

Acts 1: 8 - You will be my witnesses.

Jesus is about to leave this world. Before leaving, he gathers his disciples to speak to them. What a key moment in the lives of the disciples. This is the Lord, the one for whom they had left everything. This is the one they saw doing miracles, the one they heard teaching, the one with whom they spent three years of their lives, the one they saw dying on the cross but the one they now see resurrected. Here is their chief, their Lord, their savior. Here's the Messiah, the Son of God himself. He is about to leave, but he has something left to say to them. The Lord Jesus has one last thing to say to his disciples.

We read it in verse 8, the last words to come out of the mouth of Jesus before his departure:

Verse 8: "You will receive a power, that of the Holy Spirit coming upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea, in Samaria and to the ends of the earth."

The very last thing Jesus said to his disciples is this - you will be my witnesses.

Jesus gives his disciples an enormous responsibility. He said, "The world needs me, the good news, the gospel. The world doesn't know me but it needs to know me. But I'm leaving. I'm not going to stay in this world anymore. If you want the world to know me, you're going to have to be my witnesses."

Those who receive the command of Jesus.

We must understand that Jesus gives his disciples an enormous responsibility, to testify for the King of kings and the Lord of lords. To be the spokesperson for the son of God, what a responsibility. On a human level, the proclamation and advancement of the Kingdom depends on the disciples of Jesus. And what do we know about these men to whom Jesus speaks? Among them is Peter, the one who denied the Lord 3 times after insisting that he would never do it. There were James and John who had sought the place of honor before all the disciples. There was Thomas who refused to believe that Jesus had risen. These are men who had abandoned their Lord at the time of his crucifixion. These are men who often lacked courage and wisdom. These were men who often found it difficult to understand their teacher's teaching. Even in verse 6, we see that they are still obsessed with this idea of an earthly Kingdom. These men are far from perfect, but Jesus chooses them for this crucial task in world history. He could have sent angels to proclaim the Kingdom, but he chooses sinful men, forgiven men, men transformed by his grace and by his Spirit. They will be his witnesses.

And this choice should encourage us. Jesus continues to give this enormous responsibility to his people today. No Christian can say, "This command isn't given to me." No Christian can say, "Witnessing for Jesus is for others, but not for me." Our past failures do not make us unfit to serve the Lord. Weak faith does not close the door to service. In a way, the weaker you are, the better. Why say that? Because the weaker we are, the more the power and the glory of Jesus are seen in us.

We have to understand that the role of witness is not reserved for experienced pastors or missionaries. Not at all. Whatever your gifts, whatever your background, if you are a Christian, Jesus Christ tells you: you will be my witness.

This word witness is a legal word. We know the role of witnesses in a court. They just have to talk about what they have seen and experienced. And in the courts, anyone can be called to testify. Both a homeless person and a billionaire can testify to the same thing. A child can testify. Someone who has no qualifications, no diploma, who has nothing, can testify. Jesus tells every Christian, whether they feel capable or not, you will be my witnesses.

The contents of the command of Jesus Christ.

As we have just seen, Jesus gives his disciples the difficult task of being his witnesses. And Jesus is very precise. He explains, in 5 words, exactly what the disciples will have to do: You will be my witnesses. We have already seen the meaning of this word witness. A witness was someone who had to explain in court what he had seen or experienced. He had to tell the truth, the whole truth. He was not free to add anything. It's always the case in court. Often when there is a crime, an accident, an attack, the police look for witnesses. They look for people who have seen what happened.

And in court, witnesses are asked questions to discover the truth. So when Jesus says, "You will be my witnesses," He says, "You are going to talk about what you have seen and heard. You will tell the truth."

Look at verse 3 of this chapter: "He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God."

In the days after his resurrection, Jesus presents himself alive to the disciples. He gives them evidence. He tells them about the Kingdom. Why is he doing this? Because he is preparing them as his witnesses. Followers of Jesus will have to go out into the world and tell what they saw. They will talk about the evidence. They will talk about miracles, healings. They will explain the teaching they received from the mouth of Jesus. They will talk about his death, his crucifixion. They will explain why Jesus died, that he died to pay the debt for our sin. They will explain what the death of Jesus achieved: salvation, forgiveness for everyone who believes. And they will talk about his resurrection, how Jesus overcame death. You see,

Jesus will be at the center of their message. It does not say, "You will be witnesses." He says, "You will be MY witnesses. "You are going to talk about ME. I will be at the center of your testimony." And when we read this book of the acts of the apostles, that's what we see. Read Peter's speech on the day of Pentecost. He says in Acts 2.32 "It is this Jesus whom God raised up. We are all witness to it." Acts 3.15 "You killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead; we are witness to it." The disciples do not speak for themselves. They speak about Jesus Christ. They are witnesses to Jesus Christ. Their purpose is to share the good news of Jesus Christ.

This is clearly the purpose of the apostle Paul. Listen to what he was told at the start of his ministry: Acts 22.15 "for you will serve as a witness to all men of the things you have seen and heard."

And for us too, we must never forget that our goal is to bear witness to Jesus Christ. There are facts that we must communicate about this historical figure. He must be presented as the Son of God. We must speak of his death and his resurrection. We present him as the one who saves us from our sin.

When Jesus says: you will be MY witnesses, it reminds us that our purpose is not to promote our church. The world around us needs Jesus. It needs to see Jesus, to understand who he is, what he did, why he did it. The church and we who are part of it are called to be witnesses to Jesus.

The promise that accompanies the command of Jesus.

It must be said that for many Christians, the prospect of being a witness for Jesus often fills us with fear. Even the Greek word for witness suggests that it can be a difficult, even dangerous, task. The word is "Martus". This is the word that gives us the word "Martyr". And for the disciples in front of Jesus in Acts 1, many experienced martyrdom for Jesus. Witnessing Jesus Christ can be difficult. So faced with this task that Jesus gives to his church we can feel very weak.

The command is difficult but with it Jesus gives a promise: Verse 8 - "But you will receive power, when the Holy Spirit comes upon you."

In verses 4 and 5, Jesus had already told his disciples to stay in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit came on them. And in verse 8 he promises them this power. And it's true that the Holy Spirit came to the apostles in a special way. Jesus, before his death, had already promised them the Holy Spirit: "When the comforter comes, the Spirit of truth, he will lead you into all truth;" John 16:13.

And these apostles experienced the power and the presence of the Spirit in a way that we do not experience. The Spirit allowed them to write parts of the Word of God. The Spirit allowed them to work miracles and signs.

But even if our experience of the Spirit is different, the principle does not change. Without the presence and power of the Spirit of Christ, we can do nothing but with his presence and power, through the Holy Spirit who lives in us, we can be faithful witnesses.

And what's interesting is that Jesus promises the power of the Spirit even before telling the disciples what they should do. Look at the order in verse 8. He promises his Spirit and then he assigns the task. And Jesus never asks us to do something without also giving us his Spirit to strengthen and encourage us. Jesus does not want us to try to testify for him alone, without the help of his Spirit. Jesus promises you the power of the Holy Spirit. He promises you "the dynamite" of the Holy Spirit - that's the root of the word in Greek. And we know that dynamite, in any situation, changes everything. My friends, it is the same with the Holy Spirit who is promised to us when we testify for Jesus Christ. Jesus promises you this power.

The extent of the command of Jesus Christ.

In verse 6 of chapter 1, the disciples ask a question that shows us that their understanding of the ministry and of the Kingdom of Jesus is far too limited. They say, "Lord, is this the time that you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" They are still interested in geographical Israel, a liberation from the Romans. They think that the day of glory for the land will soon arrive. But in his response to verse 8, Jesus explains to them that the Kingdom, his Kingdom will extend far beyond the borders of Israel. The disciples will be his witnesses, but it will not be limited to Jerusalem. It will certainly start in Jerusalem, but according to Jesus, it will go much further: "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all of Judea, in Samaria and to the ends of the earth." My Kingdom, he tells them, will be a world Kingdom. I will have witnesses in all the nations of the world, among all peoples.

And by saying that, Jesus points out what is taught all over the Bible. What did God tell Abram in the first book of the Bible: "All the families of the earth will be blessed in your seed."

We sing in the psalms: "All the ends of the earth will think of the Lord and turn to him; All the families of the nations will bow down before your face." Psalm 22.27 "I set you up to be the light of the nations, to carry my salvation to the ends of the earth." Isaiah 49: 6

And this promise is fulfilled even in this book of the Acts of the Apostles. In chapters 1-7, the gospel is preached in Jerusalem. Chapters 8-12 it is preached in Judea and Samaria and then from chapter 13 to 28 the kingdom of God is announced to the ends of the earth. The Church of Jesus Christ answers the call of

their leader. They come out of Jerusalem, largely as a result of persecution and wherever they go, they bear witness to the person, the work and the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

And it should be noted that the book of Acts ends in Rome, the center, the capital of the most powerful empire of the time. And what is Paul doing in Rome? "He preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ with confidence and without hindrance." (Acts 28:31)

And we are gathered here because of those who obeyed Jesus' command to proclaim his salvation to the ends of the earth. We are the extremities of which Jesus speaks. The church in France exists because witnesses of Jesus came to France with the gospel. And this same missionary mandate is given to us in the 21st century. The Church of Jesus Christ still exists to bear witness to him all over the world. Our local church exists to witness to the Lord. King Jesus has entrusted this task to us. We exist to proclaim the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus. We have to announce it to "Jerusalem" first. For us that means in Orvault and in Nantes. Our testimony begins where we are. It is the responsibility of each church but also of each Christian who is part of the church. Your Jerusalem is your home, your place of work, your neighborhood, your friends. God has placed us as a church here in Orvault but He has placed us as individuals here and there. In schools, in associations, in families, all of us with our different surroundings but all of us with the same goal: to be a witness of Jesus Christ.

But we must also engage in the proclamation of the gospel elsewhere, in Judea and Samaria. We are committed to the proclamation of the gospel in Rennes, in Bordeaux, in Paris. We pray for France. We support ministries elsewhere in France, the faculty in Aix which prepares the pastors of tomorrow. And then the ends of the earth. We support missionaries around the world so that they can share the gospel. We pray for the church elsewhere. If God calls us, we go to the ends of the earth. But these days we have the ends of the earth here in our backyard. Many countries are closed to the proclamation of the gospel and it is very difficult for Christians to go there, but the people of these countries come to us. I think the 21st century is unique in the history of the gospel. We live in an international village with people from all over the world around us.

However, as we have already seen, there are still 7000 people groups, 7000 ethnic groups in the world, who have no access to the gospel message, an estimated 3 billion people, without any access to the gospel message. They don't have a Bible in their language, there is no local church to proclaim the Kingdom of God. 2000 years ago Jesus Christ gave this task to his church and there are still 3 billion people without access to the gospel message. How is this possible? It is said that of all the money donated to churches around the world, only 5% is spent on mission work. And only 1% of that 5% is spent on people without access to the gospel. In other words, out of 100 euros donated by Christians around the world, 5 cents are devoted to the evangelization of people not reached by the gospel. 3% of the missionaries who are sent to the world are sent to the 3 billion who have no access to the message of the gospel.

In a very short time, we will stand before Jesus Christ. What are we going to say to him when he asks us what we have done to obey the missionary mandate? We exist to declare the glory of Jesus Christ among the nations. Jesus calls us to give our lives. This is the goal of our life. It is for this task that we have been called so what are we going to tell him? There are missionaries who have to give up their work on the mission field for lack of support. The reason why millions of people die without ever hearing about Jesus is that the church of Jesus Christ, including us here in Orvault, we are far too concerned about the things of this world. We seek a life of comfort while 3 billion people die without ever having read the Bible, never having heard the message that Jesus commands us to announce. Our neighbors die without hearing the gospel. What are we going to say to Jesus? If you do not have a heart for the world, if you do not weep for the world, you have understood nothing of the life for which Jesus saved you. You simply do not understand your identity as a witness. How can we explain our lack of compassion? How can the church explain that out of 100 € only 5 cents is given to the proclamation of the Kingdom of God, where Jesus is not known? We make so few sacrifices for the advance of the Kingdom. We give so little of our time, our energy, our resources to make known the one who gave everything to save us.

Jesus tells you, "The world lives in ignorance. The world needs the gospel. Billions are dying in total ignorance of the gospel. I give you this task. I saved you. I bought you with my own blood. Now you are mine and I am sending you with my Spirit in you to be my witness. Go, and make disciples of all nations. It is a command. In John 14 Jesus said to his disciples, "If you love me, keep my commandments". Do you love Christ? Are you keeping this command? Go and be my witness!