

Sermon Text for July 22, 2018

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I Kings 19:1-9, Acts 1:1-5

“Are you ready”

What a great week we had. If you remember last week during the children’s sermon I told the kids that I love VBS week because it is a week where one of these 100 children could hear something that they would remember for the rest of their lives and they might be able to make steps to worship the risen Savior Jesus Christ as a result of what they have learned here. We can hope for nothing better.

We also had a celebration this past week with one of our children, one of our youth, one of our young women get married this past week. It is not often that you get a chance to marry off one of your confirmation kids. The first time I did that was at a wedding that I did of a kid that was in my youth group when I served a church in New Jersey in seminary. Stacy and Rachel and Naomi came along, Rachel was four and Naomi was two.

In walked the bride and Rachel was absolutely captivated by what she called the girl in white. Naomi as a two year old was a little less interested and kept asking her mommy in a quiet voice: “Daddy?” There was another pastor officiating with me as the service began. This pastor asked the bride’s father, “Who gives this woman to be married to this man?” Naomi had finally realized that daddy was front and center and so she spoke out in a very loud but sweet voice: “Hi daddy!” Now, she doesn’t stop saying hi daddy until I acknowledge her, so after the second “Hi daddy” Stacy whisked her away out of church. I think they lasted two minutes in the church.

Have you ever watched kids in church, when they are in church during the Lord’s prayer? If they have been in church enough they will stop what they are doing and repeat it, because they know it, they know this part of the service.

In our Scripture today we will be reading about Jesus’ instruction and teaching of his disciples for 40 days after he had been raised from the dead. We will see how important it was for them to learn, to take that period of time to understand Jesus’ teaching about the kingdom of God. We will see how important it is for us not to just go through the Christian motions or the regular routine of our faith but rather how and why we need to understand before we can be effective messengers inspired by the Holy Spirit to bring others to Christ.

READ SCRIPTURE

The importance of learning has always been impressed upon me at an early age. We were always encouraged to read, especially since we were only allowed to watch 1 hour of television a week when we got one when I was 13. I can remember feeling disappointed when summer came around because that meant that school was out until September. I couldn't wait for September to come. But one of the greatest lessons that I ever received wasn't from the classroom but rather from an experience that I had while I was in seminary. It was my first year and the President of the Seminary stood up at chapel service and announced the riots that were taking place in Los Angeles following the beating of Rodney King.

The room was filled with tension and anger. Sure the majority of us were white but about 20% were black and another 10% Asian and there were a handful of Latinos. From that chapel service we organized a group called Seminarians for Justice that was composed of whites, blacks and Asians equally represented. We tried to learn from each other and teach each other the realities of our lives because of who we were. One day the group was gathered in prayer in the chapel and a discussion arose and I remember someone telling me: "you will never be able to understand what it means to live in America as a black man or as an Asian. You can never learn or be taught what it is like because you have to live it." I'll never forget that lesson. That stripped away a lot of the pretension that I had, a lot of the idealism that hey, if you care enough, if you try hard enough, you can learn and understand what our brothers and sisters are going through. I realized that there are certain things you can't learn or understand unless you live it.

This was the lesson that Jesus teaches his disciples in these first verses of the Acts of the Apostles. It is a lesson that we all need to learn about our faith in Jesus Christ. We can learn all we want about God, we can get all the degrees we like, we can attend all the Bible Studies that we want but unless we live our faith, or walk in our Savior's moccasins, we will never be able to understand and live the life of a Christian. The education that the disciples received from the risen Christ taught them how to be a disciple. We can learn, experience, and actually become disciples and followers of Christ. We can actually learn to be a Christian. In our Scripture today we find the risen Jesus teaching and instructing his disciples on how they can reach a better understanding, how they can be taken up to a higher ground with the Savior through their experiencing of what it means to be a follower of Christ.

The Acts of the Apostles is a continuation of the gospel accounts. It is a continuation from Jesus' life to the life of the disciples once Jesus leaves them. If you notice the text begins with "in my first book". It is understood that the Gospel of Luke was the first book written by this author, Luke, and then he went on and wrote the Acts of the Apostles. Did you notice to whom this book is addressed? The person's name is Theophilus. Theophilus means very simply "lover of God". It could have been a person or it could have been a church filled with believers or lovers of God. At any rater, Luke is writing this account of the Acts of the Apostles to a community of believers to encourage them and strengthen them in their belief in Jesus Christ.

The key in these 5 verses is the account that we hear that Jesus spent another 40 days with his disciples after his resurrection. What was he doing in these 40 days? Jesus had already spent 3 years with them performing miracle after miracle and teaching them through parable after parable and now that Easter was over and the resurrection had already taken place why did Jesus feel the need to stay another 40 days to fill in the gaps in the disciples' understanding of the kingdom of God?

The problem was that the disciples were not ready. They needed to experience and live with the risen Christ. They had spent 3 years with the living Christ but they needed more time, more experience, more living with the risen Christ. 40 days, the text says, was their time of final preparation and experiential learning. Where else have we seen in Scripture this number of 40 days? Noah, builds an ark because it was about to rain. He built it and it rained 40 days and 40 nights. Noah had the time to prepare, to pray, to get ready for a new creation and a new beginning to experience what it meant to be the one chosen by God.

Moses leads his people out of Egypt and they consistently disobey God until God says enough. 40 years later and when another generation is raised correctly and experience the Almighty God, but only then is that generation ready to take God's name to the nations is Israel allowed to progress to the promised land. But not until they were ready by experiencing the Almighty God.

Elijah went to the mountain of God for 40 days and nights in order to find and dwell in the presence of God. Our precious Savior spent 40 days in the wilderness to be tempted, to be tested by fire, to go through a rigorous spiritual training that no one except Jesus himself could have survived, and he did. Jesus had to experience and learn through living through those temptations that we go through in our daily lives. Jesus spent 40

days with his disciples preparing them, teaching them, showing them the way to the kingdom of God.

Now you realize that nobody is born a Christian but rather it is something you learn and that the Holy Spirit guides you to accept. This experience takes time. It doesn't happen in a second. But we like to try to speed things up. Even the Holy Spirit we try to dictate what needs to happen and when. We are so used to having everything now that when we hear about the need for preparation, and for learning, and for waiting, for experience, well you know, that is not going to happen. We are used to fast-food, drive-thru, speed dial, quick fixes that get things done in the here and now. But the risen Christ took 40 extra days after the resurrection, talk about an anti-climax, he took 40 more days after the most glorious of all days just so that he could prepare his disciples who had already walked with him 3 years. They had seen the miracles, they had heard his teachings but they hadn't experienced the risen Christ. All that they had learned of God's love given to us in Christ wasn't enough to prepare them to be Christ's disciples. They needed to experience the risen Christ. They were not ready to be taken to the higher ground to the next level and that was discipleship.

You know what it is like to be ready don't you? You know what it is like to experience the risen Christ don't you? You know what it is like to wait to be taken to the higher ground. This is where the disciples find themselves today. They had just experienced the risen Jesus and now he is about to leave them. He tells them that they are ready and that in a few days be taken to higher ground, they will be taken to the next level when the promise of the Father comes. Now the promise of the father is the Holy Spirit. But you see, they could not receive the Holy Spirit until they had experienced the risen Christ.

When you can see the Holy Spirit working in your life then you know that you have reached the higher ground, then you know that you have experienced the risen Christ. Now I'm going to ask you a question and before you answer it I want you to think about it. Have you seen the Holy Spirit working in your life? Have you ever experienced the healing power of Almighty God touch your life? Have you ever seen the Holy Spirit touch a relationship and heal it after years of turmoil and strife? Have you ever seen a young person's life turned around for no apparent reason, then you have experienced the risen Christ and you can thank the Holy Spirit for His presence in your life.

How easy it is to just go through our lives and not really experience the risen Christ. How easy it is not to be ready, not to take those 40 days, those 2 hours, that 5 minutes a day to learn, seek after, and experience the risen Christ in our midst. How easy it is to be unprepared before the throne of grace and not ever realize it because, hey, we are good church goers, doesn't that count for something. But if the Holy Spirit is not working in your life, if you cannot literally point out the Holy Spirit's power in your life, then you are not ready.

Allow yourself the time to learn about God by living with the risen Christ through prayer and Scripture and this will take you to higher ground where you can truly be one of God's disciples.