

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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LOCATION: Auditorium (Bill) SERIES: I Have Seen The Lord!

SERMON: “His Good Work Continues”

(Acknowledgment to Steven Cole and Tim Keller for their insight into these post-resurrection events.)

This morning we wrap up our Sermon Series called “**I Have Seen the Lord!**”. We’ve been looking at this **40-day period** between the Resurrection and the Ascension where different people encountered the Risen Lord.

We’ve looked at **Mary’s** encounter on **Day 1**...**Thomas’s** encounter with Jesus on **Day 8**...and **Peter’s 3rd encounter** with Jesus that appears to have taken place in **the later days** of this 40-day window.

This morning we turn our attention to **the 40th and final day**...it’s the day that **Jesus will ascend to the throne and take His seat at the right hand of God the Father**. But we want to take a look at this final encounter that Jesus has with His disciples – one last chance for them to *see the Lord* before He ascends.

Our Scripture passage is found in the book of Acts, chapter 1. This final encounter that Jesus has with His disciples takes place in Jerusalem. Jesus tells them to remain there and in a few days....

Acts 1:8 “...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. “Men of Galilee,” they said, “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.”

This morning’s message is titled *His Good Work Continues*.

You see, Jesus did such good work while He was here with us, did He not? All the lives He touched and forever changed as He walked among us. **Jairus, the father whose daughter was dying. The widow from Nain. Bartimaeus, the blind man. The man paralyzed from birth. The woman caught in adultery. Zacchaeus, the unethical tax collector.** The list goes on and on. Such good work that He did while He was here.

But He’s not here, not physically of course. And so how is Jesus going to see that His good work continues? From our Scripture passage it’s clear that He intends for His good work to continue through us.

And so while we will be looking briefly at what Jesus said *to His disciples* before He ascended, much of our time this morning will be spent looking at what Jesus’ final words say and mean to us.

Jesus told His disciples – and He is telling us - three things:

You Will Receive Power”...**“You Will Be My Witnesses”**, and the third thing, very important are the final words found in Matthew’s gospel where Jesus made those who would follow Him this promise: **“Surely I Am With You Always.”**

Let’s look at the first thing Jesus told His disciples. He said...

1. YOU WILL RECEIVE POWER

Acts 1:8 “...when the Holy Spirit comes on you.”

And were His disciples ever going to need it. Because the opposition was going to be intense. As they looked to continue the good work that Jesus started, they were up against intense persecution.

Stephen was the first to give His life when he was drug outside the city and stoned to death. The apostle Paul at this point was a bitter enemy of the early church, going door to door and dragging off followers of Jesus and putting them in prison.

Still, even in the face of such strong opposition, the Holy Spirit *did* come upon them with power and enabled them to continue the good work of Jesus. So good that it still continues to this day, through us.

And do we ever need the Holy Spirit if we hope to continue the good work that Jesus started. Because while it's a different time, a different place, evil and darkness still exist.

Child trafficking. School shootings. Amber alerts. Bullying throughout school, hazing if you go off to college. Sexual intimidation in the workplace. And that's the short list.

And not just that - if we're honest with ourselves - we realize that we have all contributed to the darkness by our words and our actions...we know what we're up against, and in many ways, we're up against ourselves.

So how does this work? If God's Spirit lives within every disciples of Jesus, how is His power displayed in our lives?

While there are many aspects of the Holy Spirit's power, one of the most important aspects is **the work that He does over the course of our lives, helping us to more and more mirror the image of Jesus.**

The good work that we do "out there" **all begins with the good work that the Holy Spirit continues to do in us.**

I'll be honest, sometimes I wonder how well I am doing when it comes to mirroring the image of Jesus. I say so much that doesn't need to be said. My attitude at times leaves much to be desired. I'm sure that people are aware of it. So sometimes I wonder...

But...I'm also encouraged by the words of the apostle Paul who – after he encountered Jesus and became a leader of the Christian church – wrote these words...

Philippians 1:6 ...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

I'm not where I want to be, but the Holy Spirit is going to carry on....He will continue a good work in me so that I can continue to carry on the good work of Jesus for others.

Here's an example of the good work that the Holy Spirit is doing in my life. It's nothing epic...but it rarely is. His work is often just found in the ordinary.

Not long ago I was at a worship event, and as everyone in the room was singing, I was finding it difficult to join in...my heart just wasn't in it.

It reminded me of the battle that some of you surely fight when you come in here on certain Sundays. Little things, sometimes big things that just make it hard to come in here and your heart be fully engaged in worship.

And I hate to admit this, but a big part of my struggle was that I found myself thinking about how the images and words projected onto the screen looked a bit dated, a bit antiquated.

When I say the word "typewriter" do you know what I'm talking about? Back in the day when a typewriter was all we had, when it came to what the letter would look like – the font they call today - we had one choice. I think if you wanted to, you could switch something out that would provide a **cursive look**. So one, maybe two.

Today, with computers, the font options are limitless as far as what you want a letter to look like. And what is "in style" constantly changes. Just like furniture and hairstyles and

automobiles become dated and antiquated, so do certain fonts. And because I'm involved in medial presentations to some extent here at the church, I notice these things. And what was on the screen at that worship event looked to me like a font from days gone by.

And you ask, "What does it matter?" An the answer is, "It doesn't." At least it shouldn't.

I became convicted – that's a word that means I started recognizing how shallow I was being – and I'm convinced it was the work of the Holy Spirit...it's what He does. His power at work in my life, getting me to stop critiquing the presentation

But that's not all He does. It's not just about pointing out what's broken, He's also about helping me find my way to Jesus. And so I believe He nudged me to try something I'd never done before...I stopped singing and just started speaking - that is just saying - the words on the screen.

Not too loud, so as not to distract those around me...but while others are singing, I'm simply saying the words. Instead of singing to Jesus I was talking to Jesus. And it became very personal between Jesus and myself.

An example of how the Holy Spirit speaks into our hearts and lives...nothing epic...very ordinary...and I'm certain that throughout every day He is speaking into your heart and life, continuing the good work that He has started in you.

Working all of our lives, helping us more and more mirror the image of Jesus...so that as His good work continues, we can play a part.

Well, Jesus not only said "You will receive power" – this life-changing power - He also said...

2. YOU WILL BE MY WITNESSES

Acts 1:8b "...and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Jesus was looking for His disciples – through the power of the Holy Spirit – to continue His work by becoming His voice, His hands, His heart to those around them.

And what was their experience? In some cases, incredible healings, conversions, many new disciples who were baptized and taught to obey everything that Jesus commanded.

But it couldn't have been easy in the face of such intense persecution at that time. It surely wasn't for those disciples and it isn't the easiest thing for us to know how to be the voice, hands and heart of Jesus.

And this is why – as I said last week – **it will be our love for Jesus that gives us the motivation we need.** A love that looks for Holy Spirit to work in our lives, **helping us become more and more like the One who ministered to...**

Those who were hurting (*Jairus, the father whose daughter was dying. The widow from Nain*)

Those with disabilities. (*Bartimaeus, the blind man. The man paralyzed from birth.*)

Those caught up in sin (*The woman caught in adultery. Zacchaeus, the unethical tax-collector*)

This was the world that Jesus came into. No different than it ever was, no different than it's ever been. It's the world in which you and I live.

It's not clean. It's not easy. It's why we need His help. It's why He has given us the help that we need.

You see, whether we're talking someone who is grieving or someone who is caught up on sin, we should be asking ourselves, "How did Jesus' respond...and how do we respond?"

Just asking...how do you find yourself responding to a father or mother whose child is dying, or had died? To one who has lost his or her spouse?

How do you find yourself responding to men and women with physical disabilities? Do you shy away, or feel led to engage with them in the way that Jesus did?

How do you engage with someone that you know is committing adultery? How do you react to those that are being unethical in their dealings with others?

These are difficult, but let me ask you...Do you love Jesus? I mean, do you *love* Jesus?

If so, you *can* do this. You *can* be His voice, speaking words of comfort to those who are grieving, speaking words of truth to those embracing sin.

You can be His hands, helping to feed those who are hungry, helping to build a ramp, put on a roof, cut and deliver wood to those who are in need.

You can be His heart...humility....compassion...kindness. God's Spirit living within you provides you with the power to love as He did. To engage as He did. To speak the truth - with grace - and He did.

He did such good work while He was with us, and He's looking to you and I to continue the good work that He started. **He's sending us out to tell those who are hurting that He loves them and that meaning, purpose and hope are found in Him.** To tell them with our words and show them with our lives what it means to be one of His disciples. It's how His good work continues.

So,as His good work continues all around us...how are you participating? Are you allowing the power of the Holy Spirit to do a good work in your life? Listening to the Holy Spirit, helping you to mirror the image of Jesus. Are you intentional when it comes to being Jesus' voice, hands and heart?

I'd like to close this message and this series by looking at the final words attributed to Jesus in Matthew's gospel. He told His disciples...

Matthew 28:18b-19 "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

You will be my witnesses in other words. But Matthew concludes his gospel with Jesus giving us these very significant words...

Matthew 28:29 “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

3. SURELY I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS

How is it possible that Jesus can be with us...with you always...with me always? Through the Holy Spirit that dwells within us.

It's an incredible promise that is only possible because of the Ascension. And the Ascension is one such a huge event in the life of the church...but it takes a back seat to the other big events: **Jesus birth, the Cross, the Resurrection, and Pentecost** to a lesser extent...these are on our radar.

But I'll bet you **Ascension Day** gets missed by many the church just about every year. By the way, it's 2 ½ weeks from now...**Thursday, May 10th** this year...40 days after Easter. And while it may often be missed, it's the ignition switch...it's the igniter that makes everything that we've been talking about possible.

Because of the ascension, Jesus is able to say - to His disciples, *“I am leaving and you will no longer see me...but surely I am with you always.”*

After ascending, taken up before the eyes of the disciples, Jesus assumed His place on His throne at the right hand of God the Father. And I don't want to end this series without quickly pointing out three things that come about because of the Ascension...three things that Jesus gives us through the Holy Spirit that allows His good work to continue.

The first is **Intimacy**. Do you recall back in the first message how we looked at Mary's encounter with Jesus, and how she reached out and took hold of Him so tightly. Jesus told her...

John 20:17b “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father.”

She was not just holding on to Him, she was clinging to Him tightly, and Jesus told Mary that she needed to let go. I suggested that perhaps it was because as long as He remained here on earth, she could only be in His presence when He was physically present.

But if she would let go, and Jesus returns to the Father, there would never be a moment when she would be without Him. *“Mary, you need to stop holding me like this so you can hold me like that.”*

Regardless of what Jesus meant, the fact is that because of the Ascension, Jesus now is with all of us every moment of every day through the Holy Spirit. The relationship that we can have with Him – that many of us have with Him – is a very intimate one, for we know that we are never alone. His presence is always with us.

But that’s not all. His ascension makes it possible not to just have intimacy with Him, but with each other. Comforting and being comforted. Sharing our experiences and learning from the experience of others. Sharing our weaknesses and rejoicing in the good fortune of others. It’s a big part in the continuation of His good work. Building intimacy, honesty, authenticity with one another. That’s good.

The second thing the Ascension brings about is **Confidence in Jesus’ Authority.**

There is a passage in the first chapter of Ephesians where we read of God’s great power...

Ephesians 1:19b-21 ...which he exerted in Christ, when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion...

This lets us know that Jesus is control of all things...and this is something we need to be reminded of when it seems like He isn’t in control at all...or during those times when He seems to be totally silent.

Early in 2017 we looked at the life of **Joseph**, and earlier this year we looked at the life of **Esther**. In both cases it appeared that God was absent at a time when He was sorely needed.

Joseph is in a pit, left for dead, crying out to God for help, and is met with nothing but silence. Esther and her people are under a death sentence, and God is nowhere to be found.

But in each case we saw that **silence on the part of God is not absence on the part of God...He was working beneath the surface – in Joseph’s life...in Esther’s life - as He carried out His plan and His purpose.** And it was a very good plan, a very good work.

If you’re here this morning and you just don’t understand what is happening in your life...you’ve been crying out to Jesus for help and you’re getting nothing...I hope it will help to know that because of the Ascension, Jesus is on the throne and in control of everything. ***And He is with you always.***

Know that silence is not absence, and while it is extremely difficult, I’ll encourage you to continue to trust that He is working beneath the surface to bring about His purpose and plan for your life. And may this awareness and your faith allow you to continue to do His good work, even in the midst of what seems to be a deafening silence.

Finally, the Ascension brings about **The Reality of Intercession.**

In the book of Hebrews we see the work of Jesus as He sits on the right hand of God the Father.

Hebrews 7:25-26 Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

When was the last time you were in a courtroom? Jury duty? Maybe supporting someone who was on trial, maybe facing the judge yourself? If so, it’s vital to have a good lawyer.

The truth is, you and I walk around in a courtroom every day. Virtually all of us passing judgment on one another and being judged by one another. How we look, how we act, how we speak...no lawyers necessary, we’re the judge and jury...even if the verdict doesn’t really matter.

There is a courtroom of sorts however, in the throne room of God. And the stakes are high...this is one where the verdict matters. And so it's vital to have a good lawyer...good representation. And in Jesus you get the very best. In fact, there is no other.

And He lives to intercede for those who have come to God through Him.

What does this intercession look like? Well, let's say that you or I sin yet again in that one area that we just can't seem to get right. We say that we love Jesus, and we do...the power of the Holy Spirit is real...but we really have a battle on our hands in this one area.

So how do you picture Jesus interceding when we fall yet again in this one area? *"Well Father, Bill has gone and done it again. **Would you show Him mercy, and give Him yet another chance?"***

If you can relate to this, do you ever ask yourself, "I wonder how long Jesus can keep this up?"

But Pastor Tim Keller once said something I think is profound. Keller says, "His intercession is much deeper than that."

Jesus knows all too well the punishment that He bore on the Cross. And because of this, He can go to the Father and intercede in this way:

"Father, Bill has walked away from us and has done it again. But Father, I'm not asking you for mercy. I paid for Bill's sin on the Cross...see my hands, see my side, see my wounds. **I'm not asking for mercy, I'm asking for justice. It would be unjust for you to take two payments for the same debt. I've already paid it.**

And as Keller points out....that is an infallible argument that Jesus makes on your behalf and my behalf.

If you have come to God through Him, He is with you always through the Holy Spirit, even as He sits on His throne. Living to intercede for you.

This awareness of where you stand with God – no fear of condemnation – should give you the confidence to go and continue the good work that He began. His voice. His hands. His heart.

Our series is called “I Have Seen the Lord!” Trusting in the testimony of those who saw Jesus during that 40-day period and aware of His presence in my life, I’m humbled to be able to play a part in continuing the good work that He started.

But I am so looking forward to that day when ***I will see the Lord*** face to face...before falling at His feet and worshipping the One who lives to intercede for me.

Would you pray with me?