

JUNE 1, 2019 SUMMARY SERMON-JOHN TSCHUDY

SCRIPTURE LESSON - ACTS 1:1-11, JUNE 17:20-26

Last Thursday was a forgotten Holy Day in much of the church. It is believed according to scripture that Jesus was on earth for forty days following his resurrection. Then he rose or Ascended into heaven. It used to be the church celebrated Ascension Day but most do not any more. Still I believe it deserves mention the following Sunday as it is an important day in the history of the Christian Faith. On that day Luke records for us both in his Gospel but especially in his book of Acts, the event. We see in Acts 1 Luke's reason for writing his books. He is trying to explain to the man Theophilus about who Jesus was and now recording for him the history of the church. The book of Acts begins with a summary of what happened between Jesus' resurrection and his ascension. On that occasion Jesus gathers the disciples together one last time and gives them two important instructions. In the first he reminds them it is none of their business when God will "Restore the kingdom of Israel." The question is probably meant as an actual physical restoration. However it is often taken by some of the church to mean Christ's second coming or the end of time or judgement day. Still today many in the church ignore what Jesus says and like Adam and Eve choose to believe the "snake in the grass", and try to figure out when it will happen. Even believe that God can't bring it about without their help. This attitude affects even our national policy towards the Middle East.

The second command is what I want to focus on, where Jesus tells them that after they receive the Holy Spirit, they are to be witnesses for Christ starting from Jerusalem into all of the rest of the world. This I believe is the ministry that has been given to the church, and to all Christians, if we choose to accept it. We as Christians and as a church are to be an example of how God, through Jesus Christ is calling us to live as followers of Christ or as modern day disciples of Christ.

In turning to today's Gospel we see this reflected in its teachings. This is an excerpt from Jesus' prayer in the garden on the night he is betrayed and arrested. In this prayer Jesus is not only praying for the disciples but also for us-you and me and all that come after us, as he prays for those who come to believe because of the words of the disciples. We cannot forget that our personal faith is to be based on the teaching of Jesus that come to us through the disciples. At the start of things Jesus is praying for is unity in among his followers. For a while this was interpreted by many in the church to mean there had to be physical unity or one church institutionally. But in reality that has never truly existed. The institutional church has always been divided simply because it is made up of many different types of people that exist in many different cultures, with many different beliefs. This doesn't mean that there can't be unity. For that to happen and Christ's prayer to be favorably answered the church must accept the differences that exist among its members and work together to witness for Christ and pray for those who differ from them when that happens.

Jesus prayer continues that we would all be kept in the love of God so that the world can know that the source of that love is ultimately God and not some human institution. The hard part for us is to realize that as witnesses for Christ we must truly love each other as God loves us as individuals and institutions. This goes far beyond giving love a "lip service" when we say that we love them but don't like what they do because they don't agree with us and we know God agrees with us. No, as Christians it is expected that our love will reflect God's love for all of God's children.

As we move into the next phase of exploring whether or not our three congregation can really work together to provide a witness to God's love here in Northern Minnesota we need to keep these two tests in mind. The reason our three congregations are here is to give witness to Christ's teaching just as Jesus commanded the disciples to do. We share the common history that at least a part of our congregation comes out of the work of the Rev. T.W. Howard and his wife Susan Collier, who is buried at Birchdale. The example they set for us all is the example they got from Christ, of giving witness to God's love and way of life for all people. To do that they put their own interests aside for the good of the work they were trying to do. I don't know if any of the congregations will last another 10 years. But I'm pretty sure the best chance of continuing to witness for Christ in the years to come are best served by working together, rather than apart. Trust me working with two other congregations is difficult, especially if you aren't used to doing it. It is made only harder when one church or a group in one church, loses sight of the common purpose and insists on their way or the highway. The best we can do is provide an example of

the goal Jesus sets in his prayer, that we can work in unity while maintaining our individuality as we are called to do I believe by God.