

INI

7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

Ascension Sunday

June 5, 2011

Prince of Peace Lutheran Church

Hecla, SD

Text: Acts 1:1-14 ***In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, (2) until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. (3) He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. (4) And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; (5) for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." (6) So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (7) He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. (8) But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (9) And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. (10) And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, (11) and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." (12) Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. (13) And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. (14) All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers. (ESV)***

THEME: WE ARE HIS WITNESSES!

- Witnesses who must never speculate about the unknown
- Witnesses who testify of what Jesus did and said

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ Jesus,

“Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?” Those of you who have either been in a courtroom or have watched courtroom drama’s on television, are probably familiar with these words. These are the words a judge or officer of the court will ask someone who is about to testify on the witness stand. The job of a witness is to tell the judge and jury what he saw or heard with regards to the crime in question. And it is important that those who are going to testify of something in a court proceeding tell only the truth. After all, a person’s life may be at stake, so it is essential for a fair trial that those witnesses answer every question truthfully.

If we realize how important it is for a witness to tell the truth when someone's life is at stake, of how greater importance is it to tell "nothing but the truth" when someone's soul and eternal future is at stake? In our text Jesus refers to His chosen apostles as **"My witnesses...to the ends of the earth."** Before Jesus ascended into heaven He commissioned them to tell the world what they saw Jesus do and what they heard Him say. The Apostle John speaks of how they were witnesses of Jesus in his first epistle, **"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life."** (1 Jn 1:1) The Apostles were reliable sources about Jesus because they could give a firsthand account of what they heard Him with their ears, saw Him with their own eyes, how they examined His resurrected body, and even touched Him. If the Apostles were on the witnesses stand, they would be the perfect witness.

You have heard the witness of the Apostles in the Gospels and Epistles of the New Testament. As such, you are now witnesses of Jesus. While we did not see and look upon Jesus as the Apostles did, we have heard the very words of Jesus. As Jesus' witnesses we must be careful not to speculate on the unknown, but rather to make known what we do know - the words and works of Jesus. May the Holy Spirit aid us by His Word that He might make us better witnesses.

#### WITNESSES WHO MUST NEVER SPECULATE ABOUT THE UNKNOWN

If you've watched much of the news channels in the last week, you've probably heard a great deal about the Casey Anthony case in Florida. The case against Casey Anthony deals with the tragic death of her two year old daughter Caylee. The state of Florida is accusing the mother, Casey, of killing her. Who here is expecting a call from the Orange County Courthouse, asking you to testify as a material witness in this case? Nobody? Why not? Why wouldn't the defense or prosecution put you on the stand? Don't you have anything to say about the case? One simple reason, you were not there nor do you even know who these people are. You did not see anything or hear anything. Quite simply, you are not a witness for this case.

But couldn't the lawyers call on you to testify about whether you THINK Casey killed her daughter? Or whether you THINK she is innocent? Well, that is all irrelevant, isn't it. What you think about a particular subject has no place in a court of law. Speculation should never be a part of a trial. In fact, if you were to speculate on the stand about something, the other lawyer would object to your speculation and the judge would ask the jury to disregard the thoughts expressed by the witness. The judge and jury are only interested in the facts. Especially when the case is a matter of life and death, like the case against Casey Anthony.

Just as there is no room for speculation in a court of law, there is no room for speculation in God's courtroom. Our witness is not to go beyond what God has made known to us in His Word. We are not to speculate about the unknown. That is not the job of a witness.

Just before Jesus ascended into heaven, we read that His chosen apostles asked Him, **"Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"** (v6) It seems that the disciples, along with many Jews of that time, had a misguided view of what the Messiah was going to do when He came. Many thought that He was going to come and restore Israel to its former glory. The way things were in the "good ol' days" of King David and King Solomon. The days when Israel was a super-power in the region. Now Israel was a defeated nation, subject to Roman

rule. Now that they had seen the risen Lord, the disciples wondered whether if now was the time. They were certain Jesus was the promised Messiah and asked Him if NOW He was going to restore the kingdom to Israel.

What was Jesus reply? ***“It is not for you to know the times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.”*** Jesus had spent the last three years talking to them about the kingdom of God. He told them parables, like the parable of the Mustard Seed and the parable of the Sower and the Seed, to teach the truth about the Kingdom of God. Luke reports in our text that in the 40 days from Easter to Ascension, Jesus was ***“speaking about the kingdom of God.”*** Teaching them the same things we learn from Scripture about the kingdom of God. Teaching them that the kingdom of God is not an earthly kingdom, but it is Jesus setting up His throne and ruling in the hearts of believers. And how the kingdom of God will come in all its glory on the Last Day. A day which the Father has put in His own authority.

Yet the apostles wanted to go beyond what Jesus had made known to them about the kingdom of God, into the unknown. Quite simply Jesus said, “It is not for you to know such things.” In other words, if God wanted you to know about it, God would have revealed it to you. If they were going to be His faithful witnesses, it was important for them to learn that they must never speculate about those things which the Father has not made known to them.

We need to hear the same thing, don’t we? How many times are we tempted to speculate and wonder about things God hasn’t made known to us in Scripture? Here we have God’s book, with His words recorded on each and every page. Here we have God speaking to us and making known to us everything necessary for our salvation. Here we hear of the depth of God’s love for us in sending His only begotten Son to be our Savior. Here we have all the promises of eternal life.

And yet, we’re not satisfied. The devil continues to tempt us as he tempted Eve, causing us to think that God is holding something back from us. And so we are tempted to speculate about the unknown - those things God has not revealed to us. One such example I ran across in preparation for today’s service. Remember in our text how Luke recorded that during the 40 days from Easter to Ascension, Jesus was ***“speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God?”*** (v3) What specifically did Jesus speak about? We don’t know. God has not revealed that to us. Yet, the Roman Catholic Church speculates on the unknown and says that during those 40 days the “things pertaining” to the kingdom of God that Jesus spoke to His Apostles about was commands about the 7 sacraments.

So we see begin to see the danger of speculating beyond what God has said in His Word. When we begin to guess about the things God has not made known to us, we begin to wander into the neighborhoods of false teachers. We begin to add our thoughts to Scripture. Just as speculation about the unknown is irrelevant in a court of law, it is even more irrelevant and dangerous, when we are witnessing the spiritual truths of the kingdom of God.

#### WITNESSES WHO TESTIFY OF WHAT JESUS DID AND SAID

Rather than speculating about the unknown, Jesus tells His apostles, ***“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*** Rather than speculating about the unknown, the Holy Spirit would reveal to them all they needed to know. The Holy Spirit would remind them of everything that Jesus said and did.

That is the role of a witness - to tell of what one said and did. The witnesses called to testify in the Casey Anthony case was there to tell of what she said and did. Luke did just that in his Gospel account, where he investigated and reported ***“all that Jesus began to do and teach.”*** (v1) What did Jesus do? He came into the world to save the world. Jesus had died on the cross and suffered the punishment of hell for every last man, woman, and child that ever has been born or ever will be born. He rose from the dead on the third day for our justification. By His resurrection from the dead, He reconciled us to God and gave us a right relationship with Him. And when His work of redemption was done, He soared to God’s right hand. And as the angels told the apostles at His ascension, ***“This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”***

What Jesus did for the whole world, He wants the whole world to know about. Therefore He has commissioned us, His followers, to be His witnesses throughout the world. To tell the world, beginning in our own backyards, ***“all that Jesus began to do and teach.”*** At the close of Matthew 28 we read, ***“Go, therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.”*** (Mt 28:19-20a) As His witnesses they were to teach everything Jesus told them to teach. At the close of Mark 16 we read Jesus saying, ***“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.”*** (Mk 16:15) As His witnesses they were preach the good news of what Jesus had done.

May God forgive us for the times we have wandered beyond what He has made known to us in His Word. May He, by His Holy Spirit, help us to rejoice in what He HAS made known to us in Scripture. May He ever equip us to be faithful witnesses that tell “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth” of what Jesus did and taught. May He strengthen us by His Spirit that we may preach the Gospel to every creature. Praise be to our ascended Lord for making us His witnesses. Amen.