

*You killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses.... (Acts 3:15)*

There used to be an advertisement for the shoe and clothing company Nike – perhaps you saw it. It featured a famous basketball player doing his customary pregame ritual, in which he would go to the scorer's table with some gym chalk and fling it high into the air. That moment was captured for a banner hung many stories high outside the player's home arena, which also happened to be near his hometown. The player's arms are outstretched, as he looks up at the now scattering powder in the air. Above him is written the advertisement's catchphrase: "We are all witnesses." The point of the ad, I think, is that this particular player was seen already as transcending the sport with his influence in the community and culture. In other words, you don't have to be a fan of the team, or even of basketball, to feel the effects. Even more, this player was seen as a sort of 'savior' for his hometown team, which had never won a championship. In fact, the city itself hadn't seen a sports team bring home a championship in any major sport in 52 years. But now, with this man on the roster, fans were going to witness history.

This idea of witnessing is important to us as Christians, and we're going to be reminded of that often over the seven weeks of the Easter season. Our first reading each Sunday will come from the Acts of the Apostles (often simply referred to as 'Acts'), which was probably written down by Luke the evangelist (who also wrote the Gospel according to Luke). At the end of his Gospel account, Luke records the risen Jesus telling his disciples, *Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high* (Luke 24:46–49). On the mount of his ascension, Jesus repeats the point: *You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth* (Acts 1:8). And when the Holy Spirit comes at Pentecost, this is *exactly* what Peter and the Apostles become – witnesses. *This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses* (Acts 2:32). Over and over in the first half of Acts, Peter uses this same word, that they are *witnesses* of Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

What does it mean to be a witness? It has two meanings, in fact. The first is passive. To be a witness is to have seen something happen. You might think of this word when you think of legal proceedings: Who are the witnesses to the crime? Yet, we know that with that passive seeing often comes active *telling*. To witness to something means to tell other people about what happened.

For Christians, *both* of these ideas are important. We believe exactly what Peter said: *We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty* (2 Peter 1:16). We believe that Jesus was raised from the dead not simply by blind faith *but because there were many people who saw the risen Jesus!* And they told others about it! But, what about us? We haven't seen the risen Jesus with our own eyes. Yet, what does Jesus say to us? *Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed* (John 20:29). You may not be a passive witness, but you are blessed! Even more, God makes you an active witness to the power of Jesus' resurrection. How? Jesus chose *you* to bear fruit through love (John 15:16). We have the same Word, the same Lord, and the same Spirit as the apostles did, thanks to being baptized into Christ Jesus! And we, like the apostles, eat and drink with the risen Christ as we partake of his very body and blood! In our lives and in our words, *we* are witnesses to Jesus' grace, forgiveness, love, and resurrection. What joy to be able to share these great blessings with all who would hear!

-Pastor Squire

"How blest are they who have not seen and yet whose faith has constant been, for they eternal life shall win. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

("O Sons and Daughters of the King," LSB 470, v. 8)