

Luke 24:44 -53 ⁴⁴ He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." ⁵⁰ When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. ⁵¹ While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. ⁵² Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. ⁵³ And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

“God’s Eulogy”

Ah yes, the funeral eulogy, you got to love giving those things. It’s not easy to give a eulogy. The word literally means good word and to eulogize is to speak good things about someone. In most cases, finding nice things to say about a person you’ve known since way back when is not a difficult thing. The task is to try to limit what you say and still come out summarizing who this person was. Yet, for some people finding something good to say about them can be difficult. As a minister, the task of eulogizing a person often falls back on me. Usually, I get a family together a day or so before the funeral and get them to start telling me stories about who this person was. I don’t tell any of the stories in the eulogy. That gathering simply gives me a sense of who that person was and then I try to say how God worked through this person to love or to bless her family, friends and even whole communities.

Well, in my first year of ministry I received a taste of how precarious it can be for the minister to eulogize a person. Wisely, they told us in seminary to avoid it if at all possible because our role at a funeral is to proclaim resurrection in Christ. It started when the local funeral director called me and said a family wanted the Presbyterian minister to do their father’s funeral because Grandma so and so from way back when was a Presbyterian and that’s what they thought they must be. I was unable to get the family to agree to meet with me for story time. It would have been too difficult for them. One of the daughters led me to suspect that her father wasn’t all that great a man. I also asked a few people who might have known him or at least of him and they all agreed he wasn’t the finest example of a human being. So, I was left with a mess on my hands. I had to do the funeral for a man most people regarded as “Hell bound”. My usual funeral plan wasn’t going to work because I had no evidence that God had blessed these folks through their father. This family was a prime example of why we should be wary of saying that God loves us like a father. That’s not what God the Father means. We call God Father because that’s what Jesus did, but to say that God loves us as our Father’s loved us is a mess better avoided.

The funeral came and went. I stood there before his two daughters and son as they wept. I sensed there was a lot of unfinished business there. So, instead of eulogizing I talked a bit about how to deal with grief and that death is not the end of things. As I expected, I didn’t get paid for the funeral. I didn’t mind

that. But the thing that hangs over me about it all is that I was unable to tell a grieving family that their father was a blessing to them. That’s pretty messed up, I think. This funeral had no eulogy. Therefore, I am saddened with the thought that this man’s life may have lacked God’s blessing and therefore there was no reason for his family to bless God and be thankful for their father. If assumptions or should I say judgments are correct, this man was one of those people that make it hard for us to say that Jesus Christ is Lord for if he is Lord why would he let someone be so hurtful to his own family. We have all known people like this and I’m sure it is a question we’ve all asked.

This is Ascension Sunday. Today we celebrate that Jesus the resurrected one has ascended to the right hand of the Father and from there reigns in the power of the Holy Spirit, and by power I mean the power that comes through the vulnerability of self-giving love. We would like to believe that the way God reigns in his creation is through smiting or cursing the wicked. As far as the man I spoke of earlier, we want to ask why God didn’t get that man for causing so much hurt. I can’t answer that question; but I can say that Jesus shows us that God rules in his creation by suffering with us not by getting those who cause suffering. To that weeping family I could have said yet not knowing the full details that Jesus has been with them in the sufferings they have endured from being the children of this man, that their expectations of God should be that somehow God is going to take all the hurt this man caused them and instead of letting it remain as evil hurt, use it as the means of blessing them with knowing who God himself is so that they might bless God and be a blessing to others. If I have not said this clear enough please stop me and I will try to say it again. The reign of Christ is that he will bless us by taking our hurts and showing us how he has been with us through them and then those hurts to be the means by which he blesses us with new life in himself. He reigns by suffering with his own and healing us in such a way as we wind up knowing God himself.

Well, if you are wondering why I’m talking about eulogies and blessing, I have no short answer to give you other than at the end of our passage from Luke he says that the disciples were continually in the temple blessing God. The Greek word for blessing is eulogia – literally, eulogy. The apostles spent their days after Jesus ascended in the temple eulogizing Jesus and God the Father in the voice created within them by the blessing of the new life in Christ imparted to them in the gift of the Holy Spirit. The evidence that Jesus Christ has ascended and reigns is that there are those who in full knowledge of knowing what God the Trinity has done in, through, and as him for themselves and for all people can eulogize him, can bless him.

The Trinity works in our lives and through us by means of blessing us so that we are a blessing to others. Jesus, the Son blesses us by letting us know that he is the one who suffers with us, who prays continually for us, and reveals the self-giving love of God to us. This blessing bears its fruit as we get involved with Jesus’ blessing of others. If you’ve got a friend at work suffering through a divorce, or grief, or whatever, this means you must be part of God’s blessing to them by suffering through it with them. Be the one who is intentional about being there and listening. When I went through divorce, I had darn near a whole

congregation of people being that blessing to me. That’s what you call preacher’s perks and it made a huge difference. That perk gets less and less for each individual in a congregation. Often times it is only the minister and a few others being the blessing. For people outside the church, praise God, he puts people in their lives who suffer with them. It is a rare person who suffers alone and if they do it is by their own choice. Yet, it is still our task to proclaim that in this sharing Jesus is suffering with them.

I realize that there are those here today who are hurting and need to be blessed with knowing that Jesus is in this with them. To these I say come. I will listen to you and share in your hurts and not only me. You are surrounded by some wonderful people who have been blessed and who will walk with you through your hurts until you see Jesus and are blessed in him. Amen.