

Winging it
[Luke 21:5-19](#)
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This year has been pretty eventful for our family in some strange ways. In August, we were on our way home from vacation in Ontario when our flight had to make an emergency landing in Regina because there was smoke in the plane. A few weeks later, back here in Richmond, we witnessed an accident here at 2 road and Granville where a cyclist was hit by a car right in front of us. And just last month, at 11 pm on Saturday night a car crashed into the front of our house – it didn't do too much damage, but it's not a good feeling opening your front door and just seeing headlights shining a few inches away from you.

And after witnessing these accidents, each time we were asked to tell the story of what we had seen. In the Regina airport the next morning, as we were trying to figure out how to get back to Richmond, there was a CBC news crew asking to interview passengers about our emergency landing – we declined to participate, mostly because I wasn't sure I wanted to put Calvin in front of a television camera for the entire

country to hear – you never know what he might say. And after both the accidents in Richmond, we were interviewed by the RCMP – they asked both me and Johanna to make statements explaining exactly what we had seen, all the details and circumstances so that they could determine how these accidents happened and who was at fault. Three times this year, we have been asked to testify, to be witnesses, to the various accidents and mishaps that we experienced, to tell the authorities and the world what we had seen and heard.

In our reading from the Gospel of Luke, Jesus warns his disciples that there is trouble ahead for them, and for the world. A time is coming when nation will rise against nation, kingdom against kingdom, there will be earthquakes, famines, plagues, dreadful signs in the heavens. And in particular, there will be trouble for the disciples. The followers of Jesus will be betrayed by their relatives and friends, arrested and persecuted, put on trial and condemned to death, all because they carry the name of Jesus Christ. Jesus is painting a pretty grim picture here, a picture of a world in complete turmoil where everything is falling apart, there is pain and suffering everywhere, and most of it is falling on the

disciples, on the church. And that probably sounds like bad news, right? I mean, if I can't handle a car bumping into my front door, or having to spend a night in Regina, I'm probably not ready for what Jesus says is in store for these disciples. And yet right in the middle of this long chapter of miseries and troubles, Jesus makes a surprising comment, one that puts all these troubles in a new light. When we are arrested, persecuted, on trial for our lives, Jesus says that this is good news, because this will give us an opportunity to testify. We will be asked to testify, to be witnesses, to tell the authorities and the world what we have seen and heard.

And that still might not sound like good news. As much fun as it was explaining to the RCMP officer exactly what happened to our house, I would've preferred just not having the car crash happen in the first place. But Jesus is convinced that this opportunity is worth all the trouble. The Greek word here that our Bible translates as opportunity literally means to disembark, to get out of a boat at the end of a journey – the only other times it's used in the gospels, it's when the disciples have finished fishing for the night and they get out of their boats and

arrive on the shore. So when the moment comes when the disciples are put on trial for following Jesus, that moment is an arrival. They are reaching their intended destination, they are coming to the place where they are meant to be. And that destination is to be a witness – to testify. The Greek word here for testify is martyrion, and it's the same word that Luke uses all throughout both the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts to describe the identity and purpose of the church. After Jesus' death and resurrection, he appears to the disciples and tells them that they are witnesses to what has just happened in Jerusalem, and when Jesus ascends into heaven at the beginning of the book of Acts, he tells them that they will receive the Holy Spirit so that they can become his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. At Pentecost when Peter is filled with the Spirit and stands up in front of the crowds, he tells them that God raised Jesus from the dead, and of that all of us are witnesses, and everywhere the church goes, everywhere the church grows, they keep coming back to that same word, that same idea about who they are and what they are called to do and to be – they are called to testify, they are called to be witnesses. And they are called

to testify not about the troubles that they've seen, not about their own character or track records, about their own guilt or innocence. They are witnesses to Jesus Christ, to his death and resurrection, that is the purpose of the church. Everywhere they go, everything they do, they are meant to be witnesses, to testify about what they have experienced in Jesus Christ.

The calling of the church is to testify. The identity of the church is to be witnesses. And the moment when we will be able to fulfill that calling – the moment when we reach our destination and disembark, get off the boat and come ashore onto solid ground, that moment will come when everything else in the world is falling apart. That moment will come when every other foundation is collapsing, when every other kind of strength we might rely on is failing, that's when the church arrives and becomes who we were always meant to be: witnesses. And when we become witnesses, Jesus promises that in that moment, we will be given everything we need to endure. The disciples are not supposed to try and prepare for that coming moment of crisis – they won't be able to rely on wealth or cleverness or eloquence or any human strength to

make it through the storm – but Jesus promises that they will be given the words and the wisdom to say what needs to be said in that moment. And when they witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Jesus promises them that they will participate in that resurrection – by telling the world about how they saw Jesus alive again, they will enter into that same kind of life – even if they are put to death during this coming calamity, they will not perish, but through endurance they will gain everlasting life. When the church witnesses to the resurrection, the church becomes part of the resurrection – the same life that is in Jesus Christ becomes our life, once and for all.

The warning and the challenge that Jesus gives his disciples here in the gospel of Luke is a challenge that they accepted and embraced after his death and resurrection, as the church moved out from Jerusalem and spread throughout the Roman Empire, as followers of Jesus Christ had to choose each and every day whether to bow to the power of the emperor or to give their lives as witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And let's be honest, that is probably not a choice that any of us will have to make in our lives. I know we live in a difficult time, where

there are wars and rumours of wars every day, where we hear stories of disasters and plagues and famines each and every day, but as bad as things may seem, we still enjoy incredible freedom and safety and wealth here in this nation; right now we are free to live as disciples of Jesus Christ, to worship him and share his story and represent his name. Here in this time, in this place, we are still the church, and we are still called to be witnesses. Through our words and our actions, we are still called to make it clear to the world around us that we believe Jesus is alive, that death has been conquered, that sin has no power over us any longer. And if we want God to send us opportunities to testify – moments where we can share what we have seen and heard of Christ's grace and love – we have to remember that those moments come not in our strength, but in our weakness. They come not when we have everything prepared ahead of time, when we are feeling strong and well-rested and clever, with lots of money in the bank account, lots of well-thought out eloquent arguments that we're sure will persuade the world into admitting we were right all along. When we get an opportunity to testify, it will come when we are weak, exhausted, broken-hearted,

surrounded by trouble. It will come when we have no idea what to say or do, when we feel we have nothing left to give and no idea where to go, when our lives, our churches, our world seems to be falling apart, that's when Jesus Christ comes to us and reveals his love to us, and in that moment our one and only job is to testify. Point to Jesus Christ, help the world around us see what we see, know who we know, by letting his light and love shine in the darkness, let his words and his wisdom be our strength and our song. If we want to be witnesses, we don't need strategies, clever arguments, eloquent sermons, expansive budgets. We need to join the world in the trouble that is all around us – join our neighbours in their pain and sorrow and need, and as we sit there and share their trouble, we can help them see Jesus Christ. Help them listen for his voice. Help them find their part in his story, so that they can become witnesses too. In the name of Jesus Christ – Amen.