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“WITNESS”
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Acts 1:1-14

In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning² until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.³ After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.⁴ While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. “This,” he said, “is what you have heard from me; ⁵for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

⁶So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” ⁹When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. ¹¹They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

¹²Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day’s journey away. ¹³When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. ¹⁴All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

Notes

This is a critical passage for grasping the development of the early Christian communities. In verse 2, Luke (the writer of Acts) describes the *Holy Spirit*, which becomes a central theme in this book, appearing 57 times. In fact, Jesus (v.5) underlines the importance of Holy Spirit, which links the disciples to the life and work of Jesus. Verse 6 reveals a key misunderstanding that the disciples still held: they were looking for a political-military kingdom for Israel that would drive out the Romans. Instead (see v. 8), Jesus directs them to be *witnesses*. (The Greek word is *martyrs*.) This in fact is a fulfillment of Isaiah 49:6, God’s word to the people of Israel: “I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.” One final note: prayer in community is central in their response to this task. (See verse 14).

In his masterful paraphrase of the Bible called *The Message*, Eugene Peterson offers this introduction to the book of Acts: It is Luke’s task, Peterson writes, “to prevent us from becoming mere spectators to Jesus, fans of the Message. Of the original quartet of writers on Jesus, Luke alone continues to tell the story as the apostles and disciples live it into the next generation. The remarkable thing is that it continues to be essentially the same story.” Luke continues his narration with hardly a break, a pause perhaps to dip his pen in the inkwell, writing in the same style, using the same vocabulary.”

Questions

1. Read the quotation above from Eugene Peterson. How is our story as the Christian community essentially a continuation of Jesus’? How have we also failed to live up to that task?
2. This passage says that the Holy Spirit equips us in our call to follow Jesus. How do you describe the work of the Holy Spirit? How have you felt the Spirit moving in your life?
3. Put yourself in the apostles’ position; How would you feel if Jesus gave you the task of Acts 1:8?
4. When you look at the word *witness* in verse 8, what does that mean to you? How does Jesus call his followers to be witnesses today? What does it mean about our words and our actions?