

Sermon for 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Easter, Ascension Sunday, May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2013

Luke 24:44-53

Blessings to you and **peace** from God the Father, our **risen** Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and the **Holy** Spirit. Amen

**Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia.**

A few days ago I was listening to the radio and a **commercial** came on which caught my listening ear. In it were the words, *“believe in something bigger”*. I thought, “OK, I want to hear **more** about this!!” As it turns out the commercial was about the *Powerball lottery* that California has just become a part of. *“Believe in something bigger”*. Hmmmmm. Then just Friday morning I read headlines on the internet, “Lottery Fever: Mega Millions, Powerball Jackpots Grow: Lottery Fever Spreading.” Those of you who play the lottery or any of those types of games you probably already know that you have a **better** chance of being **struck** by lightning than you have of winning the lottery—but they want us to *“believe in something bigger”* so we will **continue** to play in hopes that if we **do** “believe” the something bigger will **eventually** come along.

This morning I have an **alternative** for you when it comes to *“believing in something bigger”*. This alternative which I have is **not** going to make you richer in this world, it is **not** going to give you a bigger house or a fancier car—what this

believing it **is** going to do for you is to give you eternal life, what this believing **is** going to do for you is to help give you peace when your hearts are weary, and what this believing **is** going to do for you is to give you support and comfort in your time of need.

I am pretty **sure** all of you here in this sanctuary know what I am going to say, “the something bigger that I am offering you is **knowing** God and Jesus Christ and **everything** that having a relationship with them has to give you in this world.” But I ask you, “**what about** our brothers and sisters that surround us in our lives who do **not** know God and Jesus Christ?” How about them? Are they **chasing** after the hope and the “belief in something bigger” that this world has to offer them which can **pass away** in the blink of an eye? I believe **many** times the answer to this question is, “YES”.

Today in both our **gospel** reading and in our **first** reading from the Book of the “Acts of the Apostles”, as it is **also** known, we hear of God’s **saving** promise and the **power** of salvation continuing as **40** days after Jesus’ crucifixion, death, and resurrection our Lord **ascends** into heaven where **we** are called to “believe in something bigger”, where we learn of the disciples **waiting** in Jerusalem for the **promise** of the Father—the promise of the **Holy Spirit** which will come to them so as Jesus’ **witnesses** they can go out to **all** the nations to proclaim **repentance and forgiveness of sins** in His name.

Since the the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts were **both** written by the same author they are not to be seen as being **separate** from one another. They are meant to be seen as a **continuation** of the story which began in Luke's gospel because as you may or may not have realized in both books Luke addresses what he has written to "*Theophilus*", a man whose name means "*lover of God*", a man who was a **believer** in God; but really nothing else is known of him. In both books Luke's **ideal** audience was and is anyone who truly seeks to love God.

In the gospel reading from the **last words** from the book of Luke we listened to the story of how Jesus had **opened** the disciple's minds to understand the scriptures, **explaining** to them what was to happen, **leading** them out to Bethany, **lifting up** his hands, **blessing** them, and being **carried up** into heaven. Acts gives a longer explanation of what happened but you may have noticed that in both readings there was a **common thread**. The disciples were to be Jesus' **witnesses** to **all** nations and to the **ends** of the earth as well as they were **to wait** in Jerusalem for the **power** of the Holy Spirit to **descend** upon them as God had promised. And *wait they did* as we will hear about next Sunday on Pentecost. That my friends is "belief in something bigger."

But **what** does all of this mean for us today in our time, in our culture, and in our society where so many people do **not** know the story of God and Jesus Christ? These two readings from Luke and Acts are Luke's version of **the Great**

**Commission**—where Jesus tells the disciples that when the Holy Spirit comes upon them they were to **go out** to the world and **baptize** in His name, to go out and **proclaim repentance** and the **forgiveness** of sins, to go out and **spread** the Good News of all the things that Jesus had done in the world while he was here, to go out and be his **witnesses**, and to go out and make **disciples** of all people. The story is **no** different for us today. We are **called** to do the same thing—to “believe in something bigger”—to believe in something bigger than what we can **see**, to believe in something bigger than what this **world has to offer**, to believe in something bigger which is a **God** who has **something for all** people which this world cannot give to them. To **believe** in a God who offers you eternal life, to **believe** in a God who offers you peace when your hearts are weary, and to **believe** in a God who will give you support and comfort in your time of need.

The readings tell us that Jesus **blessed** the disciples and then He was **carried up** into heaven. Then it says, “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?’” *That is it!! True!!* **Why** were they standing looking up to heaven when there was **work** to be done here on earth? I am *sure* they were amazed; but yet, now the *real* work was to begin.

The message is the **same** for us today: Get on with it. Don't be **stuck** in the **mystery** of the event. *Live into it.* **Discover** the gift of new life, the new hope, and the new beginnings in ourselves that knowing God and Jesus Christ has to offer us and those we meet.

What happens next is the beginning of a **new chapter** and **book** in the lives of the disciples. They now had a **direction** in which to go—they **worshipped** Jesus, they **returned** to Jerusalem as they were told with great joy, and they were **continually** in the temple blessing God because they had witnessed God's promise fulfilled and the power of the resurrection right before their eyes.

God did a mighty and powerful new thing in the **resurrection** of Jesus and God sealed this mighty and powerful new thing in the **ascent** of Jesus to God's own center and heart. It is the **purpose**, the **work**, and the **mission** of God and the church which **continues** in us today. God has given us **life** as a church. God has given us a **new beginning** for our own lives also.

We know that today there is still much for us to do in the name of God and Jesus Christ; as we do not have to look very far beyond our own community to **realize** the truth in that. We are the **bearers** of the good news message. We are also called, like the **first** disciples, to give **witness** to God's love, grace, and mercy.

To grow it in the **world** as well as in our own lives. God has made us **partners** in this mission on earth.

The disciples **rejoiced** that day because they **knew** they were released for something new, something bigger and higher, something that drew them out of themselves—into a **mission**—into the **life and power** of God. We too have the power of the *uplifting love* and *grace* of God right **here** in our midst. Are we willing to **let go** and **ascend** to something higher? Are we willing to **be released** for something new? Are we willing to “believe in something bigger” that God has to offer each of us? If we are—we who are the **body of Christ**, the **signs of His presence** in the world—**cannot** be kept down. The love of God through Jesus Christ **lifts us up** to **new** life and **new** hope to continually worship and bless Him and the world for **all** He does for us through the **resurrection and ascension** of our **beloved** Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. All thanks be to God. **AMEN.**