

IS IT A TITLE OR A TESTIMONY?**Acts 1:1-8****(Read Acts 1:1-8)**

Intro: Some of you remember Ken and Debbie Danielson who were part of ABC for some years back in the late Seventies to the late Eighties. Ken and Deb did degrees at the Seminary and then Ken went on for his PhD at Kent State. After he successfully defended his dissertation and he finally received his doctoral degree, he was known as Doctor Danielson and he milked it for all it was worth, He even had a coffee mug that read “Trust me, I’m a doctor”. This was a moot point since Ken’s degree was in communication and not in medicine, which is the implication. And it’s true, our physicians and to be trusted and I do. My life was saved by my family doctor when I was an 8-year-old. BUT apparently, it’s not as true anymore. A Gallup poll last December showed that nurses (for the 16th year in a row by the way) are the most trusted profession and that doctors have slipped to the #4 spot. That’s not too shabby. As you can see they were beat out by Military officers and Grade School teachers. Kudos to Martha, Karen, and Keith – but what about Bonnie, Emily, and Sheila?!!! Does teaching in higher grades move you over to the dark side or something?!!. Specifically, doctors are very highly trusted by 65% of Americans – since we are maybe still thinking about Ken’s coffee mug.

Now look at this list, while I still have it up on the wall: Notice that Clergy (that’s me) are rated #8 with 42% of Americans saying they highly trust them. And local politicians are at #11 with 24% of Americans trusting highly in them. Notice that national politicians don’t even make this list though in the official list they were at 11% and actually higher than Car Salespeople. Obviously, these people have met Basil Solomon, or car salesmen would maybe have beaten out preachers.

Now, seriously, I’m troubled about the reputation of clergy – that we get beat out by Judges and Daycare Providers. As servants of God, we should be above reproach – but we’re not. Over the past couple months, I’ve become aware of a pastor of a large church in a big midwestern city, a man I have long respected and learned from, has been accused of impropriety with quite a number of women. This breaks my heart – for him, his family and his congregation. It breaks my heart for what it does to the reputation of God’s servants and his Church.

It’s has gotten to the point, by times, that I find myself reluctant to tell people I’m clergy. Not because I’m ashamed of my profession or my beliefs but because there is no quicker way for conversation to change or stop completely than to mention one is a pastor.

Sometimes this is because people are reluctant to be vulnerable if a pastor is present. But often it is because we have not represented the Gospel well and it has reflected poorly on Christians. That needs to change – the Church – which, by its very definition is God’s “Called out Ones” must better represent King Jesus. It comes down to this, will we be known by a title “Christian” which is, often for good reason fraught with misgivings? Or will we be known by our testimony to the transformed life?

As you can see in our text that I read as I began this talk, Jesus commanded his followers who were there with him – on what probably was the Mount of Olives – that they should stay in Jerusalem. The problem was everyone could not wait to get out of Jerusalem. Galilee was their home. It’s just better to be home. And besides, Jerusalem is where Jesus’s killers were – its generally good practice to avoid those who want you dead. But Jesus said “Stay and wait for my Spirit. And that’s what they did. And on the Day of Pentecost, which is today, by the way, the Holy Spirit came upon that band of normal people, people just like you and me, and he empowered them for ministry. They were no longer afraid of anyone, they just wanted to tell about Jesus. Jesus said they should be witnesses and they were just that. Thousands believed and were baptized. Not because they had a title – it was because they had a testimony. People notice a changed person. They want to listen to a changed person. That is witness.

A key from our text, on this Pentecost Sunday where we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit on those first Believers, is that we want to be more than just Christians, we want to be witnesses. In other words, I want to ask you, will you have a title or you have a testimony? And let me ask first . . .

What will make people say that they can tell that we have “been with Jesus.”?

- In Acts 3, (Acts 3:1-10) Peter and John healed a lame man who was begging at one of the Temple gates. They said they had no money to give him but, in the name of Jesus of Nazareth he could be healed. Which is exactly what they did. Well, they were arrested for the horrible crime. Not necessarily for healing, but for merely

mentioning the name of Jesus. That name had been causing the Jewish leaders, who thought they had dealt with his troubling message, a lot of grief.

- This is familiar to many of you because it happens to be one of my all-time favorite passages and since it makes my point I'll use it again. Over in Acts 4 (Act 4:1-22) the two apostles are taken before the highest religious court and confronted with *"By what power or what name did you do this?"* Acts 4:7b. And Peter and John gave an amazing testimony to the saving power that is only available in Jesus Christ – whom their accusers thought they'd killed. And the accusers saw this was a genuine testimony. It was unmistakable. In fact, the actual words from Acts 4 are, *When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.* Acts 4:13.
- These men had been with Jesus. They looked like him, they spoke like him. They were a testimony to transformation. They were just fisherman. They were just regular people. They didn't have a title of religious scholar. They didn't have any title at all, except a testimony of the soul changing work of Jesus Christ. They had taken him at his word when he said go and be my witnesses. They had done just that.
- We need to do the same. But that means we need to spend time with Jesus – in prayer, in the Word, hanging out with people who look just like him. People gravitated to Jesus, they didn't try to avoid him. If our testimony to Jesus's work in our life oozes out of our beings, we will not be a people repellent, we will become an attractant because we have been with Jesus.
- And it wasn't just the church of Acts or some other church somewhere else . . .

By the power of the Holy Spirit the ministry of Jesus continues through his followers – EVERYWHERE!

- That means us! We have been empowered, so let's be witnesses too. The Word is spread by testimony.
- Even as Jesus's return to the Father was immanent, they still showed they were more interested in politics rather than resurrection power. They ask, *"Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"* Acts 1:6b. They no doubt hoped that Jesus would clean house and kick out the Romans and clean up the hijacked Jewish faith. Naturally they were more interested in power than in witness, and I'm making it sound worse than it was – they had legitimate concerns.
- So lest we get judgmental about it, maybe we should ask ourselves, are we more interested in power than in witness? I mean, wouldn't it be nice to be that big church with hundreds or thousands of members impacting the community and the world? Actually, we already are. We already are making a huge impact on our world.
- And another reason the disciples asked Jesus this question may have been that they simply wanted the Kingdom to be now! They had been through the mill. They had taken their licks and their reputation was in shambles and, truthfully, they were wanted men. It would have been a relief to just enjoy the Kingdom of Heaven, immediately! So, they wanted it over NOW! They didn't want to deal with the journey. They felt they deserved to enjoy the destination.
- Jesus set them straight pretty quickly: That's not for you to worry about, not yet. Right now, the uttermost parts of the earth need to hear about me! That's what needs to happen now. So, WAIT!!
- And Jesus further admonished, "Don't try to figure out my return – figure out what to do UNTIL I return." BE MY WITNESSES!
- Jesus set them straight and they followed instructions and stayed in Jerusalem. Ten days later, the Holy Spirit fell on them and infused them, and their witness was unmistakable. Their fear was replaced with single minded vision and they turned the world upside down.

Conclusion: That brings it to us again. We have been here in this community in two iterations (Chestnut Grove and Ashland BIC Church) for 150+ years. We have made a huge impact, people all over the world have heard the witness of the saving message of the Gospel from people that have come from this congregation. We have had missionaries from ABC all over there world. But not just missionaries across the see, the other day I read the obituary of a farmer who lived near our old Chestnut Grove site and it said he attended services at that church and it was one of the formative influences in his early Christian life. Also, retired First United Methodist pastor, Mike Namy, was profoundly influenced by ABC in his high school years and tells me about it every time he sees me. We have made an imprint on this community and this world by taking the Great Commission seriously and going near and far with the Good News.

That will never change, but perhaps how God wants us to do it has. Our ABC leadership team, with your input, has been seeking what God's vision is for ABC, going forward. The world is changing. How the church impacts it needs to evolve too and I'm talking about adaptation and not compromise. The Gospel message is the same – it's how it gets out that changes.

And like the disciples the question is not when? Because the time is now. So, the real question is what should we do? Be praying about that as we go forward. On this Pentecost Sunday, pray for a fresh infilling of the Holy Spirit so that we, Ashland Brethren in Christ Church, can have maximum impact. We aren't looking for accolades or a title of the biggest or the most innovative church. We are looking for ways to spread our testimony. One thing we need is renewal and I'm going to preach a series on that next.

In the meantime, ask yourself this, "What has Jesus done for me?" Your answer is your testimony. Tell people! Amen.