

# It Is Time to Leave the City

## Luke 24:44-53

### INTRODUCTION

Every day, all across our world, people say goodbye.

- Husbands and wives say it to each other as they head off to whatever their day entails.
- Parents say it to their children as they watch them get on the school bus or move them into their college dorm rooms.
- We as a congregation will say it more than once when this service ends and we have finished greeting our friends and guests in the narthex.

Sometimes the word is punctuated with a kiss, a hug or a wave. Some people don't like to say the word, so they substitute phrases like "See ya" or "Later." Some prefer to imitate Arnold Schwarzenegger: "*I'll be back.*"

Goodbye scenes are, of course, the staples of classic Hollywood movies.

- Humphrey Bogart standing by as Ingrid Bergman gets on the plane in *Casa Blanca*
- Robert Redford and Barbra Streisand walking their separate ways in *The Way We Were*
- Tom Hanks calling out as the Wilson the volleyball floats away in *Castaway*.
- The child version of Drew Barrymore when ET finally goes home.

Our Gospel text portrays a pretty incredible goodbye scene itself. It's been 40 days since the Easter Sunday resurrection of Jesus. During those days Jesus has made multiple appearances to his disciples.

- He has reassured them of His love.
- He has addressed their doubts and reestablished their faith.
- They have eaten meals together.

But on this day, a day we label as "Ascension of our Lord," it is time for Jesus and his disciples to say goodbye. Jesus is engulfed in clouds and lifted into heaven, leaving those awestruck disciples with this promise (as delivered by the angels and recorded in Acts 1:11):

*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.*

Jesus was born. Jesus died. Jesus was resurrected. Jesus ascended into heaven. And Jesus will come again.

But in the meantime – between the ascension and His promised return – Jesus had a simple instruction for His disciples:

*Stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high (v. 49).*

The city was an important place for these eleven disciples.

### 1. **The City provided them with a collective identity.**

Nearly all of us here share the city of Springfield in common. We live here, go to school here, work here, worship here, shop for groceries here. Many of us have come from different places. I'm from St. Marys, OH. My wife is from Van Buren, IN. My grandson Gabriel is from Philadelphia. (*ask for hometowns*)

So too with these disciples. Eleven men from several different towns across the Judean landscape all brought their different backgrounds were all shaped by their shared experiences with and in the city of Jerusalem.

**The city** gave their faith its foundation. These men were first and foremost Jews. As such, Jerusalem would always be at the center of their lives. Their entire religious life centered on the feasts and festivals that emanated from that city, as well as on the Temple that gave direction to their Jewish faith.

**The city** was the site of their common Christian experience. Jerusalem continued to shape their lives as they transitioned from faithful Jewish men into faithful followers of Jesus Christ. It was in Jerusalem that the key events of our faith would take place. In one week alone, these disciples would celebrate a triumphal entry, share a last supper, pray in the Garden of Gethsemane, watch in horror as Jesus was arrested, tried, beaten and crucified and they would gather in fear lest they too suffer a similar fate.

**The city** was where their faith was renewed and refreshed, for it was in Jerusalem that Jesus first appeared to them following His resurrection, and where He would appear again on one or more other occasions. There He reminded them of His love and addressed all their doubts.

Jerusalem had become their identity – not just because they were Jews, but also because they were Christians. Bonds formed in those shared experiences would be crucial to the work Christ called them to do.

### 2. **The City was the place they were equipped for service.**

The city was the place where they were to get all they needed to carry on the work of Christ during His absence. Jesus makes it very clear to them that something else was coming and that they needed to be in the city to receive it. Look at verse 49:

*I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.*

That was the missing piece, and God would be sending it to the city.

Some of you might know Rev. Cecil McCarty, now deceased. He was a long-time pastor of the Pentecostal Church out by the WalMart on Springfield's east side. I wasn't feeling well one day, but felt I needed to be at a meeting where we were planning one of the large prayer breakfasts that we used to have in those days. As the meeting drew to a close Rev. McCarty offered to pray. Part of his prayer went like this:

*O Lord, we know you are the Great Physician, the healer of all our diseases. I pray that you would send your healing Spirit to our brother Tom. I pray that this Spirit would arrive at his home in 30 minutes and that You would withdraw that healing Spirit if Tom should choose to leave his home the rest of this day.*

Something important was on the way, I needed to be at home. The disciples needed to be in the city. They needed three things. They already had two of them. But there was one more crucial piece...and they would need to be in the city to get it,

**They needed** a story to tell. They already had it. They knew the story well, but in these closing moments Jesus reviewed it one more time.

*The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem (v. 47).*

**They needed** a job to do. They already had this one, too. They understood why they had been called to follow, but again Jesus reviewed it one more time.

*You are witnesses of these things (v. 48).*

The one missing piece, the one thing that required a return trip to Jerusalem was the gift promised to them by the Father,

**They needed** the power of the Holy Spirit. Luke says it like this:

*But stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high (v. 49).*

It was in the city that they would be equipped to carry on the mission of Christ. And so to the city they returned.

There is one more truth about the city that we need to share – a truth found in a single word in that 49<sup>th</sup> verse:

*But stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high (v. 49).*

Until. Stay in the city until ...

### 3. The City is NOT a Place to Stay

It is tempting – oh so tempting – to remain in the city...a place where you have shared experiences and where you have been prepared to serve God.

But the call on these disciples was to “go and make more disciples of all nations.” It was never to “stay in the city.” Only to stay in the city **until...**

The challenge for them was to see city as a place from which to go out into the world. To see the city as a place of support and friendship, a place of preparation. Their temptation was to stay in the city and enjoy the shared experiences and equipping and to bask in the refreshment of the Holy Spirit. But the call of Christ on their lives was to go – to go out from the city into a world that needs to hear the good news of Christ. Once the Holy Spirit came, it was time to leave the city.

The challenge for those first disciples remains the challenge for all disciples who have followed in their footsteps. Our city isn't called Jerusalem. Our city is called the church, Grace Lutheran Church to be precise. Our temptation is to stay in this city and enjoy the shared experiences and equipping and to bask in the refreshment of the Holy Spirit. But the call of Christ for us is the same as Christ's call to those first disciples. “Go!” He says. It's time to leave the city and take the story of Jesus into a world that needs to hear it.

We have not been called to stay in the city, but to go from the city with our shared experience, with our equipping and in the power of the Holy Spirit to fulfill the Great Commission given to us. It's time to leave the city.

The attraction of the city is that it is about ME! In the city I get to feel good and feel safe and feel fed and feel like my needs are getting met. But the city should never be confused with the mission field. Jesus did not tell those first disciples to, “Stay in the city” because He knew that the mission field beyond the city walls. He said instead “Stay in the city until ...”

He did not say “Stay in the city and all nations will come to you so you can teach them and baptize them and in so doing you will fulfill the Great Commission.” He said “Go.” Not stay, but go. It's time to leave the city.

### APPLICATION

Outside of the walls of this city we know as Grace is a world that needs to hear and experience the message of Jesus Christ. We all have been given that message. We have been called to be witnesses to that message. That's our job. The Holy Spirit has come and dwells within us. It's time to leave the city.

Over the next several weeks we are going to be challenged over and over again to move beyond the walls of this congregation into the harvest field around us. Your pastors and staff believe that it is time for this church to leave the city and to go in

Grace and as Grace so that we can share the story of Jesus in ways that may be unprecedented for this church and we intend to lead you in that direction. This summer will be an exciting time for this congregation.

*Father, when Your people go out in Your Name and in Your power and in obedience to Your call, You not only promise to go with them, but promise to go before them too. Guide our steps as we go in Grace to the harvest field around us. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*