At the risk of showing my age, I would like to test your memories this morning. What do [The Rolling Stones,](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1NN786hXMLg) [the Temptations](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8pD0TUneYxs), [Dusty Springfield,](http://https//www.youtube.com/watch?v=0QsQLvzZwzo) and [Marvin Gaye](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G1WWHwBn4x8) with the Supremes singing back-up vocals all have in common? Some of you may not even know those names. At some point over the span of a year, they all recorded [“Can I Get A Witness?”](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Can_I_Get_a_Witness). A Gospel style hit that got its start in 1963. While the song didn’t have remarkable lyrics, and the melody only consists of about three notes, it put Marvin Gaye on the Billboard 100 top songs list. The hook that inspired such popularity was the refrain that sounded like a revival preacher’s chant, repeated over and over: “Can I get a witness?” In other words, can anybody out there affirm that I’m telling the truth?

As Jesus talked with his followers in the days after the resurrection, he found himself repeating the same words over and over for them too. As we heard a moment ago, in the reading from Acts 1, they still didn’t fully understand how his reign was supposed to work. We can imagine them saying, “Okay, Lord, we get it that you had to die, and be raised from the dead to prove that even death has no power greater than yours. We get it that you came to offer forgiveness of sins. That’s great. But now that you’ve done all that, isn’t it about time for you to overthrow the corrupt Roman oppressors?

Can we get on with the revolt, Lord? Isn’t it time for you to restore the kingdom to Israel?” The disciples were still trying to make Jesus into a military hero. They still didn’t understand that Jesus had come to *save* the whole world. Time was growing short. Jesus knew he would not be with them much longer. But the only way to help them see the truth was to tell them again and again, over and over. So, just as he had done before, on the road to Emmaus, Jesus started at the beginning.

Each week, as we recite the Apostles’ Creed. I wonder if we consider that it is organized around God’s identity as three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but the central part of the creed focuses on the work of Jesus from the moment of his conception through his ascension and heavenly reign. As often as we say those words, I wonder if we really pay attention to the mystery they describe. I wonder if we realize how each element of the life of Jesus affirms both his divine and human natures, how each phrase we repeat when we say, “I believe” connects the earthly life of Jesus to everything that had come before, and everything that would follow.

That narrow band of time when Jesus walked on earth was the turning point of salvation history, and this final moment Jesus shares with his disciples falls into a similar pattern: a narrow band between what was, and what will be. First, Jesus repeats what he has been telling them – and us – all along: since the beginning of creation, God’s plan has been clear. Jesus is the culmination of the whole story up to now. Every bit of his life and ministry is the answer to Old Testament questions, the fulfillment of Old Testament promises. It all comes down to this: Jesus is the Son of God, the Savior of the world.

Like the disciples, we might say, “Yes, Lord. So what now? Now that you have topped every miracle in the history of God’s people, now that you have even defeated death itself, what are you going to do now? Are you finally going to restore the kingdom?” But Jesus lifts up his hands as Moses did when he blessed Joshua as the one who would lead God’s people into the promised land, He lifts up his hands in blessing, as Elijah did when his successor, Elisha, asked for a double portion of Elijah’s prophetic spirit. Jesus lifts up his hands, with the marks of the nails still showing, and he blesses his followers.

Then he says, in effect, “It’s up to you. You are going to be my witnesses.” And then he’s gone. I don’t know about you, but if I had been standing there, looking up at the soles of Jesus’ feet disappearing into the clouds, my gut reaction would probably have been something like, “Wait a minute! What’s all this! , I would be dumbfounded. How could Jesus expect so much of me, when I am so clueless.

What has happened to the disciples, those followers of Jesus who were scared out of their wits on Easter morning, They had already lost Jesus once, on the cross. And their sorrow at his death is completely understandable. But now, when they lose him a second time, they rejoice! What happened to them in the meantime? Well, they became witnesses. But how can we possibly *do* that? you may be wondering. Well, notice that Jesus didn’t say, “Go ***do*** witnessing.” He said, “You ***will* *be*** my witnesses.” God is not asking us to add more things to our To Do list. God is asking us to make a new ***To Be*** list. Not that we need more items to check off, but that each item on our To Be list makes us more like Jesus.

Jesus calls us *to be* hungrier for the Word of God. Instead of just signing up for more projects, participating in more programs, and doing more work, Jesus calls us *to be* **more aware** of the needs we see around us. And that is our witness. But we cannot be witnesses on our own. In fact, we can’t be Christ’s witnesses under our own power at all. If we depended on our own strength, we would only be witnessing to ourselves. Jesus told his followers they would be “clothed with power from on high.” Very shortly, we will celebrate that initial baptism in the Holy Spirit that came like a mighty rushing wind on Pentecost. The same power that John ascribes to God, Jesus, and the Spirit becomes evident in the lives of the apostles. My friends, Jesus expects great things of us, and the good news is that he will give us the Holy Spirit anew to accomplish that work.”

This is the central theme of Ascension: Jesus has completed his work on earth. Now it’s our turn. He leaves, but not without saying a proper Goodbye. He leaves, but not without reassuring us that this is not the end, but the beginning. Jesus calls us to live our faith, willing to share good news, and to be aware that our very lives are the witness. How we live shows Jesus to others. We have not been given this grace to keep it locked up inside this building, So the disciples returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and they were continually in the temple, blessing God. Isn’t than an interesting way to put it, “blessing” God? Jesus had blessed them as he left their sight.

Now they were blessing God in the temple, as they waited to be clothed with the power of the Holy Spirit. That narrow band of time, the bridge between what was and what will be, has come to completion. What lies ahead is the Kingdom of God, in which we all participate, to which we all belong. As our lives bear witness to this good news, we are called to receive Christ’s blessing, to accept the power of the Holy Spirit working in and through us, changing us as it did those first disciples.

I will close with a question for each of, Can we be a witness?