*This sermon was originally preached by Board for Home Missions Chairman, Rev. Mark Gabb, at the Taste of Missions 2022 worship service. Some changes were made to focus it more on the 100 Mission initiative, though more could also be included. Even still, the main focus of the sermon is on the main point of the text itself, that we all are called to be his witnesses.*

*As is the case when a preacher uses sermon resources like these, the preacher will want to make this sermon his own. He will want to pay close attention to places where more recent current events should be used as well as relating the pastor’s own personal anecdotes and information. Those sections are in red font.*

**100 Missions in 10 Years Sermon
Acts 1:1-11
*Look to the One Who Called You to Be His Witness***

You don’t need me to tell you that we live in a world that his hurting; we live a world that is filled with hopelessness and with hatred. We were reminded of that again a couple weeks ago with yet another school shooting, this time in Texas. What in the world would drive someone to do such a horrific thing? It must be someone was hurting, feeling hopeless, and filled with hatred. In the aftermath, people are left hurting, feeling hopeless, and even filled with hatred toward the gunman and others who could have or even should have been able to prevent this from happening.

We witness these sorts of events, and our hearts go out to those who are directly impacted by them. It’s hard not to feel discouraged ourselves. It seems like more often evil is winning out over good. As much as we’d like to think something like this will never happen again, we’ve been around long enough to know that probably won’t be the case. Yet, as true as that might be, I hope and pray this brings into clearer focus the importance and relevance of our Christian witness in our lives. Yes, as Christians, our witness will always be relevant because Jesus will always be who he is. The King is still in his castle, Jesus is still ruling on his throne and ruling all things for the benefit of his Church.

This same Jesus has called us to be his witnesses in this world that is hurting and dying. And isn’t that what we’re being reminded of today as our focus is on the mission that Christ has given us and hear more about WELS’ 100 Missions in 10 Years initiative? As we consider this, it all this starts with each of us. It starts not only with Christ’s call to us to be his witnesses, but it also goes back to **looking to the one who has called us to be his witnesses.** And you and I, through the eyes of faith, have witnessed what the disciples witnessed at Christ’s ascension.

The book of Acts picks up where the Gospel of Luke left off because both books have the same human author. Luke tells us at the end of his Gospel that as Jesus appeared to his disciples, he walked them through the truths of Scripture to help them see with the eyes of faith that he was the Promised Savior. In our sermon text, we’re told that he gave them **many convincing proofs that he was alive.** These convincing proofs are like a medical examiner testifying in a trial, providing overwhelming evidence as to the cause of death of a murder victim. The M.E. provides charts, illustrations, and medical evidence to prove exactly how and why the victim died so that the judge, jury, and everyone in the courtroom is absolutely convinced there could be no other cause of death.

Jesus did that, too, except he gave overwhelming evidence that he was alive. He appeared to his disciples on numerous occasions. He ate in front of them so they could see he was not a ghost. He showed them his hands and feet so they could see the nail marks. He invited Thomas to touch his side. He appeared to them along the Sea of Galilee and sat and ate with them. And he appeared to hundreds of others, giving overwhelming evidence that Christ indeed has been raised from the dead.

You and I are no less witnesses of Christ’s resurrection than they. On Easter Sunday, through the eyes of faith we sing hymns like, “I know that my Redeemer lives, what comfort this sweet sentence gives! He lives, he lives, who once was dead! He lives my ever-living Head.” Through the eyes of faith, we’ve all sung, “There in the ground his body lay, light of the world by darkness slain. Then bursting forth in glorious day, up from the grave he rose again. And as he stands in victory, sins curse has lost its grip on me. For I am his and he is mind, bought with the precious blood of Christ.”

My friends, **look to the One who has called you to be his witness!** He is risen! He has conquered sin, death, and the devil. Christ is risen! He lives to give us hope. He lives to give us joy even in the face of death. As a parish pastor, one of the greatest joys I have is to sit with God’s people as they are dying, to point people like Paul, Wilbert, Ray, Lenore, and their loved ones to Jesus’ words, “I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me will live even though he dies. And whoever lives and believes in me will never die.” The resurrected Lord is the One who has called you to be his witnesses, and he equips you and me with the power of his resurrection and what that means for us – forgiveness and eternal life!

**Look to the One who has called you to be his witness**. He is now ascended into heaven. And as he is seated at God’s right hand, he is ruling over all things, as Paul reminds us in Ephesians 1. God placed all things under his feet, and he now rules and controls everything for the benefit of the church, his people, you and I who are his witnesses. He is the One who rules the events of history and does cause good to come out of evil. He is the One who is above all the powers in heaven, on earth, and under the earth who governs and guides all things so that we can be his faithful witnesses.

And before he left this earth, **look to the One who empowers us with his Holy Spirit.** To his disciples he promised that he would send the Holy Spirit. On Pentecost we saw how the Holy Spirit brought 3,000 people to faith through the Gospel that Peter preached. Throughout the book of Acts we see how the Holy Spirit gave power to the likes of Peter and Paul. How he turned their hearts and empowered them to be bold witnesses and through their bold witnessing the Spirit brought others to faith.

We, too, are witnesses of the Spirit’s power. Just two weeks ago, little Anna Joy was baptized at our church. You know what happens at a baptism. There’s water. There’s the Word. What we see with the naked eye appears to be a cute rite or ritual, at best. But we know better. There is the promised Spirit, working through water and the Word, bringing yet another one into his family of believers. We, too, are witnesses of the Spirit’s power for no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” but by the Holy Spirit. Your faith, your ability to see Jesus, and to know the peace, hope, and joy that we have through him, his resurrection, and his Word, all are a testimony to the Spirit’s power. Again, **look to the One who has called you to be his witness!**

He is the one who has called you to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth. That means for me, as a Christian (not just as a pastor), he has called me to be a witness on 1131 E Bluebird Ct in Hernando, FL. He has called me to be a witness at the YMCA, in the Walmart down the road, and in other places in my own community. In other words, he has called each of us to be his witnesses in our personal lives and through the ministries in our home congregations. He has also called us to be his witnesses collectively, together as a group of believers in Judea, our own country, and in Samaria and to the ends of the earth throughout the world.

Again, this is why we’re here, isn’t it? We’re here to hear more about home mission churches and the 100 Missions in 10 Years initiative. . . to see how we can do our part in participating in and supporting this initiative, to celebrate the Holy Spirit’s work through our home missions. And there’s a sense of urgency to all this. **There’s a strong sense of urgency to all this.** As the disciples were standing there watching as Jesus ascended into heaven, the angels bring them back to reality. They’re told, this same Jesus who left will return. Jesus is coming again. And in the meantime, we have work to do: to be his faithful witnesses!

And yet as I think of all this, as I **look to the One who has called me to be his witness,** as I look at his resurrection, his ascension, and how he has equipped us all with Word and Sacraments, and the Spirit’s power, I stand convicted and ashamed for I have not always been a faithful witness. That’s true of my words and actions: even there I haven’t always witnessed the Christian faith in ways that are fitting and honorable and pleasing to God. But it goes way beyond that. There have been times where I’ve been lazy and failed to see the sense of urgency. There have been times when I’ve been afraid to witness out of fear of what others might say. There have been times where I simply haven’t witnessed because I thought the person was beyond hope and so I didn’t trust in the Spirit’s power to work through the Word. There have been times when I’ve been so self-absorbed by my life, my priorities, or my desire for comfort and ease that I have failed to speak, to witness, and to testify to others these truths I say I hold dear to my heart, but I don’t share. I’m guessing you might have similar personal confessions.

My friends, own them. Confess them. Repent of them. Don’t pass them off as, “It just isn’t my personality or my strength.” Don’t pass them off by saying, “I just don’t know what to say.” You do. Let’s repent for the ways we have not been his witnesses and as we do, let’s **look again to the One who has called us to be his witnesses.** Look to him and remember the significance of ascension.

I recently read a weekly email from one of our home missionaries. It was his weekly email he sends out to his people prepping them for what is coming on Sunday. They were celebrating the festival of the ascension and he posed this question: “Which is more significant: Christ’s coming into this world or his departure?” The quick answer of some might be, “Well, Christmas because without coming into this world there would be no death or resurrection.” True, but Christ’s ascension into heaven is God’s final stamp of approval on all the redeeming work of Jesus Christ. Not only did his death on the cross and resurrection from the grave forgive our sins, including those sins you personally confessed moments ago. But because of Christ’s perfect witnessing, you are perfect witnesses. Christ was the perfect witness to his disciples, to the religious leaders, to the Samaritan woman at the well, and to countless others. He gave perfect personal witness through his entire life, and through faith you now are also perfect witnesses.

As his witnesses, we carry with us a message of peace, hope, and joy because Christ is alive! As his witnesses, we share that message with confidence because we have his promise of the Holy Spirit working through our witnessing. As his witnesses, we have Christ who rules all things, *all* things, for our good, so that through school shootings and other tragedies, he will continue to accomplish good. **This is the One who has called you to be his witnesses in our hometowns, through our congregations, through the work of WELS both at home and abroad.** And this is the One that has led WELS leaders and its members to support this aggressive initiative to open 100 Missions over the next 10 years. Let’s do that as we serve as his personal witnesses. Let’s do that as we pray for our missionaries and their missions. Let’s do that generously supporting the work done here and supporting the work of our synod, so that more and more people can witness what we have through the eyes of faith. May the One who called us to be his witnesses grant that, to his glory, and the good of his Kingdom. Amen.