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# Our Business

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A Sermon By  
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May 28, 2017  
Grace Episcopal Church  
Silver Spring, Maryland

*An audio version of this sermon can be found on the Grace Church website at*  
<http://graceepiscopalchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/2017-05-28-AAA.mp3>.

**Press On**  
Acts 1:6-14

The Rev. Amanda Akes-Cardwell  
Grace Episcopal Church  
The Seventh Sunday of Easter  
May 28, 2017

My wife, Sarah, is a priest in the Diocese of Maryland. Two weeks ago, Maryland held their annual diocesan convention, which Sarah and I attended together. One of the convention highlights for both of us was getting to experience our Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry, who was a convention guest, preach at the Friday evening service. Bishop Curry's message was inspiring and encouraging. He reminded us that we are the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement — a movement that started in 1st century Palestine and continues with us today in 21st century Maryland and beyond. As Bp. Curry understands it, one of the most important things we're called to do as members of the Jesus movement is to share the good news of Jesus with others, to be witnesses for Christ.

Is being a witness for Christ something you're comfortable doing? Saying we're members of Grace Church or that we're Episcopalians is one thing, but thinking of ourselves as witnesses for Christ is a bit different. Some of us may readily claim and name that identity. However, being a witness for Christ is not always an easy thing to do. At least, for me it's not.

I know, I'm a priest, it's supposed to be easy for me right? It's not that I have a problem articulating my faith or sharing it. The issue for me comes when I don't know how someone may respond to me sharing my faith. For example, some friends and I recently took an Uber together. After getting in the car and exchanging the usual pleasantries with our driver, the young man continued to make conversation with us by asking us what we did for a living. My friends shared information about their careers while I experienced an internal struggle. Should I share that I'm a Christian pastor?

My hesitancy to share my vocation was not because I don't love what I do, nor was it for lack of relationship with Jesus. No, my love for Jesus has been on-going since my childhood, fostered in Sunday School classes at my home parish, in bedtime prayers with my parents, explored in youth group, and in the pages of my Bible, strengthen and transformed in seminary, tested through struggles. I love Jesus, and I know he deeply loves me. So my hesitancy didn't come lack of commitment.

Instead, my caution in sharing my vocation had more to do with the fear of what assumptions the driver may make about me because I'm a Christian. What if he'd had a bad experience with Christianity? He might lump me in with the many who claim to be Christians, yet wield that identity with judgment. What judgments would he make about me if I came out not only as a

Christian, but as a Christian minister? I did eventually share my vocation with him and received a non-committal head nod and eyebrow raise, before the conversation shifted in another direction.

But that initial hesitancy to claim my Christian identity has been something I've reflected on. Yes, some Christians have given Christianity a bad name. But that doesn't mean I should be uncertain about sharing my faith. In reflecting on that moment, I began to see it and other moments like it, as opportunities to reclaim what it means to be Christian. To really share the joy of what it feels like to be a member of the Jesus movement, as Bp. Curry encouraged us, is our call as Christians. And Jesus gave that very imperative to his disciples in our reading from Acts this morning.

Our reading from Acts, recalls the final earthly appearance of Jesus as he is taken up into heaven to sit at the right hand of God. As the passage begins, the disciples are gathered together with Jesus in Jerusalem after the Resurrection. There's a high degree of anticipation that suffuses the text. Acts begins where the Gospel according to Luke left off: with grandiose expectations all fueled by an emerging recognition that God changed everything on Easter morning. And if all things are changed, anything is possible! Perhaps even, the time is right for Jesus to sit on the throne of his ancestor David! Perhaps now God has decided to topple over the oppressive Roman government and reinstate a just Jewish ruler, Jesus, to be Lord of all. The disciples, feeling anticipation and excitement, ask Jesus if he will "restore the kingdom to Israel" (1:6).

Jesus pretty much shuts that line of thinking down. Essentially, Jesus says, "That's none of your business and you're missing the point worrying too much about what's going to happen in the future. I've already told you my kingdom doesn't look like any kind of kingdom you've experienced on earth." That's not your business Jesus says, but let me tell you what is...

"Your business," Jesus says, "what you need to be spending your time working on is being my witnesses. Being witnesses of God and God's love in action." Jesus' instruction wasn't only for the ears of his ancient followers. It is a message for us too. Our business as followers of Jesus, as people of the Jesus movement, is to be witnesses of God and Christ in our broken world. We, like the disciples, can sometimes miss the point. We can be focused on things that really, we don't need to worry about. Jesus calls us back to what's important.

And what's important is that we are resurrection people in a Good Friday world, a world that desperately needs us to bear witness to the resurrection, to new life coming in the midst of death. We don't need to be ashamed of sharing our faith. We have a hope that others desperately need. Our collective Christian story bears witness to a God that loves creation so much that God became a part of creation to share in our struggles, to know us intimately, and to bring us out of darkness into life. We are witnesses of a messiah who loves deeply and yearns for all creation to be one in love with him, even as he is one in love with God. We are witnesses of Good News. And our business is to share it, in sincerity, with all who will listen.

I am not Paul, great missionary of the New Testament. I am not Michael Curry, preacher extraordinaire. And neither are you. We might read a passage from Paul's epistles or listen to a

sermon from Michael Curry, and think, wow that is impressive and wonderful. But, I will never preach like that or write like that. That may be true, but it doesn't excuse us from Jesus' call for us to be bearers of the gospel. We don't have to be someone or something that we're not, but rather we're called to lean into who we are at the core of our being, a loved child of God. In God we live and move and have our being—a way of being that is uniquely ours. We are called to share these stories, the story of who we are and who's we are, because people desperately need that hope in their lives.

After instructing his disciples to bear witness to the Good News to the ends of the earth, Jesus promises the disciples they will find the strength to do this through the power of the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus will send them. As the disciples waited for the gift of the Holy Spirit, they gathered together and prayed. May we, like them, find strength in community and prayer that we may be emboldened to share the source of our hope with our hurting and broken world, which dearly needs the promise of God's blessed assurance. Amen.