* Acts 1:6-14
* Thanks for inviting me today
* I was walking the streets of Middletown last week, between Hope House and The Gathering
	+ Guy saw I was carrying a Bible, came up to me
	+ Please pray for me and my hearing
	+ I became full of myself, placed my hands on his ears and offered 8 minute prayer for the guy and his ears
	+ Finally AMEN
	+ Then full of myself, well, do you hear better now?
	+ Huh?? My hearing is next Tuesday at the courthouse
* I am a Certified Lay Minister in the United Methodist Church
* If you have any questions about what a CLM does, or how to become one, holler
* The next class of CLM Academy will begin in September and registration deadline is August 15
* I probably shared this before, but years ago,
* I was in a district training class that was led by our then co-Lay Leader Ralph Malany
	+ Ralph gave each of us in the class a bag and told us to tell a brief Faith based story about the contents
		- My bag had a hatchet
	+ I really did do this – I told people turn in their Bibles to Book of Acts
* Today, we do indeed look at this passage from Acts of the Apostles
	+ 28 chapters about the earliest believers, the Disciples
		- The amazing arrival of the Holy Spirit
		- The stoning of Stephen
		- The conversion of Saul
		- Paul’s three missionary journeys
		- Wonderful stories about people of faith
	+ Yet how does Acts of the Apostles begin
	+ As it should, with Jesus
	+ Yes, first story in Acts of the Apostles is about Jesus
	+ A good place to begin
	+ And a very good beginning for me
	+ Like Peter, I am impulsive, impatient
	+ This begins with impatient people
	+ Lord, is \*THIS\* the time you will restore the Kingdom to Israel?
		- No, not for you to know
	+ Now, Now, Now
		- No, not for you to know
	+ Then Jesus repeated the promise of Pentecost when he said
		- You will receive the power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you
	+ Next week is Pentecost when we celebrate the wonderful occasion when God sent the Holy Spirit to be with those first believers
		- The amazing story in Acts 2
		- The rush of wind that came over the disciples
	+ Today, we look at the ascension of Jesus
	+ Last time I spoke was Transfiguration Sunday, the Sunday before Lent
	+ Today Ascension
	+ Sometimes we ask for signals, signs of what is to come
	+ Think the Disciples wanted a sign from Jesus
		- Like the ascension itself wasn’t a sign
	+ Jesus, please let us know what is coming
	+ So Jesus promised that Disciples would receive power when the Holy Spirit came
* And what power the Spirit brings
	+ What are some of the Gifts of the Spirit, that Paul wrote about in 1 Corinthians 12
		- Verse 7
		- Word of wisdom
		- Word of knowledge
		- Faith
		- Healing
		- Miracles
		- Prophecy
		- Discernment
		- Tongues
		- Interpretation of tongues
	+ Then in verse 28, these jobs
		- Apostles
		- Prophets
		- Teachers
		- Miracle workers
		- helpers
		- Healers
		- Leaders
		- Tongue talkers
* So yeah, the power that Jesus promised came for the Disciples
* And comes to us today
* For each of you have 1 or more gift of the spirit
* And if you don’t know what that gift is, take a class on discovering your spiritual gifts
* Our district is doing this in July at Middletown First UMC
* Then what did Jesus tell the Disciples
* And what does Jesus tell us
	+ You will be my witnesses
* Witnesses, where
	+ Jerusalem
	+ Judea
	+ Samaria
	+ And to the ends of the earth
* Why did Jesus tell Disciples to be witness in Jerusalem?
	+ Hebrew center of their world
	+ The Temple was there
	+ All Jewish people made annual pilgrimage
		- So traffic
	+ Of course, jubilation of Palm Sunday occurred there
	+ Passion of Maundy Thursday
		- Passover meal
		- Institution of Holy Communion
		- And the so instructive lesson of Jesus washing the Disciples feet
			* Jesus showed us that to lead, we have to serve in humility
	+ So all these great things occurred in Jerusalem
	+ As did the betrayal by Judas Escariot
	+ As did the mock trial before Pilate and Herod
	+ As did the whipping of Jesus
	+ As did the painful walk to Calvary
	+ As did the crucifixion of our Lord and Savior
	+ As did the incredibly painful death Jesus suffered for us
	+ As did the Glory of the empty tomb on that first Easter Sunday
* For all these reasons, Jesus told the disciples to be witnesses in Jerusalem
* And be witnesses in Judea
* Judea province included towns of note
	+ Jericho – very near where Jesus was baptized
	+ Bethany – where Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead
	+ Bethlehem – where Jesus was born in a stable, laid in a manger
	+ Mt of Olives
* Now it gets really interesting in what Jesus said and what he didn’t say
* For he told the disciples to witness in Samaria
* Samarians were outcasts, kinda Jewish, but looked down on by “proper Jews”
* So why did Jesus send the Disciples to Samaria
* We are to witness to, to minister to all
	+ Not just those who live near us
	+ Not just those who live like us
	+ Not just those who look like us
* But to Samaria
* I am intrigued by what Jesus didn’t say
* Why didn’t Jesus send the Disciples to Galilee?
* His earthly home
* Their home
* Where he found them, to make them disciples
* Where they had family
* Where they had homes
* Where they had fishing boats
* Nope, Jesus did not tell his Disciples to go witness in Galilee
	+ Because Jesus was already known there?
	+ Because Jesus was shunned by some in Galilee?
	+ Because Jesus knew the disciples would fall away if they went home?
	+ Because we are called to be outside of our comfort zone
* For that ties into the last locale Jesus listed:
	+ To the ends of the earth
* Are there limits on where we are to go?
* We are to witness wherever we find ourselves
* Paul found himself in prison several times, yet he ministered from inside the cell walls
* I have to include John Wesley reference
* Wesley said that he considered “all the world as my parish”
	+ He did not limit himself to restricted part of town
	+ Wesley taught that we are not to limit our thinking
	+ We are not to think that God is present only inside church buildings
	+ God is not limited to any box into which we might try to limit God
	+ United Methodist connection helps us witness to the ends of the earth
		- But that is not our only means of witness
		- We as individuals can witness outside of church structure
		- We can share good news of God, and do God’s work in all places, in all ways
		- The body of Christ is never holed up inside a building but is sent to the ends of the world to proclaim the Good News
* So Jesus was quite clear of where we are to witness
* Then Acts gets even better
* “when he had said this”
* And
* “as they were watching”
	+ He was lifted up and a cloud took him out of their sight
* Moses, Elijah received similar rides
* Had to be something to see
* You can imagine the disciples, wide-eyed, mouths hanging open
	+ Didja see that?
	+ Wow
	+ What was that?
* When God has some fun with the Disciples
* Angels
	+ God uses angels at interesting times
* Angels ask Why are you looking up toward heaven
* What are you looking at AND
* Just what are you looking for
* Are you looking for instruction
	+ Jesus just gave you instruction
* Are you looking for fireworks
	+ Not Labor Day
	+ Not Rozzi family fireworks show
* Are you looking for Jesus to turn around
	+ Verse 11 reminds us that Jesus will come in the same way as they saw him go up
* Meaning, we don’t know how
* Meaning we don’t know when
	+ Like in verse 7
		- It is not for you to know the times or periods
* So cool to have the same message with same meaning, from 2 different points in the scripture
* First, Disciples ask Now, Jesus, Now?
	+ Nope, and not yours to ask when
* And then the Ascension
	+ Stand there and stare, probably looking stupid
		- At least I know I’d have a stupid expression of my face
	+ He will come in the same way
* So they returned to town, they went to an upper room
* The 11, Mary, and others
* They prayed
* They were a little afraid
* They saw Jesus die on a cross
* They saw how all that he had foretold them came true
* They heard him challenge them to witness, once they received the power of the Holy Spirit
* So they prayed, and waited for the Spirit
* How many of you are good at waiting?
	+ I’m not
	+ Very impatient
* But they were told to wait for the Holy Spirit
* So they put time to good use
* They prayed
* They prayed together
* I’m sure they prayed individually
* How did they pray
	+ I’m sure they praised God
	+ I’m sure they confessed sins
	+ I’m sure they offered genuine thanks
	+ I’m sure they prayed for others
	+ I’m sure they prayed for discernment, for the wisdom to do what is right, when it needs to be done
* That is our prayer
* To receive the power of the Holy Spirit
* To discern the spiritual gift that is ours
* To pray for direction in how to use that gift
* Then to pray for courage to act upon that discernment and that gift
	+ To use that gift, courageously in service to our God
* So, what are you looking for?
* Looking for peace?
* Looking for direction?
* Looking for purpose?
* Looking for a place to belong?
* This is the moment, this is the place
* This is the Savior who is calling us
* Go to the ends of the earth
	+ Be the witness for Jesus
	+ And as Matthew records
		- Go and make disciples
* And know that Jesus will be with us always