

**- Saint John's Pulpit (May 16, Ascension Sunday / UMW Sunday)  
- "You Are Witnesses!" Luke 24:44-53**

<sup>44</sup> Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." <sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, <sup>46</sup> and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup> and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup> You are witnesses of these things. <sup>49</sup> And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

<sup>50</sup> Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. <sup>51</sup> While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. <sup>52</sup> And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; <sup>53</sup> and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

***You are witnesses of these things!***

Several meanings can be found from this Sunday today. As we shared in the beginning, today is UMW's Sunday recognizing all UMW and their wonderful mission for the World and people. Secondly, it is the last Sunday to wrap up the Eastertide season. Last, it is Ascension Sunday. All these meanings focus on one common thing. What is it? It is to become witnesses!

Since Jesus had been ascended, all churches and Christians have served their ministry and mission until now. Maybe before Jesus' return (Second Advent), we are required to be faithful in serving God and people as witnesses continuously.

Here is a question. What does it mean to be witnesses? In Luke 24:48,

*<sup>48</sup> You are witnesses of these things. Luke 24:48 NRSV*

I believe that this is Jesus' last remark before his ascension, also is the last keyword to know who we are. However, it is still hard to understand what it is clearly. Can we find some ideas to know it from the text today? Three lessons can be observed when it comes to becoming witnesses for Jesus – past, present, and future.

### ***Past: Everything I told you while I was with you***

Becoming witnesses means remembering what Jesus taught us. Let me read Luke 24:44.

*<sup>44</sup> Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." Luke 24:44 NRSV*

Witnessing is from your memory. Please try to collect all your memories with Jesus Christ. When you pray or take a moment of meditating Bible verses, collect all pieces of how Jesus could shape, form, and change your life. When you prayed for something in the past, at that time, you may not sense whether it had been fulfilled. But later, you may recall that God worked for you even when you were not realizing it.

### ***Present: You can see now how it is written***

Witnessing requires your living with the Bible and living it out. On the last minute before His ascension, Jesus asked all to read the Bible, especially about Jesus' passion and Resurrection.

*<sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures,<sup>46</sup> and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day,<sup>47</sup> and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. Luke 24:45-47 NRSV*

Unfortunately, we have no idea what verses or books Jesus presented from the Bible, but we know that what Jesus wanted to share with us. It is about Jesus' passion and Resurrection, which means Jesus is the Messiah to save

us. It was not the Ten Commandments, the law of Moses, or lots of prophetic messages from the Bible. It was Jesus' saving Grace from the Bible! If so, don't you think that this is all about our witnessing?

After all, we get to know our mission is sharing Jesus with others. This is the way of living as witnesses. Witnessing is not criticizing or blaming because others think differently. Witnessing is transcending all gaps and embracing all, because of Jesus' love for all!

Another point requires our attention in verse 47. Jesus said, "repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem." A couple of words were mentioned by Jesus directly, one is repentance and the other is forgiveness! The point is this. Witnessing requires repentance and forgiveness!

Isn't it interesting to see that Jesus' last words were repentance and forgiveness? To live as witnesses, we are required to repent all the time. Repentance is like a mirror to see oneself. It helps us not to be in spiritual hypocrisy. Through a mirror of the Words of God, we are asked to see ourselves first.

What about forgiveness? It is like a window to let people see God's grace. Witnessing is proclaiming one more chance to all. Through the Good News, people are forgiven and can enjoy one more life! Through a transparent window, we can see other worlds which we've never seen, and we can feel warmth through it. Likewise, our effort to forgive others makes them feel the warmth and see a new world in their life just as we experienced by God's forgiveness. Thus, forgiveness is like a window to see others.

***Future: What comes next is very important...***

The third lesson from Jesus about witnessing is to wait for the Holy Spirit. In verse 49, Jesus encourages his all people to wait for what God promised to them.

*What comes next is very important: I am sending what my Father promised to you, so stay here in the city until he arrives, until you're equipped with power from on high. Luke 24:49 MSG*

Witnessing needs its power source, we can call it Holy Spirit. Witnessing without Holy Spirit makes us feel tired. Why? Witnessing can be done by God's power, not by ours. Jesus knew that his people need the Holy Spirit and asked them to wait for it by staying in the city. And what Jesus said happened on a Day of Pentecost exactly!

### ***Worship, Temple, and Joy***

After all these teaching on the last minute, Jesus blessed them and was carried up into heaven. Then, what did they do?

*52 And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; 53 and they were continually in the temple blessing God. Luke 24:52-53 NRSV*

Three words stimulate our curiosity from these verses. Worship- (with great) Joy – in the temple! The last two verses show what we can get after our faithful witnessing. Those who witnessed Jesus' Ascension experienced three things. They worshipped God, were full of great joy and were in the temple blessing God.

Like these people, St. John's UMW (United Methodist Women) has been faithful witnesses to serve St. John's ministry. As a core mission organization at St. John's, we pray that they keep going on worshipping God, experiencing great joy whenever they serve and staying in the temple blessing God, which means serving their loving church, St. John's.

In a similar vein, if all United Methodists would be faithful witnesses following Jesus' teachings before His Ascension, I believe that they can continuously worship God together full of great joy in each of their churches blessing God and people.