**Luke 24:44-53 (ESV)**

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 and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” **45** Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, **46** and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, **47** and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. **48**  You are witnesses of these things. **49** And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” **50** Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. **51** While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. **52** And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, **53** and were continually in the temple blessing God.

**“You Are My Witnesses”**

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. Church terms are certainly foreign or misunderstood by many in our society. Apostle, inerrancy, justification, liturgy all sound strange, but that word “witness” will always have meaning. Witnesses are those questioned in the court concerning a crime. Witnesses are those needed for signing a marriage license. Witnesses are those texting the final score of the game you missed. We have witness protection programs, religious cults called Jehovah Witnesses, and plenty longing to witness the future advancements of humanity. The word “witness” is not going away, but is a standard in life. Even God’s Law states, “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”

“You are my witnesses” is the theme for this LWML Sunday. Jesus said this after the resurrection having secured all salvation in His Name. He alone is the true witness of God’s love sent for a sinful world. The accusing Pharisees heard Him say, “In your Law it is written that the testimony of two people is true. I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me” (John 8:17-18). At His trial, Jesus confirmed the words of Pilate stating, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world— to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice” (John 18:37). For Jesus to say finally to His Church, “You are my witnesses” means an identity rests fully for us on Him.

Jesus makes us witnesses by His Word. Nobody else could unlock the key to Scripture that the Devil so easily confused. Nobody else looked beyond the Law’s judgment to a Savior out of the cross. Not even the resurrection event turned disciples into witnesses for Jesus. Rather, His Word is what gave the good witness to sinners. He said, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you…” All that God had ever spoken by the prophets like Moses and others was always witnessing to Christ. His claim on the Old Testament is not here or there, but engulfs the whole saving work of God. The disciples were not witnesses on their own accord, but it was the word of Jesus who “opened their minds to understand the Scriptures…”

Jesus continues to make witnesses by His Word. It comes from those who had first-hand experience hearing Him. The apostles did not establish any kind of witness without Jesus. They make this fact known for St. John says, “these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:30-31). The foundation for all witnesses rests in Jesus’ death and resurrection. This sacrifice by God both judged sinners and justified them for all time. Only the earliest Christians experienced the cross. However, this saving work still comes in words to save lives. Jesus said, “that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations…” It is “in His name” the church publicly raises up pastors. It is to preach the word of Law and Gospel to draw all to the Savior. Isaiah saw such a witness saying, “On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have set watchmen; all the day and all the night they shall never be silent.” “You are my witnesses” rest on good news God gives to save. The LWML organized with efforts to support what Jesus’ speaks in His Church.

Jesus makes witnesses by His Word also promising us the Spirit is at work. What would the disciples ever amount to without Jesus? They knew the nature of man was to run away from the cross, to betray the Savior by a kiss, to fear the powers that crucified Christ. No wonder Jesus said, “And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” This clothing of power was nothing else than the Holy Spirit. The completion of baptism preached by John the Baptizer was now with the fire that now preached Jesus. The Work of the Holy Spirit given to the Apostles and early Christians had one goal. Peter said it on Pentecost, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). The spoken Word was already at work to convict and comfort, but only the Spirit had power to change hearts and minds of sinners.

We see plenty of ‘spirits’ floating around today. Some pretend to witness to an emotional high in Jesus. Others offer a new prophetic revelation from an influential personality. The “positive experience” speech entices with pictures of self-fulfillment. What the Apostles received was the Holy Spirit proceeding from the crucified and risen Savior sent by the Father. Their Words witnessed to this Spirit for St. Paul said, “my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (1 Corinthians 2:4-5). If Jesus makes witnesses by His Word, then only the Spirit works by the Word. This is why by baptism you are already wearing the clothes of a witness. Jesus has done all the work of forgiveness for you. His Word and Sacraments shines as a witness of compassion. “You are my witnesses” is far from a prideful control of ownership by sinners. This humility now serves with gratitude to Christ and no other glory. His Spirit always works to save, is alive by the Word, and rests as a promise in our lives.

Jesus makes witnesses by His Word promising the Spirit and leads us to rejoice in Him. If it was in terms of separation from the Savior, there might be something to fear. However, the blessing Jesus gave at His ascension shaped the character of His witnesses. You heard it, “And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God.” This is joy in a witness deeper than a fleeting emotion or a pursuit of happiness. Before the cross Jesus told His disciples, “ So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you” (John 16:22). Since Jesus blessed His disciples after the resurrection, it is a blessing not even sin, death or the Devil could remove. They were recipients of God’s grace given in Jesus. Their worship of Him supplied the joy in their witness. Yet, whether in success or suffering, Jesus led the way in glory. Only He gave joy that by the breaking of bread could go out to the ends of the earth.

Receiving what Jesus gives by His Divine Service is reason to rejoice. He comes to bless us for service in the world through our various vocations. His presence in the Sacrament extends a witness in our life not somewhere just out there, but what we share between each other. The LWML has been a part of this witness providing gifts, food, cleaning, and a place of fellowship for women. This witness of love is a blessing, even while Jesus reigns with an eternal love over all the baptized. His blessing holds glory unable to fade or falter kept safe for His Church. Joy always shapes those words, “You are my witnesses.” It is an identity for us resting fully on Jesus. What He brings on the Last Day will be a witness to His witnesses. Amen. Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding be with your hearts and mind in Christ Jesus to life everlasting, Amen.