

Witnesses in Power Suits©

Acts 1:1-11; Luke 24:44-53

Ascension Sunday

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What do you think of when you think power suit? You probably don't think of power suits real often ... or do you?

I think of a few years ago when women were being helped to feel confident in applying for jobs or if we were preparing to lead a training or give a speech. We were told we should dress in our power suits.

You know, something bold – like navy or red, or black and white. Those bold colors are supposed to portray authority, plus give us confidence.

So, as you can see, I'm dressed in my power suit today. But I also think of other power suits. I think of that favorite cartoon my brother and I used to get up early on Saturday morning to watch.

“‘Here I come to save the day!’ That means that Mighty Mouse is on his way!”

Anyone else remember that? This was a powerful super hero mouse who put on his super hero cape and could fly places and save the damsels in distress. You know, the ones the villain would tie onto the railroad tracks and mighty mouse would save her just before the train came thundering past?

Or there is Super Man, and many other Super Heroes.

So, today, not only am I wearing my power suit, I also am putting on my super hero cape. In honor of what Jesus says the disciples should do.

Just before he is taken up to heaven. You know, when he instructed them to stay put and wait for the power. “You will be my witnesses ... so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

In other words, don't leave until your power suits have been handed out.

And what does it mean to be a witness? Where do we see witnesses today? We look for eye witnesses when there has been an accident. Insurance companies look for eye witness accounts of what happened – who's at fault.

We think of witnesses in the courtroom, don't we? Witnesses are called up and sworn in – do you tell the truth, the whole truth, nothing but the truth? And then they are drilled by lawyers and prosecutors. They tell their story. They give the account of what they know, what they saw, trying to prove that something happened. Or didn't happen.

And we have character witnesses as well. These might be people who probably did not see what happened, but who personally know and can account for the defendants' good

character. They will say how long they've known the person and tell about all their good qualities – their honesty and integrity.

So, Jesus tells the disciples, “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Luke tells us that Jesus reminded them of all they had learned and seen – he opened their eyes to what they knew about Moses and all the prophets and how it all pointed to Jesus. And he reminds them that for forty days, after he had died and risen from the dead, he appeared – over and over – to them and others.

They are eye witnesses to who Jesus is and what Jesus has done. And it is their witness that will be important in order for the good news of salvation for the world to be told and understood.

But it was important for these disciples – these witnesses – to wait, to not start out on their own, trying to tell the story without the power of the promised Holy Spirit. Wait for it, Jesus says. With the power of the Holy Spirit, the disciples would then have courage, boldness, confidence, insight, ability and authority.

Luke tells many accounts of the boldness the disciples had when going into situations where they were going to tell about Jesus. And they had to have courage because often times they were beaten and thrown into prison. They had to have authority so they could preach with confidence that what they were saying was – the GOSPEL truth.

That's what the Holy Spirit gave to them. Without it, they would not get far. Think of them before Jesus showed up after he had risen. They were afraid, they were unsure, they were in hiding. Even after the risen Lord appeared and they had joy and surely more confidence, they were still just human men. Limited in their skills and ability.

But with the Holy Spirit in them they were propelled into the world with what they needed. They were given language so others would hear and understand. They were given insight into the scriptures and each situation they encountered.

So, here's the thing, believers. We didn't learn about Jesus from those first hand witnesses, did we? When Jesus said to go to the ends of the earth, it was a short trip 2000 years ago. Maybe not so short when walking it on foot. But compared to the world today, it wasn't very big.

Yet, here we are, over 2000 years later living in what they would surely consider the “ends of the earth.” And there have been many generations since those first eye witness disciples. But we have heard the good news and we have come to believe it is true and to put our trust in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

How can that be? It is because those witnesses were empowered with boldness and passion and they were obedient in going where the Holy Spirit led them and in opening

their mouths to tell the story, trusting the Spirit to give them the words and everything else they needed.

And while the next generation were not first hand witnesses, they had their own faith experience to share and they had the words and passion passed on to them from those before them.

But they also had something else. They had the Word of God, written down by witnesses and they were empowered by the Holy Spirit to understand what they read and what they heard and it became their witness as well.

The gospel of Jesus Christ has spread through out history because of witnesses who were filled with the Holy Spirit and who were willing to obediently go and tell.

So here we are today, in the United States of America, in the 21st century. And while we might think the good news of salvation through Jesus' death on a cross and rising from the grave, has been told to everyone to the point of us not needing to be so bold, I would beg to disagree.

Do you know that we are living in a “post-Christian era?” That the number of believers in Jesus as the Son of God, as the Savior, has diminished greatly over the years. And many people who have heard the story, also have been infiltrated with other stories – New Age philosophy, mixed with Middle Eastern thinking. Many people have the information but its kind of all mixed together. There is a great deal of confusion and uncertainty about what to believe.

I think that is one of the reasons why we are seeing Christian Churches getting smaller and smaller – some to the point of having to close. And while I know we think our faith is more personal and that we don't want to push something on others, I do believe Jesus' great commission to disciples is still important today. He said “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.”

That is the great command to the Church – to all who believe and follow Jesus. We are not being obedient if we refuse to tell the good news story to others. We are not being witnesses to his death and resurrection, to God's mercy and grace and new life in Christ if we are unwilling to share. That's just a fact.

Certainly, one of the ways we can share Christ is by loving others. Giving ourselves in service to them, showing Christ in how we live. I love that quote by St. Francis of Assisi that says, “Preach Christ. And if necessary, use words.” Our lives are a witness to our faith in Jesus.

But I do think we are also responsible to be witnesses in telling our stories. There are gentle and natural ways of those conversations just happening easily. I would like for us to find someone who might come and share some of those ways with us. To help us fight off the fear we have of sharing such an amazing story of love and grace and salvation. We should have a passion in our hearts – a desire to want others to know the joy we have.

Not by cramming it down their throats but through our own personal stories of experience.

I shared a church sign with the Worship Team one day. It was a sign that I told them we would NOT be putting up on our sign. It said, TURN OR BURN. So Gordie put it on our sign for a minute, took a picture and texted it to me asking if that was okay. I wrote back NO! Absolutely not. I know he was laughing all the time he was taking it back down.

Friends, we need not be afraid to be witnesses to what Jesus has done and to who Jesus is. We are believers – disciples. We may not have been first hand, eye witnesses to the person, Jesus, who was here on earth, but we have experienced him in many ways and we know him. We know who he is and what he has done in our lives. We have a story to tell.

And we too, have the promised Holy Spirit in us. We have been given power, courage, boldness, confidence, insight, ability and authority living in us. We just need to acknowledge it and to step out in faith.

So, next Sunday, as we celebrate Pentecost – the day when the Holy Spirit came upon those witnesses who were obediently waiting for power – I'm inviting you to come with open hearts and ears and eyes to experience anew the amazing gift of the Holy Spirit. I'm inviting you to come wearing something that represents power to you – clothes or a costume or a super hero cape. Preferably wear it in red as we remember those tongues of fire that appeared. But let's have some fun with it as well as taking it seriously.

Lets all be witnesses in power suits. Shall we?

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