Topic: Commissioned and Empowered (Season of Easter 5, Lectionary C)
Scripture: Psalm 93, Luke 24:44-53, Acts 1:1-11
Hymns:

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Let’s take a moment to pray…

Lord, before this world's days even began, your Word was in the beginning, and it was with you and it was you. The mystery of that brings us to our knees. Yet today you allow us to open your Word and know you better. So, we ask that you would give us eyes to see and ears to hear. Give us hearts open to your Spirit as we seek you. AMEN.

(SLIDE) Easter Sunday is well behind the Disciples at this point... the ugly crucifixion after a sham of a trial was easily laid beneath a wave of joy and excitement at the resurrection. The once dead Saviour's prophecies rang true, He rose, and He appeared to many.

Many, including the Disciples, who really should have expected all this but couldn't get their stubborn minds out of the limits of this earth. Jesus appears to many including Mary who didn't recognize Jesus until he spoke her name. Jesus appears to many including Thomas who doubted the Lord's resurrection until Jesus could literally prove it was him before Thomas's very eyes.

Then Jesus goes place to place, appearing to many more people before He must ascend. Before He does that, he does something quite unique, quite bold, and it has some true spiritual siginificance for us even today.

(SLIDE) Jesus begins by establishing His baseline for what He is about to do. "**This is what I told you while I was still with you: everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms**".

Jesus is about to leave His Disciples again, and as He has done in the past He is going to build them up a little for what comes next. He's reminding them here that all of what has happened and is about TO happen, MUST happen... God MUST accomplish what He has said He would do - or else He wouldn't be faithful, He wouldn't be trustworthy.

God accomplishes EVERYTHING He says He will do. And that means that our expectations, our hopes, our dreams, do not come first. The Disciples were expecting Jesus to lead them forever on the Earth... that was not the plan, the crucifixion was the plan.

When Jesus returns from death, the Disciples expected Him to lead them once again in all manner of wonderful things... but ascension is the plan. He must ascend and give them a powerful helper, the Spirit, for these are the things that are written to happen.

Not a single promise ever goes unfulfilled. Even to His Son, Jesus... His life, His death, His resurrection were not accidents, not conjecture, they were real events and they were the fulfillment of God's redemptive plan.

Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22 are very clear in pointing to Christ's mission, the resurrection points to God's promises being true. This is why God is truly the trustworthy One, because He never goes back on His word - He accomplishes everything He promises to do.

(SLIDE) Jesus then tells them what's going to happen next, "**You are witnesses of these things**" and "**You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth**".

The Disciples witnessed all of Jesus' life... all of the prophecies and miracles coming true right before their very eyes. But, Jesus says, they WILL receive power, they WILL BE His witnesses...

Now, you might be saying, "Amadeus, they saw Jesus, they saw what He did they are witnesses". There's two things going on here which are important... Jesus is talking about the past and the future, and usingtwo different meanings.

"You are witnesses of these things", says Jesus... that's the past. You've seen my life, my power, my acts. Then, Jesus says "**You will be my witnesses**", that's the future. They are witnesses in seeing Jesus, but they aren't yet witnesses in the second sense of the word.

The Disciples are still just Disciples, 11 ordinary guys learning along the way but they will be witnesses, once they receive the power of the Holy Spirit. When that power comes on them they will become the other definition of witness... someone who reports on what they saw - like an eye-witness in court.

Their living next to the Saviour has changed their lives, and living in contact with the Saviour changes the life of anyone who accepts it. The Disciples were already in Jerusalem, and He instructs them to wait there. They've seen a lot, so many miracles and wonderful things, and a time is coming when they will need to report on that, speak about it, tell others.

Notice also that Jesus' foretelling of what will be is so precise, even down to the place. Look at that verse... you WILL BE my witnesses in Jerusalem (that's where they are), in all Judea and Samaria (that's where they will go, the wider region)... and then to the ends of the Earth.

And look today where the message of Christ has reached... this book (BIBLE) has survived over 2000 years of human history, as far as religious books go that's an incredible feat. You know how many books we have that are older than this?

Not many, I'll tell you that. You know how many books older than this that have survived this long? Even fewer. This book has survived bannings, burnings, entire civilizations uprooted and wiped out - yet still, Scripture endures.

It was the first book printed in the Gutenburg Press in 1455 - the first printing press that could work at incredible speeds. The Bible has been translated into over 1000 languages.

5900 Greek manuscripts from just the Second Testament alone still exist even today, dating back to 1500 AD. Biblical texts are preserved also in the writings of prolific scholars like Plato, and Aristotle. (BOLD) Ends of the earth...

Jesus is letting the Disciples know that they will not simply be spectators, they do not get to keep the gospel message all to themselves and live comfortable lives... they are going to be given power, they will be sent out with a message that transforms lives.

(SLIDE) As Jesus ascends those Disciples were blessed and two angels remain to deliver the final part of this story. That comes as a challenge and a message of hope. "**Why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven**".

There's hope in the promise of His return. There's the connection to Revelation, the end of Scripture we talked about a few weeks back - the promise that God is STILL working, and will be working all things for good.

But more than that there's the challenge from the angels, and I'll put it into modern terms, "What are you standing around here for?!" You're not spectators... you're not here to simply watch this happen. You've seen it, now go out and tell others about it.

And they do that, exactly as Jesus said they would. First they go about Jerusalem, and then the head into Judea and Samaria... letters are sent, gospels are written, allowing the message to reach the Ends of the Earth. That message, and that same challenge, is preserved in the Holy texts and presented to us here over 2000 years later.

Oh you heard me right, Jesus didn't just give the Disciples the Holy Spirit and take off into Heaven leaving the witnessing to them in their time and place. If the great commission was to go out and make disciples, then we become disciples.

And when we become disciples, when we are baptized, the Holy Spirit is given to us. The Holy Spirit is conferred to all believers, all who put their trust and faith in Jesus as the Son of God.

That same Spirit that empowered the Disciples, now Apostles, empowers us to live boldly and proclaim the same gospel message of hope that the Apostles' did. This Holy Spirit is the same spirit that you rely on every day. The same spirit that speaks to you of things to come...

The same spirit that speaks to you of God's miracluous power... the same spirit that whispers to you in times of sorrow. We receive that spirit because knowledge and conviction alone are not enough.

Plenty of people have knowledge, even more have conviction. But it is the Holy Spirit that provides the spark of ignition for Christian success. All who receive the Holy Spirit are commissioned and empowered by the words of the Saviour...

To go out, into the nations, into the corners of the earth, and make disciples. The only tool you need for this is the Holy Spirit. Not all are called to Teach, or Preach... not all are called the Prophecy or Acts of Service... but all are called to be witnesses and to make disciples.

So, to paraphrase the angels... What are you standing around here for?!

Jesus' ascension was not the end of the story, it was not a comfortable spot to stop and let life just trudge on until the sky darkened and Revelation began... it was the beginning of our mission. Jesus fulfilled God's plan, and then commissioned the Apostles and we who follow to be His witnesses in this world.

Jesus empowers us with the Holy Spirit to complete this task. Now, it is our turn to live in His power and proclaim His name until He returns. You are not merely spectators of God's power... you were not called to simply watch and wait...

You are to make disciples, to speak about God's power, to talk about how He reigns in your life, to praise Him and pray for the world.

AMEN.