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St. Paul's Lutheran Church – Potter, NE
Mission Observance (Pentecost XVIII)
September 27, 2015
Text: Luke 24:44–53

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Have you ever been called upon to give eyewitness testimony? In court, at an accident scene, in church as baptismal sponsors, in a squabble at home between siblings, etc...? To be a witness is simply to say you have firsthand knowledge of a situation. Dear saints of God, you are witnesses to the great things accomplished by God the Father through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. You have firsthand knowledge about Jesus, His life, death, and resurrection. You know and have experienced, firsthand, His love and redemptive grace. To borrow words from Luke 24:48, today's gospel reading, "You are witnesses of these things."

Your annual Mission Festival is but one proof that you are witnesses. For mission work is, first and foremost, giving a witness-account of the things of God accomplished in Christ Jesus. And thanks be to God for the mission work being accomplished through you and all the members of St. Paul Lutheran Church. It is an honor and special privilege to participate in your on-going witnessing to the great things of God.

This morning's gospel reading from Luke 24 is a beautiful passage of Scripture. It provides the content of the Church's witnessing activity and the mandate for her to witness to what she knows in Christ Jesus. For today's purposes, we'll take as a given the command of the Lord Jesus for His Church to proclaim His life, death, and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins to all nations. Today, we will focus on the content of our witness to Jesus as understood from the OT. But not all 39 OT books but only one chapter, Genesis one, and a verse or two from Genesis 2. That will be enough to occupy our attention for today.

The resurrected Jesus makes a bold claim at the very beginning, in vs. 44, "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 and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Everything "written about me" in the OT must be fulfilled, says Jesus. The content of our witness begins with the Scriptures themselves, and we will focus on Genesis 1.

That great chapter provides a rich tapestry of ideas, events, and institutions which provide the form and shape of our witness to Christ. From the very beginning, we see that the eternal Son of God was active in the creation of the world as the Father speaks the world into existence through His Son by the power of the Holy Spirit. We are witnesses to the fact that God the Holy Trinity is the creator and maker of heaven and earth and all that is contained therein. Our witness to God's creative work is needed all the more nowadays. Evolutionary science is so entrenched at every level of society that without the Church's witness to God's creative work, the world would never hear the truth about that most basic question that almost every child has ever asked, "Why am I here?" More specifically, we are witnesses to the special creative act of God in creating man and woman from the dust of the ground in God's very image.

Today, we are being bombarded with a most pernicious lie that says we are here as a result of mindless, random acts controlled by the unyielding laws of nature. When evolutionary scientists, sociologists, and philosophers, are confronted with the overwhelming evidence for design, purpose, and intention in the universe in general, and humanity in particular, they sometimes will say that the human race is the result of alien intervention. "Directed panspermia" is a theory postulated in 1973 by Nobel winning scientist Francis Crick, one of the co-discoverers of DNA in 1953, that aliens from other worlds purposely seeded the universe with microscopic seeds sent out into the universe. This idea has received renewed support of late. But we are witnesses to God giving of Himself to us by creating every human uniquely and purposefully.

We are witnesses to the fact that God created man and woman in His image as man and woman; male and female. Need I rehearse the almost frenzied infatuation with transgender-ism as evidenced by the constant media bombardment of Caitlyn Jenner? Today, we are told, that your gender identity is up to you to choose. Facebook provides 56 different gender options! But we witness to the truth that God gives us our gender and our identity as a unique and precious gift to be cherished and celebrated.

And not only that, we are witnesses declaring that every human being is a unique, creative gift of God the Holy Trinity. As witnesses to that truth, we defend human life from womb to grave. We speak the truth in love that babies in their mothers' womb are more than potential body parts to bartered over during wine and cheese. We witness to the world that the aged, the infirmed, the marginalized, and the dying have inherent, intrinsic dignity regardless of their capacity and abilities, or lack thereof. We are witnesses to the truth that every human being reflects the dignity of reflecting God's image.

And yes, we are witnesses to the Biblical definition of marriage as being the conjugal union of one man and one woman in life-long fidelity to each other. The worldly wise and powerful are telling us that the definition of marriage is as flexible and redefineable as our gender identity is on Facebook. And that the US Constitution protects our liberty to make such redefinitions. We are witnesses to the gift of marriage as the basic building block of human society and as the precious, tangible image of Christ's love for His bride, the Church.

At this point, you may be wondering what the past several minutes have to do with the OT forming the content of our witness to the gospel of the Lord Jesus. I submit to you that it has everything to do with the gospel of the Lord Jesus. For everything that I have briefly rehearsed, undercuts and destroys the very foundations upon which our witness to the saving Gospel of Jesus is established. (As an aside, some of these themes will be discussed more fully in the Bible study after lunch! Please hang around if possible!!)

It must be said that Jesus affirms the OT creation account of the universe, including the special creation of man and woman in God's image, and the establishment of marriage as the unique union of man and women in holy bonds of fidelity that ought not to be broken. In addition, Genesis 1 provides the backdrop for understanding Christ's redemptive work. Or to put it more provocatively, without the right knowledge of these things recorded in Genesis, you cannot rightly understand Christ's gospel, for they witness to Christ.

Let's take creation. Both the OT and NT describe humanity's ultimate destiny and purpose as coming to fulfillment in the new creation. As God the Trinity created the old creation by the power of His gracious word, so the new creation is created by the redemptive work of God in Christ, especially His death, resurrection, and ascension. If God did not create the universe, as evolutionary science teaches, then how can we know and trust that God will make a new creation? Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you. And behold I make all things new where death and tears will be no more." You can only understand Christ's redemptive work as a new creation in light of God's creative work as described in the OT.

Let's take the creation of man and woman in God's image, specifically, Adam and Eve. The OT teaches that Adam was not only the first human created but that he is the universe's representative head. When Adam commits his original sin, all humanity, yea all creation is plunged into the degradation of sin and death. The NT describes Jesus as the new Adam. Jesus is the new creation's representative head. When Jesus dies and

rises again, He does do for the salvation of the world. The new creation is established upon Jesus, the new Adam, even as the current creation was established upon the first Adam. If the Adam of Genesis 1 did not exist, as evolutionary science teaches, and if Adam was not male as part of his intrinsic, unchangeable identity, as current transgender-ism teaches, then our hope of heaven and the new creation is futile and empty. You can only understand Christ's redemptive work in light of God's creative work of fashioning humanity as male and female.

Lastly, let's take marriage as defined as the conjugal union of one man with one woman. The OT describes the unique relationship God has with His redeemed people using the analogy of the marriage between man and woman. St. Paul especially picks up on this theme in Ephesians 5 and concludes, rather provocatively, that marriage was created in order to be a living illustration of Jesus' faithful love to His Church. Jesus is the groom who chooses, loves and sacrifices everything in order to secure His bride, the Church. If marriage is not the union of man and woman in lifelong fidelity, you cannot rightly understand the Gospel of Jesus. Even a verse like John 3:16, "For God so loved the world..." can only be fully and completely understood as marital love founded upon Genesis 1 and 2 and expanded upon in Ephesians 5.

Dear saints of God, you are witnesses to these great things. Through the saving content of God's holy Word, you have come to know who you are in Christ. You were created in God's image; you are redeemed and loved by the Lord Jesus as a groom loves and cherishes His precious bride; you are sanctified and enlivened by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit so that you long for and look forward to a new creation wherein dwells righteous, innocence, and blessedness. You have firsthand knowledge of these great things. They shape you, inform you, and enliven you unto eternal life. And thanks be to God, He has promised to be faithful to us in all things even into the new creation. Go and be faithful in your witness knowing that the Lord works through you to bring about His good and redemptive purposes in Christ Jesus.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.