

Witnesses

Dr. Lal Hmingliani Browne



Acts 1:1-14

In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. “This,” he said, “is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They

said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

*This is the word of the lord.
Thanks be to God.*

Let us pray: *May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, o God our rock and redeemer. Amen.*



When I was in college I went on an evangelism trip to two villages in a remote non-Christian part of Northeast India. In each village we set up camp. In the Gospel According to Mark 6:7-13 Jesus sent out his disciples two by two to live with people where they were welcomed. Like the disciples we went and lived in villages where they welcomed us. At their invitation we ate with them. Some of us – not me - worked in the fields with them. While eating and working we shared the gospel in response to their questions about why we were there.

In the late afternoons we played soccer with the children and youngsters. We invited the whole village to come to an event each night on the soccer field.

There we held a short devotional with the missionary giving a brief message in their language. We taught them praise songs and hymns he had translated into their language. There was some food – not good food (they

only know how to boil everything they cook to death!) - and drum music. (Now you know why I like to go to the drum circle on Siesta Key on Sunday evenings.) There was light from pressure lanterns that were held up high by the men.

Later in the night, the villagers invited us to dance in circle dances with them. We danced and danced. They put a huge bucket of young rice wine in the center with dozens of bamboo straws stuck in it. During the dance whenever anyone got thirsty they went and drank some wine through a straw.

We good Mizo Christians were not supposed drink the wine because in those days, in our church, even one drop on the tongue leads to ex-communication. However, we were in

all witnessing with our own stories of how faith in Jesus Christ made us who we are. We were witnessing when we were receiving hospitality and when we were giving hospitality.

We also were witnessing in the work we did; and the songs we sang; and the soccer we played.

We were witnesses by dancing with them and also by drinking with them.

All of us on the team knew the resurrection story all of our lives. We had been Easter People from our childhood. We were witnesses to living as Easter People. It was the sharing of great joy.

We celebrated Easter or the resurrection of Jesus from the dead last Sunday. The book

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their culture and we were their guests so of course we had to be polite and drink the wine. The happier they got the happier we got. ‘Witnessing’ can be such sacrifice! In all of this, in everything we did, we were being ‘Witnesses to the gospel.’ We were

of Acts in the Bible begins with the disciples being shocked by the very event of Jesus’ resurrection. They were caught in a story out of human control and moving too fast for human understanding. Something utterly new had happened! **Jesus was resurrected!**

Think of it:

- the Jesus they saw crucified has risen;
- the Jesus they buried is now walking;
- the Jesus they thought was gone forever, is now the One with whom they can eat and talk; and
- the Jesus that was dead is now alive.

When Jesus leads the disciples out of Jerusalem to Bethpage, they wonder if this is the time Jesus will establish his kingdom on earth? Jesus tells them it is not for them to know the timing of God's actions.

Instead, Jesus says, **“You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.”**

And, **“You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the Earth.”**

This is the last time the disciples hear Jesus speak. It also marks the beginning of their lives as witnesses to Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

They hear the words of Jesus charging them to be his witnesses. But in their shock they are immobilized. And the immobilization is heightened when Jesus disappears in a cloud into heaven.

Stunned, they stand there looking up into the empty sky. Two men in white appeared and promised the disciples that Jesus will return the way he left.

As people who had seen the risen Christ they were now witnesses – like it or not. Perhaps they had a choice as to whether they would

be good or bad witnesses, willing or reluctant witnesses, but witnesses they were.

Today, while we have not seen the risen Jesus, we experienced Jesus as our living Savior. In knowing Jesus and in believing in the Resurrection, we experience the depth of God's love and the transformation of our lives. To believe in the resurrection is to be transformed. In the transformation we also become ‘Witnesses’ to Jesus' life, death and resurrection. We are Easter People! Easter is not a day. It is a season. In fact it is not only a season it is a way of life for us Christians.

We can witness with words – expressing God's grace we have received - to others. But witnessing is not just a matter of speeches.

We can also witness by:

- acts of mercy;
- walking with others in time of trouble;
- teaching;
- loving the unlovely;
- standing for justice;
- worshipping;
- celebrating with other people in their triumphs of life;
- rearing our children in the faith; and
- coming to this the Lord's Table.

The Good News for the world is that the disciples did become ‘Witnesses to the Resurrection.’ They were “witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.” They did go and be with other people.

Modeling after the disciples my group went to share in the life of those villagers. We are the proof of the faithful witness of the disciples to the ends of the earth.

So here is the good news for us today. God wants us to live in joyful response to the resurrection. By virtue of our belief and faith in Jesus' resurrection we are made Christ's ambassadors – we are elevated to a high and holy identity – we are the Easter People, we are the ‘Witnesses to Christ's Resurrection!’

Thanks be to God!

Amen.



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