

Read also Isaiah 55:1-5, 10-12. Check out the service at [www.fpcd.org](http://www.fpcd.org).

Right now we are in that forty-day period in which Jesus walked on the earth as the Resurrected Lord, God's Messiah, the victorious Savior.

During the forty days after his crucifixion, he appeared to the apostles from time to time, and he proved to them in many ways that he was actually alive. And he talked to them about the Kingdom of God. Once when he was eating with them, he commanded them, "Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you the gift he promised, as I told you before. John baptized with water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." (Acts 1:3-5)

They were a little fuzzy on what this meant. Did it mean that Israel would be restored and they, as disciples, would rule? Did it mean all struggles would be over and Jesus will inaugurate God's kingdom now? Jesus said, *Only the Father knows when that day will come but here's what you need to know:*

"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere-- in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

We are all familiar with this mandate. It has been called The Great Commission by the church. What it means is that Jesus laid on you and me and all Christians throughout time, the burden of the entire redemptive movement that developed from his crucifixion and resurrection.

Jesus is a risk-taker!

The good news is that the church is still alive. Perhaps that is a miracle! The reality is that we do not want the church to die on our watch.

Some of you embrace spreading the good news about Jesus quite easily. You tell everyone, even the people you are in line with at the grocery store.

Others would rather have a root canal.

It was hard for the disciples to hear this mandate, too. They would rather Jesus come establish God's kingdom now; so they could rule the nation. Perhaps that is why Luke wrote the mandate twice—once in his gospel, and again in Acts.

- Matthew told the mandate as a command. "Go and make disciples!"
- Mark closed his book with two endings. The first ending says that the women said nothing to anybody because they were too frightened. Some

manuscripts add that they reported to Peter and friends only “briefly” that Jesus was risen. Some later manuscripts said when Mary Magdalene told the others but they did not believe her. Mark says later Jesus appeared to them himself and rebuked them for their lack of faith and stubbornness.

So it has not been an easy mandate.

Then, you remember when Jesus told Peter, “Feed my sheep” Peter pointed to John and said, “What about him?”

So let’s just say they did not get started with a shouting hurrah.

But, as Jeff Thorpe explained, Peter did move forward in faith, and as Steve Netniss told us, not too long afterwards, Peter healed a man and preached in Jesus’ name and 5,000 people believed.

Thank goodness Jesus shows up!

When challenged by the ruling authorities, Peter and John were so excited about Jesus that they said, “We can’t stop talking about what we have seen and heard.”

And that is the main thing. This is the goal and the role of the church.

How do I know that?

Every Gospel ends with it. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Acts begins with it.

The disciples did not exactly sit around and themselves determine—we’ve got to have a fundraiser and build a church building. We will hire a band and meet in houses until then. And, we will need to write a New Testament. On the third Sunday we can have a potluck.

Acts tells us about how the church began.

What was their main thing? What did they do? What were they like? How did they take on this monumental commission? Is an exact pattern laid out for us? What is their story?

We know they were ordinary men and women who did not get any special schooling in sharing their faith. We know they had their own homes where they

met together on a regular basis. They sometimes shared their possessions but their property was their own to manage. Sometimes they collected money to send to another church who had economic challenges. Sometimes tragedies happened. People and authorities came against them. Sometimes they experienced extraordinary miracles. Some went out as missionaries. They all prayed together.

They formed the church because they were given something. They existed because they had a story to tell. God spoke for years through the prophets, and those Old Testament prophecies had come to pass in Jesus. The church told his story. New people became Christians.

How would you define 21<sup>st</sup> Century First Presbyterian Church, Duncanville?

We are ordinary men and women who share our faith on the job, in the community, and with friends. We collect money to give to people who have economic challenges. In the past four years we have collected over \$230,000. We send money to missionaries every month. We tell Bible stories here and in public. Sometimes we have problems and we help each other. Sometimes we have experienced extraordinary miracles. When Tristan fell out of a third-story window and you all prayed, we didn't know the outcome. We did not know if he would walk or talk or see. But soon doctors and therapists began saying things like, "This does not happen. A child who experienced such an accident does not get up and start walking within a month."

In the book of Acts there was a story of a man with a life-time disability who was healed in the name of Jesus.

Then, exactly five years ago, Steve and Marna's little Honda Insight had a blowout on I-20. It bounced around from lane to lane at first until it was carried down the road sideways, "driven" by an eighteen-wheeler. During that half-mile sideways "ride," Steve was completely confident and at peace that the driver knew exactly what he was doing. After the truck stopped safely, Steve and Marna learned that the driver did not know he had hit the car. He never saw them because his truck was so high and their car so low. The driver had stopped because he had heard the blowout and thought it was one of his tires. The Bayless's are still driving that car.

We read in Acts how sometimes missionaries were led out of jail during the night, even though shackled to guards. Those people went on to testify to the good news of Jesus's presence with us, in the good and the bad.

How are you staying connected to Jesus in your life, enough so that you do not get distracted by lesser things or disappointments, and you do not focus on the main thing that brings hope? Do you feel down and discouraged because of this thing or that thing that did not go according to your plan? Do you draw back from Jesus when your expectations have not been met? Do you want to just give up and move out to the country and live unto yourself, and say ‘I’ve had it with the world.’

It is tempting. This week I picked up the newspaper. Tuesday, May 2<sup>nd</sup>. Headlines:

- Paramedic shot; suspect dead
- Teen’s shooting death in Balch Spring. He was beloved by students and teachers.
- Despair and hope. Victims of vicious storm need our support.
- UT student accused of fatal stabbing on campus.
- Even the Rangers are “Not so hot.”

This is what our world looks like. There is tremendous need. Could people do better if they have the Lord? Will you bring them that hope?

“Then Jesus led them to Bethany, and lifting up his hands to heaven, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was carried up into heaven” (Lk 24:50-51).

I want you to envision this scene, as if you are there. A friend of mine, Gary Bayer, died in January. He was an actor, director, and Christian. He directed this scene and I want to share it with you. You will hear his voice but you will not see Gary. But put yourself in that scene. Imagine yourself watching Jesus ascend into heaven and let what he has done for you flood over you. (show video)

Jesus is our most precious and important Savior, Lord, and friend. Look at the world’s problems, losses, hurts, dangers. What a blessing to know and live in the Lord’s lifted hands of blessing. Now go and share this good news.

AMEN