

April 23, 2017

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“Just As He Told You (When in Doubt, Read the Instructions)

“Stay, Witness”

Mark 6:7-13

Acts 1:1-14

The Rev. Lynn P. Lampman

We began our new worship series last Sunday, at the 7 AM Easter sunrise service with the instructions from the man with the nice, colorful and glowing aura at the tomb, when he said to Mary and the women, “Go, tell the disciples”. So many times we have heard these Easter words as, “go tell the world”.

Yet, this instruction holds an important message for us, if we are to see resurrection: ours, our community, and even the world – we must encourage and undergird each other first with the Good News of Jesus, before we can go and tell the world.

Now, regarding the going and telling, the disciples had a dry run before Jesus died. He developed a pilot project for them. In that pilot he told them to take nothing – no food, no money, no change of clothes, and stay in other people’s homes (no Motel 6, for them). And then he sent them out in pairs, a detail not to be missed. In other words, you will need to depend on others and each other to get this mission, this work done.

And then, there was the content and agenda of the pilot project. They were to be advocates for change – people changing their hearts and lives (in other words, whole-life discipleship, not Sunday attendance only, nor your name in the directory of some church, nor I grew up in that church and haven’t been there since). This is not about a teflon faith, where things don’t stick. But rather, a fully saturated faith where we let the life and teachings of Jesus change us, and then we go about being change

agents for our world.

So, the pilot project was about being advocates for change, and also addressing evil that seeks to destroy, and touching those who need wholeness and well-being. Now, I don't know about you, but that is some serious work. And I have to admit, when given that agenda, I find myself asking myself, how are you doing on the addressing evil and bringing healing? Maybe, you will ponder that today and in the days ahead as well! Don't worry about the tall order, the "impossible" agenda, the very hard content, because we are not doing it alone – we are doing it with God -with God's help, as well as each other's help.

And last but not least, some serious feet shaking, and some dirt flinging jirations. Why, must we do it? Because in not doing it, it is just another way to get stuck and not have the message of the kingdom of God stick. For when we go around with the memory of rejection seared in our frontal cortexes we get bogged down by it – we end up in quicksand – unable to move, and the more we thrash about, the deeper and deeper we sink, until we are swallowed up by it, and thus never heard from again.

After the two by two mission, the 12 disciples dry run is over. Mission accomplished. The experiment has indeed been successful!

Our second reading for today is about some more instructions regarding what the disciples are to do. We are in the part of their story and ours where Jesus has risen and is appearing to them several times, over the course of forty days.

The first part of the instructions told them is: "don't just stand there, stop looking to heaven". It sounds a bite that sounds like they were paralyzed. Frozen in time and place. Yet, you can't move the mission of the kingdom of God forward if all you do is

stand there looking in the wrong direction. The conversation that happens just before “don’t stand there, do something”, is one in which the disciples ask Jesus “when are YOU going to restore the kingdom. To which he answers with a comment about them receiving power from the Holy Spirit, and then THEY will be his witnesses.

It was as if they did not take in what he was saying, for they were still thinking Jesus would do it all. And if we are not careful, we as his contemporary followers will wind up doing the same thing – wondering when Christ is going to do something. In other words, it’s on YOU Risen Christ. To which, he then says, no it’s you! I’m giving you the power, it’s in you, thus it’s on YOU.

And with that, he is taken up to heaven. The disciples as if paralyzed are gazing endlessly toward heaven. Till their trance or stupor (depending on how you look at it) is interrupted with two men (who also have nice auras) who say to them, “Why are you standing here, looking to heaven.” In other words, get on with it, don’t just stand there. And, by the way you’re looking in the wrong direction. Now is the time to look out, look around and speak up!

Some of you know, I can’t sew worth a darn. Yet, I love quilt patterns. So, what does one do when you cannot sew like Marian or Kathy, you make paper quilts instead of fabric ones. With that in mind, I created three canvas paper quilts around the issue of environmental damage.

(Elephant paper quilt canvas – tan, rust and brown color palette)

The first has to do with endangered species, especially the elephant. Those are all pictures of tusks, herds, poaching, and what is being done to try and protect the elephants.

(Solar energy paper quilt canvas – blue, gray palette)

The second one is about climate change and the use of solar energy to help combat rising temperature due to our most often chosen forms of energy.

(Nine-Patch “Eyewitnesses” paper quilt – nine animal eyes)

This is all a lead up to this paper quilt which I call “The Eyewitnesses”. It is made up of borders and patches gleaned from photos of climate change, topped with an eye of an animal who is experiencing climate change first hand, for they are literally on the ground floor of what we are doing to our environment.

By the way, Lynne makes me keep this one in my office upstairs. She says, it is way to creepy to hang on the wall anywhere else in our house.

Like the reptilians at ground zero, the disciples were the “eyewitnesses” and God was counting on the furtherance of God’s kingdom after the death and resurrection of Jesus on what they saw, heard, said, and did.

Christ told them to be his witnesses – to witness. The Greek New Testament word is *martuereo* (Mar-too-reh-o). Which is a verb, an action word which means to affirm that one has seen or heard or experienced something, to give testimony.

In our roll as witnesses, as contemporary followers of Jesus, we need to move beyond looking up, because Christ is looking at us to look out and look around with his eyes.

We are at ground zero and we are his eyewitnesses. We are the ones who should refuse to look away, but rather see and give testimony of what we have seen. There are too many people turning a blind eye, or looking over those who need us most. We are called to see what is going on, and report that, and then

move, not just stand there, but be an advocate for change.

I remember a clergy colleague of mine, getting ready to go on sabbatical and her planning to go and give witness to a situation that was going on in another part of the world. I thought to myself, what good will that do? Yet, I have come to realize, since then, that she was right, this was important, to give witness, as a first step – to hear, to see, to experience. Yet, it would be insufficient, if this was hers or our only step. For we must act, move forward, and as scripture candidly puts it, not just stand there witnessing what is going on.

For 40 days the resurrected Christ talked to them about the kingdom of God. In other words, he wanted them to focus on and live into and out the reign of God, the message and good news of equality, inclusion, justice, peace, compassion and mercy. It was his last chance to make an earthly impression for those earthlings who needed to know that the way they were living needed to include the addressing of evil and its commitment to destruction, and that there were many wounds and wounded, and scads of the suffering that needed healing, many who needed to be brought into well-being and wholeness.

Lastly, I would like to talk about the where of giving witness. I don't know about you, but sometimes I feel like I am just waiting around for something better, someplace different other than where I am. Yet, the real truth is Christ did not tell them to return home, if so, he would have told them to go to Galilee. Instead, he told them to look, right where they found themselves. To witness where they currently were, not where they wanted to be, not even to go back and tell the home crowd. With that in mind, we are to look around wherever we may find ourselves, listen to what is around us, fully experience wherever we find ourselves, and in doing so – we fulfill his instructions to not just stand there, not

look to Christ to do it all, but rather to be who God is counting on – to look out, listen intently, and be his witnesses by giving testimony to that which we see, hear, and know through experience. Can we – the answer is “Yes”. Will we? Well, that remains to be seen!

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