

Sermon Topic: **Witnesses ... To Be, To Do, To Go** by Pr Alan Ang

Sermon Text: **Acts 1: 1 – 8**

5 W's of Trinity Annual Conference (TRAC): Word, Worship, Welcome, Witness, Wonder

"On TRAC Together: Witness" – emphasis for 2017

The Witness of God: disciples accept differing roles in being positive witnesses to God's love and good news for the whole world.

- Accept – command of Christ, but not compulsion of the body. Rather, willingness of heart

The Ripple Effect – a small pebble can create many ripples, i.e. continuing, spreading effect of a relatively insignificant action

- Mother Teresa: "I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples."
- Similarly, the ripple effect of the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ:
 - Jesus' seemingly insignificant birth in an obscure village to a peasant woman, growing up and taking up father's trade as carpenter. Itinerant preacher with limited public ministry. Ran afoul of public opinion, deserted by friends after arrest, went through mockery of trial. Nailed on cross beside 2 criminals and only earthly possessions were gambled by executioners. Buried in a borrowed crypt.
 - But, for more than 2000 years, nothing has had more impact on people's lives than this one birth, death & resurrection of Jesus, who is now seated at the right hand of God. The ripple effect of that solitary birth, death & resurrection has continued to this day; it did not end with His life on earth.

The Gospel of Luke and Acts

Acts 1: 1-8

¹ In my former book, *Theophilus*, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach ² until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. ³ After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. ⁴ On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. ⁵ For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." ⁶ Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷ He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ **But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.**"

Luke, the writer of Acts, mentions “... my former book ...” (v. 1) – reference to the gospel of Luke.

1. Gospel of Luke is the most complete single account available of the life of Jesus, a Savior to His own people and to all peoples. Luke was a reliable witness of Jesus’ life, death & resurrection. He was also Paul’s companion for parts of his missionary journeys. Luke’s Gospel is the beginning of and Acts is the continuation of Jesus’ doings & teachings.

Luke 24:45-48

⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ **You are witnesses of these things.**

2. The major theme of the book of Acts
 - is the universal spread of the gospel
 - with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit
 - and the good news spread from a small group of followers in Jerusalem to the “ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8)

Jesus gave instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles He had chosen. The apostles were central to God’s plan to reconcile people to Him, for the repentance for the forgiveness of sins to be preached in God’s name to all nations and to the ends of the world.

We are now the witnesses of our times. The apostles and other pilgrims have come and gone. We are the next batch of pilgrims – we are to take up the torch & run the race. Called to be witnesses, to go out and take the gospel to all nations.

Do not have the mindset of the apostles who were distracted & preoccupied in asking about the restoration of kingdom to Israel. Not for us to know when Christ will come again. Rather than speculating or spreading propaganda on the timing of His coming and of the end times, make better use of our time and efforts to move forward, grow in maturity, be outward looking in compassion and bear witness to the gospel.

Our Possible Roles in Being Positive Witnesses – example of apostles in early days. Engage in some of these activities:

1. The prayerful need for the empowerment of the Holy Spirit – let the Holy Spirit shake us up and touch us, and we will reach out
2. Corporate prayers – e.g. in cell groups, prayer ministries & teams
3. Community living and fellowship

4. Be grounded in
 - a) the Word of God – engage in bible study to enrich spiritual knowledge, and
 - b) deeds – witness not only in words, but also in deeds; caring for the lost and needy, and serving/interacting with people around us. Examples of our missionaries:
 - Annabella Lim in Cambodia – instrumental role in setting up kindergarten and Sunday School in church is remembered even after death;
 - David Chan, together with family, in helping establish Methodist school in Timor-Leste;
 - Rudy Wong in teaching people in Timor-Leste to cultivate their land

5. Remember and emulate the pilgrims (witnesses) past and present – Speak up as a witness for Christ, not be just an onlooker. Let not our presence in church be a religious cushion, where we become too relaxed and snooze away in our comfort zone.

The foundation of proclaiming Christ was laid by apostles and early disciples. Our job is not to be innovators of the gospel, though can be innovative in approach. The basics of letting the world know who is Christ involves taking the message of salvation, His grace and love and proclaiming it to everyone to hear. Jesus calls us to be faithful in whatever ministries. Do one bible study, read one good biblical book, help out in a ministry. Start the ripple effect from within you.

Possible witnessing styles: adopt a style that's befitting of personal character

- ✓ *Confrontational* – forceful evangelistic approach, e.g. Peter in Acts 2: “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ ... Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.”
- ✓ *Intellectual* – like Paul when he reasoned with the Jews & Greeks from Scripture & debated with philosophers (Acts 17)
- ✓ *Testimonial* – carry a testimony and profess to the world: “One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!” (John 9:25)
- ✓ *Relational* – tell family and friends how much God has done for you, how Jesus has healed a sickness, how He has restored a broken relationship, etc.
- ✓ *Invitational* – like the Samaritan woman at the well, who went around begging people to come hear Jesus for themselves.
- ✓ *Serving ministry* – like Dorcas who engaged in deeds of kindness and hospitality.

Discover own methods, then get out of chair and run with it, all for the glory of God.

Primary duty as child of God is to pray for God to give us a new heart and put a new spirit in us. Let the Holy Spirit be poured on us and our desert will become fertile land, where new wine will drip from the mountains and flow from the hills. Let your light shine before others that they may see your good deeds and glorify our Father in heaven.

Closing

The Last Lecture by Randy Pausch, who was dying from terminal cancer. Lecture/book focused not on dying, but on importance of overcoming obstacles, enabling dreams of others, seizing every moment because time is all we have, and leaving a legacy.

Consider what matters and the sort of legacy we want to leave behind, particularly by how we live our lives for the glory of God.

For Your Reflection / Application Questions

- 1) Discuss your understanding of “being positive witnesses to God's love and good news for the whole world”. (“On TRAC Together: Witness”)
- 2) How have you been a positive witness for Christ? Relate to past, present and future efforts.