

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend David J. Powers
Sunday, May 17, 2026

As we prepare to hear God's word read and proclaimed, I invite you to get comfy in your pews. Close your eyes or take whatever prayer posture is best for you. And let's take a couple deep breaths together. Let's take a deep breath in and breathe it out slowly. Another deep breath in and breathe it out slowly. And breathe in God's mercies. and breathe out God's mercies to others and breathe in God's mercies and breathe out God's mercies to others.

Gracious spirit, you are as close to us as our very next breath. So we pray that you would dwell within us and around us in these moments. That you would quiet any voice within us by your own. That we might hear your word for us this morning, and that in hearing we might be called to lead lives of response. So may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, God, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

This day we draw to a conclusion our Eastertide sermon series, Resurrected Life. And we commend to you the sermons in this series. They can be found on our YouTube page. You can go back and catch up. Next week we turn the page to Pentecost. This text from Acts 1, verses 6-14 really sets the stage for that. It shows what happens just before and then in what happens during the liminal space between the Ascension and Pentecost. So let us listen together for God's word to each of us and indeed to God's church.

So when they had come together, they asked Jesus, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the time or the periods that the Father has set by his own authority, but 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."

When Jesus said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was still going, and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They 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. And then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivette, which is near Jerusalem. It's a Sabbath day's journey away. When 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 and Simon the Zealot, and Judas, son of James. All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer together with certain women, including Mary, the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of our Lord endures forever. Amen.

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So, not only do we celebrate Presbyterian Women this day, but Ascension Sunday as well. This is the scene, the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the preceding verses, just before the ones that we read, Jesus invites his now apostles to gather together there at the mount called Olivette. As they gather together, they have, as Whitney previewed for our children this day, a question of Jesus. It's been one that they have asked him multiple times throughout their ministry. "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" Echoes, as Whitney shared with our children, echoes of that that refrain from the backseat of a summer road trip. Are we there yet, they are asking their savior.

It's a very human question to ask in the midst of uncertainty. We are all a people who enjoy timelines, who want clarity, guarantees; and the disciples are no different. They want to know what is going to happen next. They want to be able to plan and act accordingly. They want the kingdom to come. The disciples in this moment ask for certainty, and instead Jesus gives them a calling. "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth." They will be witnesses, Jesus says. Not experts, not influencers, not apologists with the perfect theological language. They will simply be people who speak and tell stories of what they have seen. That's all a witness is. In our judicial system, there's a request, a swearing in that happens before one witnesses. "Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth? So help you God." All you have to do is tell the truth of what you have experienced. And this is key. The disciples do not yet have the spirit which they will receive at Pentecost. They do not yet have clarity. They do not yet have confidence or a strategy for growing the church. They certainly do not have a polished theology of what they have experienced over the last three years. But they do have something. They have a story. That's really it actually. Or more aptly, they have stories upon stories upon stories. They have seen bread multiplied and fish as well. They have seen a savior who stoops low to wash the feet of his friends. They have seen the pain of the cross endured. And they have seen an empty tomb. They have seen one who shows up wounded, still visible in resurrection glory. And Jesus says to them in this moment, he is saying to them, those stories are enough for you to be my witnesses. Simply go tell people what you have seen.

They were simply to be witnesses. They didn't have to have polished stories. They didn't have to have certainty. They could still have plenty of doubts and confusion about what was happening. The next scene would certainly bring about confusion to them. They had no idea what was coming. But they had encountered Christ. And the calling that we see here to the apostles in the Acts of the Apostles is a calling that we have as well, to be witnesses to the resurrected Lord. When Presbyterians hear that we are called to be witnesses, it's often that we hesitate. Our minds go to heavy-handed pastors, perhaps of our youth, even friends who seem to notch their belt with

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souls saved. Stories that they want to share with us whether we want to hear them or not. And yet, a call remains. As a people about to scatter from this place for summer travel, for camps and for vacations, for family visits and so on, we do carry from this place stories with us. And we are called to share them, to witness, not through performative evangelism, but simply through attentiveness to the divine at work in the world. Where have you seen grace recently? Where have you experienced mercy? In what do you hope right now? Where have you seen resurrection, something come back to life? Where has healing been present on your journey? And where has forgiveness been present? All you must do is tell the truth about what you have experienced. You do not need to have a perfectly constructed testimony to witness to Christ. You only need honesty.

It strikes me that in this moment, in fact, too often in these days, the world sees a hollowed out projection of Jesus in their feeds and on their screens. This Jesus is more concerned with patriotism than the poor, more concerned with the rule of law than the refugee. But we know that the Lord desires a different kind of witness. A witness that is humble and hopeful, merciful and gracious, loving and kind, concerned with care for the earth and justice for the marginalized. Those are the stories that we are to witness to as we move into our summers together. Simple stories. We don't have to embellish anything. We simply have to be attentive to grace and mercy, hope and resurrection, healing and forgiveness.

About a month ago, I got a letter in the mail addressed to Head Pastor Idlewild Church. A mentor of mine many years ago said that if there's not a return address on a letter hand addressed to the pastor, don't read it. You probably don't want to see what's inside, right? But something about the way this one was addressed caught my attention. It was a letter, and I want to read it to you this morning.

Pastor, I am 17. I played sports at Idlewild for a lot of years. I'm graduating from East High School in May, and I'm going on to college. I was in the bathroom just outside the gym when I was 13, curled up on the floor crying. This lady came in, rich, with high heels and white hair. She walks in, and she doesn't just look down on me. She gets down on my level. She puts her hands on my shoulders.

She grabs hold of me as I'm crying. I was afraid I was carrying a child.

She told me a story that was funny and real. She talked to me for a few moments about taking pride in myself, and boys, and then she took me to a doctor so that I could receive care. And after

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that, I was good. God took care of me. I want this lady to know that I'm graduating. But ask her not to come to the graduation. I'm afraid she might bust up in that place and do something crazy.

Instead, I want her to spread this story like gospel. It helped me. She helped me. If you can find her, she is pretty and old and has white hair and smells good. You have a good church.

It struck me that what that young lady did not need in that bathroom that day was any grand testimony. She simply needed someone to stoop down to witness to her belovedness before God. She needed someone to take her to the doctor so she could be cared for. She needed someone to remind her that she was loved. She doesn't want that woman to show up, however beautiful and good smelling she might be. Instead, she wants us to spread the story like gospel. "Spread the story like gospel," the young girl says. "You will be my witnesses," our savior says. With it we might take the simplest of stories and interactions, the moments of grace and hope, of healing and care, and share them to a world that sees the projection of a hollowed out Jesus. Would that we might witness to one in their fullest incarnation of grace and welcome and hope. "Spread the story like gospel," the young girl says, "You will be my witnesses," our savior says. Would that we might heed the call.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God, Mother of us all. Amen.