

“Beyond a Reasonable Doubt” **Acts 1:1-5**

Everyone thought it was over, but it was just the beginning. I’m not sure if Luke was planning on writing a sequel when he spent so much time meticulously writing his Gospel. but he wrote again, as Theophilus (the original recipient) would tell you. So Luke dipped quill in ink to continue the “Story”. I say, “continue” because Luke begins the Book of Acts by returning to his Gospel, just for a moment, mostly for those who joined halfway through. Although Acts is not considered a “Gospel”, per se, it is gospel, that is, “good” news, of what happened “after Jesus was taken up into heaven.” But even before that happened, Luke has a very interesting verse about what occurred in a stretch of 40 consecutive days. But I’m getting ahead of myself. So let’s just for a moment, recap the events before the 40 days that led to Luke writing for a second time at all.

At the end of the Gospel of Luke, like all the other Gospel writers, Luke concludes the story of Jesus with Jesus’ arrest, crucifixion, death, resurrection and ascension. It’s the story of life and death but not just Jesus’ life and death but the story of our “death and life”. **When Jesus was alive we were dead. But when Jesus died we came to life. And when Jesus came alive we received life beyond the grave.** That’s the gospel in a nutshell. If that’s all you hear for the next twenty minutes that is enough. Salvation is not about being good enough. It’s not about doing the right things. It’s nothing about what we do but everything to do with what Jesus has done for us. In many ways this is exactly the sermon Jesus, the resurrected Jesus, gave to two broken hearted followers on a road one day, just after his resurrection. Only Luke tells the story of the Emmaus Road; (Luke 24:13-35) the most extensive post resurrection story in all the gospels. We sometimes forget that time elapsed between Jesus resurrection (that is coming out of the empty tomb) and the day on the mountain when he ascended back to Heaven. That stretch was 40 days – and one of those moments captured is a lengthy 23 verses. It’s the story of two men encountering someone they believe to be a stranger, a not so well-read or observant stranger for this man seemed to have no knowledge of what had recently happened in Jerusalem. Who could not know that the most charismatic and gifted oratory and faith healer the Hebrews had ever known, and although only in the public for 3 years, had been put to death in the most cowardly way. Even the hardest of hearts were outraged at such a travesty of justice. But what these two weary travelers did not know and was therefore corrected by the third was that all those things had to happen. And with that the two were “schooled” or disciplined unlike they had ever been before. The stranger took them through the Biblical narrative from start to finish showing them that the stories were not independent lessons but a continuous story that led to this point in history – but not the death of Jesus remembered with the breaking of bread and the spilling of wine but the coming back to life, just as the prophets had foretold. And with that disciples realized the

stranger was in fact no stranger at all but Jesus Himself. The one they saw put to death had actually come back to life. You can understand their apprehension at first, right? You can see how it wouldn't make any sense. But who they saw before them was no ghost, no mirage, no spirit but beyond a doubt a living breathing man. What else could they do but believe that Jesus was alive. One person can see things. But two seeing the same vision is even more reliable. But when tens and even hundreds see the same thing, it is true! So the Emmaus Road incident is not the only one recorded by Luke. And all these encounters happened within 40 days – multiple people meeting up with someone who had certainly died but was now alive. I'm sure it convinced many that Jesus was who he said he was. And even more, I believe his message then and before took on new meaning, was even more powerful than ever before.

What other explanation can be given for what we see and what we hear if we read on in the Book of Acts? If you were amazed by what Jesus did in the Gospels (heal the sick and bring sight to the blind and so on) you will be equally amazed and maybe even more amazed with Acts stories. More amazed because this is not simply Jesus doing the miracles but simple fishermen, tax collectors, and non Jews doing these things which makes the full title, “Acts of the Apostles” understandable. But all those miracles were by no means a human feat, but an act of the One promised by Jesus and then mentioned again in our short passage this morning. Maybe that's why many say this Book should be called “Acts of the Holy Spirit” rather than “Acts of the Apostles.” But the accounts are human stories with spiritual strength of course, but still humans stories of even more convincing proofs that Jesus was and still is alive. Acts then is the story of life in the early church, how the gospel spread, how the church flourished, and how believers were persecuted. It's the story of the world's greatest missionary, a man by the name of Paul, who might be the most influential person in all of history when it comes to the spreading of faith. It's the story of how a Jewish movement became a world phenomenon, and not in just one small Middle Eastern region but to areas on the other side of the known world. It's the story of people who took the message of Jesus seriously.

It's impossible not to see two beautiful new displays – one in the foyer and one in the sanctuary when you entered KesPres this morning that have a similar message that sadly was taken far more seriously by the first century church than the twenty first century church. It's not that we have not taken some of Jesus' other messages to heart like “love on another,” or “do unto others” or “do not judge”. All these are also important but none were Jesus final words to his disciples. For that Jesus proclaimed the message on our displays. “Go and make disciples.” It's really no different than some of Jesus' first words to his disciples as he met them on the shore, “From now on you will catch men.” Both are reminders (and made tangible for us) in the displays of the real purpose of the church.

As I have quoted before and begs repetition, “The church is the only institution that exists for the benefit of its non members.” We are called not to stay in but go out. But not just go out but live and speak in such “convincing ways” that people are “convinced” that Jesus is STILL alive and the world is different because of that one transformative event.

There is a short phrase in our passage that I believe can be easily overlooked but it’s vital to our message. That phrase is “Kingdom of God.” Yes, people seemed to be convinced of faith by Jesus appearance among them but also (and certainly no less important) by Jesus words concerning the Kingdom of God. Think of this image as a city, like our own, ever expanding, ever growing. Then consider God’s Kingdom, a city that confesses Jesus as Saviour and Lord and does not keep this message to itself but with boldness and grace lives out the message and speaks the message so that not so our small “k” kingdom of KesPres necessarily grows but God’s large “K” Kingdom expands and grows. Because we are no longer simply spectators but participants of convincing proofs that Jesus is alive. I’ve mentioned before what I think it would look like but it begs repeating.

As many of you know “convincing proofs” has become part of our language around this place. In short it’s an attempt to see with new eyes happenings that we otherwise would pass over as luck, chance, fate or karma. We wanted people to see that God is involved and active in our world and is still up to showing that there are many convincing proofs occurring that Jesus is still alive and that God’s Kingdom is nearer than you think. Some of us have begun to use “new” words like “godincident” rather than “coincident”. In other words God is in control and working behind the scenes that yes “all things work together for good.” It could be recognizing God the Creator as the one who brought the sunrise or God the Provider who found you that job or God our Hope who helped you through that overwhelming event. These are not mere coincidences but godincidences. But what would happen if we were the convincing proofs? What would it look like if lives, seen by the world, as unredeemable (that is worthless) as redeemed? What would it look like for relationships that were irreconcilable to be reconciled? What about healings that are beyond words or doctor’s explanations? What about forgiving those who don’t deserve forgiveness even those who hurt you? Or giving to causes amounts that cause even the most generous to shake their heads in disbelief. These are convincing proofs Jesus is alive. But this morning and for our twentieth year we are going to take this to another level. We are actually going into the community with this gospel. We are going to take Jesus’ words seriously and “go and make disciples.”

Everyone at KesPres knows Deb. She is not just our volunteer ministry coordinator or an elder or the person who jumps in when no one else will but she is a disciple of Christ. What you might not know and what I have been given permission to share is a little bit of her story that you might not know. Deb like many grew up in the church but then like many more got away from the church. Deb

got drawn back to the church because of something we thought was hindrance but was in fact part of God's plan. On Christmas Eve we weren't allowed in the Ice Palace (our former home) to hold the "traditional" Christmas Eve worship so instead we had our Parkas and Praise in the Parking Lot: An outdoor celebration of songs and lessons around a few burning barrels. And it was there that Deb found us. And it was there that Deb began worshipping with us. And it was there that another woman in the church, Janet, took this new woman in our church, Deb, under her wing and spent every week for about a year discipling her over coffee. Janet invested in Deb's life. Janet became for Deb a convincing proof that Jesus is alive. And today I think you would agree that Deb herself is a "convincing proof that Jesus is alive."

How about you? Forget the lies of the world that keeps us silent, that faith is a personal matter or who are you to tell people what to believe, aren't all religions the same or what if people think I'm a religious fanatic? It's time the church, our church, arises with boldness to deliver, not an angry judgmental message, but a message of grace and transformation a life-changing message! It's about investing, even in just one. How about you? Have you ever invested your life into someone else? Have you ever shared your faith story with another? You're here because someone invested in you, somewhere along the line – a friend, a parent, a grandparent, a brother, a sister, a co-worker. Someone was a convincing proof in your life that brought you to where you are today. So maybe it's time to "return the favour," as it were, and begin to live in the midst of others so they by what you do but also what you say you will be a convincing proof that Jesus is alive in you - beyond a reasonable doubt. Let us pray...