* 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