

## Don't Just Stand There!

### Acts 1: 1-11

Those of us that watched television in the 1970's might remember a popular actor named Mladen Sekulovich. He appeared in a familiar TV commercial for a certain credit card and began by asking the question "do you know me? Some of us would recognize the face of the star of the crime drama the Streets of San Francisco but not his real name- Mladen Sekulovich. His stage name- Karl Malden was just as familiar as his advice to travelers'- don't carry cash- carry the American Express Card- don't leave home without it.

I'm not sure about the Amex card, but there are some things we should never leave home without. Many of us wouldn't think of leaving the house without our cell phones. I did that once and nearly had a panic attack- it was like leaving the house without my pants on. If we expect to get back into our homes, we better not leave home without our house key. If you are driving an automobile, you should make sure you have your driver's license and proof of insurance with you. And remember mom's advice- don't leave home without clean underwear and clean socks- you never know what might happen. Some of them are more important than others, especially if you are someone who doesn't have a cellphone or a driver's license.

Even so, there are some things that you and I should never leave home without and Acts 1 gives us a hint as to what they might be. St. Luke tells us that Jesus had appeared to His followers many times after His crucifixion and proved to them that He was resurrected from the dead. Like those of us who would identify Karl Malden in that Amex commercial, some immediately recognized His face and believed it was Jesus they were seeing. Others like Thomas refused to believe their eyes and had to see and touch the scars from the nails and the spear for themselves before they would believe. Still others recognized Jesus not by His face or His nail scarred hands, but by His familiar words. Verse 3 reveals that He was still speaking of things pertaining to the kingdom of God. Praise God some things never change.

Jesus's earthly ministry began with forty days of temptation and anticipation in the desert and ended with forty days of celebration and revelation in Capernaum. Those forty-day periods are like bookends supporting three years' worth of books, all with a common theme that is found in Matthew 4:11-17. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand". Luke 5:32 refines it even further. Repentance was a consistent part of Jesus's preaching. Towards the end of His time on earth, He expanded upon it. John 14:15-17. "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth.

Forty days after being crucified, buried, and left for dead, Jesus's message and His mission remained the same. He was still teaching about repentance and the kingdom of heaven, and He was still reminding His followers that His Spirit was promised to those who love Him. Look at verse 4. Remember what I told you before- John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit. You are going to need help to be my followers, so don't leave Jerusalem without it. Don't leave home without it. 1:8

That command and promise was not just for the remaining 11 followers of Jesus, but for every person of every time who decides to follow Jesus. As we saw last week, Jesus does not leave us as orphans. Like the earliest of His disciples, we have the indwelling power of His Holy Spirit, which means we won't leave home without it. Next Sunday is Pentecost, and we will further explore the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit then. There is another thing we should never leave home without and that is hope. We need hope, for it is the only cure for the disappointment that threatens to steal our joy.

Disappointment is one of the most effective tools Satan uses in his mission to try and separate us from God. Left unchecked, it leads to discouragement, and many times that will tempt us to just give up. Disappointments come in many different shapes and sizes, and most of the time they come because our expectations are not being met. We can be disappointed in the performance of something we purchased, like an appliance, a piece of machinery or an automobile. Those of us who enjoy sporting events certainly have been disappointed a time or two by the team we were cheering for.

However, the pain caused by those things is temporary or momentary. Lemons can be traded in, dishwashers can be replaced and we are always free to cheer for another team if ours is losing. It is the disappointment caused by people that can cause lasting damage, especially if forgiveness is not in sight. By God's grace, relationships can be repaired if people are willing to forgive. But what do we do about those things that God alone has control over? Like His deciding when the world will come to an end or determining the amount of time a loved one will remain with us? How do we overcome disappointment in those kinds of expectations?

As post modern disciples of Christ we do it the same way the first disciples did- by standing on the promises of God. There is none more significant than the promise He first made in verse 8- you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, AND you will be witnesses to me- here in Jerusalem and to the ends of the earth. That power- the power of the Holy Spirit- fills us with hope and joy and allows us to bring glory to God through Jesus Christ.

The apostles watched in amazement as Jesus was "taken up" by a cloud and removed from their sight. But once the thrill of the moment passed, I believe disappointment likely set in again, as now Jesus had been taken from them twice in the period of a few short weeks. They might have looked at one another and said "what do we do now?" As they stood and watched perhaps the most amazing sight they had ever seen, two men appear and ask them a pointed question. Why are you standing there looking up? In other words don't just stand there – what are you waiting for? You no longer need to be afraid. Jesus might be out of sight, but He is still with you. Fear not, one day you will see Him come back the same way He left- in glory. That is the promise of the Father and our hope.

Next Sunday we will celebrate Pentecost, which is our celebration of the fulfillment of the "promise of the Father" to us. Again, the command to us will be to go and do. We can't afford to waste time with fear or disappointment. Let us remember that we do not go alone. I pray that we find the grace to go and be that witness for Christ, the One who dwells and abides within us. Amen