

Exodus 12:33-42; 50-51
Luke 24:36-49

You Are Witnesses
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A police car in our yard was not unusual or unexpected. As the deputy Fire Chief, one of only two full-time pastors in the small New England town, and a member of several community committees the police would often stop by with deliveries from Town Hall, fire department questions, etc. And having a son at home who was good friends with two of the officers on the department helped make this a common occurrence. However, this one day it was a Sheriff's car in the yard. I was being subpoenaed. An insurance company was investigating a recent house fire and I was to be a witness. It was an interesting experience to say the least. I had no choice. I was called to be a witness.

Our first Scripture passage comes from the Exodus story. After 430 years they are leaving Egypt with the promise from God of a land of their own. They are leaving in a hurry. The tenth plague has left the Egyptians in a panic and they want the Israelites out of their land now! The word has come: get out and get out now. They are heading to a new land with new hopes and promises. They are following God's commands given through Moses and Aaron, and have not even time to let the bread rise – now meant now.

They will forever mark this event with a celebration called Passover. Every year following, until this present day, they will meet and pause to remember God's redemption of them in Egypt. The story of the Exodus will be told again. The meal is a special meal with each glass of wine and each food dish full of meaning and significance. They will again recall and witness their release from bondage. The meal will also carry a future hope: as God has redeemed so will God redeem again in the future. They will tell again their story.

They will be witnesses to the resurrection. They have been in Jerusalem for the events of the past days. Although not a part of the inner group of disciples they were close enough to know all the details of the recent events: The entry into Jerusalem, the Upper Room meal and the trials and crucifixion on Friday. They had not traveled on the Sabbath and were now headed home with the unbelievable news of resurrection reported by some of the women of their group (Luke 24:22). They were walking with heavy hearts as a stranger joins them. He asks why they are so down and they respond with a brief history of the events of the past few days. Is he the only one in Jerusalem who has not heard of the events of these past days? As they journey together he shares with them from the Scriptures concerning the events of these days. Their hearts are so heavy they fail to hear or understand the one in the midst. As they reach their destination, being good hosts, they encourage (compel) the stranger to stop and eat with them. As he takes the bread and breaks it their eyes are opened. They have seen the Lord...they are witnesses.

They rush back to where the eleven are gathered. Here they hear that Peter too has seen the Lord and they tell their story. The list of witnesses is growing. The reports are coming in and the story gains more and more validity. As they are sharing Jesus stands in their midst. All doubt and questions are now gone. He is risen. He shows them the wounds of the cross and then asks for something to eat. Ghosts don't eat. He again shares with them the Scripture regarding the Christ and how the events

of these past days have been part of the eternal plan of God. God has again redeemed. The promise of Passover is now fulfilled in the risen Christ. God's grace is now for the whole world. Elijah has come. They are to be witnesses.

Witnesses have a story to tell. These two on the road to Emmaus are in the process of telling what they have experienced on their journey home. Can you hear the excitement in their voices as they recount the experience: "*Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?*" (Luke 24:32 NRSV) They have been in the presence of the risen Lord and now they have returned to Jerusalem to be witnesses.

Our stories should be told and retold. Many of you in a few minutes or a few hours will gather with family and friends around the table. As part of the process of the meal you will share your stories. They may be memories from childhood or some other family event. They may be things that have happened in your lives this past week. The meal will not pass without some stories being told. As Chris and I were preparing the meal for us on Thursday he would occasionally recall something from his growing up days and we would talk about it. The stories are shared again and again.

The Passover story, as we have said, was shared again this week. It is a story that is retold year after year. The power of Easter is that we again have the opportunity to tell the story of the resurrection of Christ and what it means to us and our lives. The women, Peter and these two from Emmaus have now seen the Lord – their stories are being told. They are witnesses.

We too have our stories to share. They are stories that must continue to be told. How many of us wish we had listened more closely to the stories of those who are no longer with us? We want to hear their stories again. They are part of who we are and who our children will be. There are some who may not believe our stories. That is okay. Thomas would not believe the resurrection stories until he saw with his own eyes. Just because someone may not believe our stories does not mean that we do not continue to tell them. Each of our stories is different; each has its own drama and each need to told.

I grew up believing. I don't ever recall not believing. I grew up in the Church. I remember a Vacation Bible School where I answered God's call on me. I recall the room, the setting but not the teacher. All I know is that it was a woman (were there any other VBS teachers in those days?). She asked if any of the class wanted to become a Christian. Two of us raised our hands and she took us down to the furnace room (I don't know why!). It was one of those rooms that had been dug out of the dirt – no cement, dirt walls and floor. It was musty and filled with cobwebs. There we got on our knees and said a simple prayer asking Christ into our hearts and then headed off for our "snacks". There was no lightning, no flashes of light but there was a sense that something greater than myself had come into my life.

My faith continues to grow in a slow gradual way with the assurance that I am involved in something greater than I am.

Our call to ministry came after a Macedonian weekend in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. We were part of the lay team that shared with this congregation in a weekend of spiritual renewal. It was one of the first teams in the nation sent out by our American Baptist Churches as a part of Macedonian Ministries. As we were returning home (one of the few car trips Diane can remember my not having the radio on!) we both shared our response to the weekend and then spoke of a sense of call to pastoral type ministry. It was from that moment on we changed the direction of our lives...responding to God's call to be witnesses. Our story continues.

What is your story? Who have you told it to lately? We are God's witnesses. The church will only grow and continue to be effective when we tell our stories. We need to tell both the good and bad ones. It is only when we hear the bad ones can we begin to take steps to correct them. We are not perfect as much as we may some days think we are. We too stand in the need of God's grace. But we need the stories told of when and how we discovered God's redeeming love. We need to continue to tell our stories and live out of stories of God's redeeming love and forgiveness. We are witnesses.

He is risen! Hallelujah!