word, four letters, beginning with the letter "L." It is love, God's undeserved love and kindness that never changes even when

everything is falling apart.

Jesus' disciples were not totally satisfied with God's love for them. They were looking for a kingdom of glory here on his earth. That is why they asked Jesus the question, "Lord at this time are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" Jesus reminded them that their job was to witness to the kingdom of God, the kingdom of God's love, not a kingdom of glory here on this earth. Jesus is not going to come to this earth and begin talking to people about the love that he and the Father have for people. His plan is to use people like you and me to share this love and compassion and mercy with the world in which we are living.

### **You know the blessings of God's kingdom**

In his introduction to the Book of Acts the evangelist Luke tells us what a privilege it was to write an account of everything Jesus did and taught. He says, "I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up into heaven." When you look at all the things Jesus did, the miracles he performed, you realize how much he loves people. When you read about his death on the cross, you realize the love he has for you personally as he takes your sin upon himself and dies just for you. This past week in our Santa Maria Terrace Bible study we were reading and discussing from John 8 how often Jesus spoke in glowing terms about the love his heavenly Father had for him. He did this to help us see the intense personal love our Father has for us because of all the things Jesus did to rescue us and save us.

I am holding in my hand a Forward in Christ magazine that some of you are receiving in your home. The president of our national church body has an article in which he speaks about the hard times in which we are living. Wow, the economic report was lousy again this week. All of us know of people going through real hard times. As you look into yourself, you became aware of your greatest problem. You see how far short you fall of what God expects of you. According to Isaiah 59 we conceive trouble and give birth to evil and hatch the eggs of vipers and spin spider webs to cover the evil we do. Then we hear the good news of the kingdom. We hear John the Baptist cry out to us personally, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

Jesus asks us to take this good news of the kingdom that has filled our lives and pass it on to other people. He is not delegating this important work to angels, or a special elite group of people. He asks ordinary people like us to do this work and he promises to provide us with the Holy Spirit to bless us.

### **You have the Holy Spirit to help you**

Jesus told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the gift of the Holy Spirit to come and fill them with power. "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." The plan was not to get out of Jerusalem where it was safer to live. The plan was to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit to provide the much needed power to talk about God's kingdom.

It is so much easier to ignore the people in your life who need to hear about Jesus such as a member of your family, your neighbor, your good friend at work, or someone you just met this past week. The Lord does not want you to find a comfort zone where you will be safe. He promises to give you the gift of the Holy Spirit to help you bear witness to what you believe. Jesus had this to say to us about witnessing in the last days, "Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not

you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.”

How do the disciples respond to Jesus’ amazing words about the promise of the Holy Spirit? They ask him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” In the back of their minds there was always the hope that Jesus would do more than just die on the cross and rise from the dead and save them from eternal death and punishment. They wanted him to do something glamorous and exciting for the nation of Israel, maybe even return in glory and set up a kingdom on this earth with headquarters in Jerusalem. There are still people hoping this will happen today. Jesus tells them, “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.” The heavenly Father had great plans for the nation of Israel, but it was not going to be a kingdom on this earth. God’s plan was to see the people of Israel come into his kingdom of the cross, and bear this cross to all the world.

How much power do you have to bear witness to what you believe? Listen to what Jesus told his disciples. “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Think of how hard it would be to stand up in Jerusalem and witness to people about Jesus. It was in Jerusalem that Jesus was condemned to death and crucified on the cross. Think of how hard it would be to witness in Samaria. The Samaritans hated the Jews. Think of how tough it would be to take the message into the whole world. Traveling is hard today, but it was much more difficult in those days.

You cannot travel very far in a car when the gas tank is on empty. I ask you this morning, is your tank empty or full? We are not talking about the fuel in your car. We are talking about the power you have for telling other people how much God loves them and cares for them and what he has done for them through Jesus. You have the Holy Spirit. Jesus did not say you might receive the Holy Spirit. He said, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.” I believe it was the church father St Augustine who prayed, “Lord ask what you want and then give what you ask.” Jesus asks us to bring the good news of his kingdom to all the world, then he promises to provide the Holy Spirit to help us.

One of the greatest joys in the ministry is to hear people talk about their faith. You realize that what they say is not just coming from them. The words are given to them by the Holy Spirit. Think of all those times in your life when the Holy Spirit enabled you to say something about what you believe. Whatever tough places the Lord has planned for you in the future, you can be sure of Jesus’ promise, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.”

### **You look forward to Jesus returning in glory**

After Jesus said these words he was taken up into heaven. “After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.” The gospel of Luke tells us, “While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven.” Did Jesus have his hands outstretched as he went up into heaven? What did they see in the hands of Jesus as they watch him go up into the clouds? For one more time they saw the nail marks in his hands, the assurance of how much he loved them.

When we were little children, we often came to worship on Sunday morning as the church bell was ringing. That meant sitting up in the front row, but that was not all that bad. For above the front altar area was a statute of Jesus ascending up to heaven. In his hands were the nail marks, painted a deep red color. I have memories seeing the marks in the hands of Jesus and thinking of how much he loved me. How many times does the Holy Spirit help you remember those scars in the hands of Jesus?

As they look at Jesus going up to heaven two angels suddenly appear to them and comfort them with these words, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way that you have seen him go into heaven." Jesus will come back to us in the same way. When he comes, we will see him as he is, coming on clouds of glory. In the Revelation the Lord Jesus promises, "I am coming soon." The church responds by saying, "Come Lord Jesus."

The disciples gathered together in the room where they were staying. They joined together in prayer. "They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus and his brothers." I close with a prayer that we have often used in this congregation asking our Lord to lead us to be more bold in our witness. Lord God, You know the challenges we face in a world that does not want You. Place Your hand of blessing on Your servants and make us bold to proclaim Your pure Word. By Your Holy Spirit lead many to know Your Son, Jesus Christ, the only hope of salvation. Amen.