

Title: E Pluribus Unum
Text: Luke 24
Theme: Sticky unity
Series: Acts #1 (1 Savior, 1 message, 1 people, all nations: our story, mission and future)
Prop Stmtnt: The unity of the church is rooted in the person and work of Christ.

Luke, the author of the gospel that bears his name, was a Gentile. Did you hear that? Luke was a Gentile. The Bible smells very Jewish and did (OT) for hundreds of years and now you have a book written by Mark and Luke who were not Jewish. What if you were told that the president of the NAACP was on the board of the KKK? Something seems a little out of place with that, right? Unlike Matthew and John, Luke was not one of the 12 disciples. He was from the city of Antioch and traveled with Paul as a companion and help to Paul on some of his trips. Luke, a physician by vocation, benefited from an excellent education. His observation skills as a doctor and his writing skills come together in a beautiful way, not only in presenting the story of Jesus, but Luke wrote the book of Acts. Luke and Acts are two volumes intended to tell one story. Look at Luke 1.1-4 and Acts 1.1-3. We are going to be studying through the book of Acts on Sunday mornings and I want to introduce this series by doing an overview of the last chapter of Luke.

The story of the Old Testament is the story of Jesus and from the book of Acts we understand that the story of Jesus is the story of the church. That story drives and gives meaning to all other stories. The world does not see it that way. I don't expect them to. Some of you do not see it that way either. But my hope is that this series in the book of Acts will change that forever. This morning, by way of introducing the book of Acts to you I want to do an overview of the last chapter of Luke since the book of Luke and particularly chapter 24 is the launch pad for the birth, expansion and explosion of the church that is all explained in the book of Acts.

Read Text:

In Luke 24 we see that:

I. Jesus is unstoppable. (24.1-12)

Luke 24 begins with the account of the resurrection of Jesus. The church has historically met on Sunday (if it could) because Jesus rose again on a Sunday and the early church recognized that the resurrection of Jesus is a game-changer. If you overcome death, you overcome everything and everyone. If you can die and come back to life at will, then, there really isn't anything that is going to get in your way. If you are playing a video game and you have unlimited lives, then it really doesn't matter if you get blown up or killed, right? It might be a bit inconvenient, but you can always come back and keep going. In fact, if you have unlimited lives, then it is really not even a game anymore. In that sense, the game is over because if you have unlimited lives, it is only a matter of time.

Jesus is unstoppable. The impact of his resurrection was clearly seen in the lives of the disciples early on in the book of Acts. Peter, James and John were fisherman on the Sea of Galilee. They were local boys, working low-level jobs in a very low-profile arena. These guys were not world travelers, trained to stand before kings and magistrates. Today, there is no continent in the world

that is not aware of who these men are and it is not because they were so gifted, they followed Jesus who is unstoppable.

II. Jesus is the focal point of the Bible. (24.13-45)

I've said to you before that it would have made for some rather powerful drama for Jesus to show up at the Sanhedrin meeting on Sunday to let them know that the guards at the tomb didn't do their job very well. But Jesus doesn't show himself to those who refuse to see. Instead, he spent a good bit of that first day walking on the road with two of his followers because they needed to understand something. Jesus, then gave them a crash course on Biblical Theology. He showed them that he was the unifying theme of the OT. (v.27) "*And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.*" In a previous encounter with the Pharisees, Jesus noted that these guys knew the content of the Old Testament, but that they missed the point of it. He told them that it was all about him. Of course, they didn't like that, but here on the day of his resurrection as he walked on the road to the town of Emmaus, he explained to these two disciples how the Old Testament pointed to him.

This means that as the focal point of God's Word, Jesus is the focal point of history. Now, that's a big statement, so let's break that down into more bite-sized pieces. As the focal point of history, Jesus is the focal point of your life. If you do not know that, or if you do not live that way, you are literally wasting your life and you are missing the entire point of life. You see t-shirts, the tweets, the posts and slogans. I live for wine. I live for beer. I live for sex. I live for donuts. I live for football. I live for the weekends. I live for music. I live to run. I live for comfort. I live for my dog. I live to hunt. I live for video games. I live for cars. I live to shop. If that is what you are living for, you are wasting your life. Jesus is not only the focal point of history and your life, he is the focal point of today. If we live a day without considering how Jesus is the focal point of it, then we have wasted that day. I am not the focal point of my day, Jesus is.

That night, Jesus showed up to the rest of the disciples and did for them what he did for the two guys earlier in the day. (v.44) He showed them how the entire OT (Law, Prophets and Psalms) were all about him. The first four chapters of Acts quote repeatedly from the OT in order to show how the OT points to Christ. I used to wonder, how did the disciples know this? Then I realized that these were some of the things that Christ taught them.

This also means that for thousands of years, ground zero of God's plan was the tiny nation of Israel. Babylon, Nineveh, Susa, Memphis, Athens, Rome, and Alexandria were all powerful and impressive in their own right, but what appears to be powerful is not necessarily powerful. Today, the church is ground zero of God's plan now and it is still all about Jesus. We're not very impressive. We have no army. We are being persecuted and killed in India, Iran, North Korea, Indonesia, the Philippines and other regions of the Middle East and China. Christians have historically been the weak and disenfranchised of the world. But that's okay. We've hitched our wagon to Jesus and you can't stop him because the entire universe is about him.

III. The gospel is our message. (24.46-47)

It is a supernatural message based on a supernatural event, pulled off by a supernatural Savior that has supernatural results. Because this message is such a big deal, God spent thousands of years in history getting the world stage ready for this.

I have always put a train around our Christmas tree. About 20 years ago, I started setting up a larger train and now that I have grandchildren, I am motivated to get a little carried away. I've started working on a new design capable of running three trains at the same time. Cathi thinks I have lost my mind and she may be right. I know that if I can pull this off before the grandkids come home for those few days before they leave for Africa, that it will be worth it. I also know that they will have no idea of all of the planning, designing, ebay-ing, constructing and detailing that it will take. But, if they love it, and if they enjoy it and it makes them want to be with me, then it will be so worth it. I want to be that grandpa whose love and devotion will be realized later in life.

That is the case with the gospel on a universal scale. The gospel means good news. The gospel does not mean that you have to work hard in order for God to forgive you and that you never really know if he has. That isn't good news. The good news of the gospel is that even though we are sinners who have offended a holy God, that God sent Christ to live a perfect life in our place and then died in our place in order to pay the debt of our sins so completely that there is nothing left for us to pay. His resurrection proved that the penalty he paid was accepted because the power of death was broken. And that if we repent of our sins and trust in Christ, that we indeed are forgiven of our sins, declared righteous by God, adopted into his family and given a home with him forever and ever. That message is so good, and so powerful and so important, that God spent thousands of years planning, designing, setting up and preparing the world stage for the coming of Christ in order to secure our salvation through his life, death and resurrection.

The message of the gospel is not only for us, it is for anyone. It is for you and it does not matter who you are or what you have done. The good news of the gospel is all about what Christ has done for you. Religion for the most part is really messed up because it tries to tell you what you have to do for God, but the heart of the gospel is what God has done for us in Christ.

We are like the little kids who have no idea of every detail he arranged in order to pull this off. All we know is that we love to be with him and we love what he has done. The gospel is the heart of our message. It is foundational to everything else we are and do as the people of God.

So, yes we build upon the gospel, but we never move beyond the gospel. We not only have to hear this and respond in repentance and faith (as Jesus said), but we want others to hear this same gospel message. This is our mission.

IV. All nations is our mission and Revelation 5 is our vision/goal. (24.48-49)

“repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name *to all nations.*” The gospel is our message and all nations is our mission. We are to proclaim this message to all nations because God's plan is to make one people out of all of the nations who will be his forever. Revelation 5 tells us what is going to happen.

My son, daughter-in-law and grandchildren are preparing to go to another country on another continent to another culture in order to proclaim this message, disciple believers and build healthy churches. Will we miss them? Absolutely! But, the vision of one people around the throne is greater than one family around the table or around the tree. This is our mission and the book of Acts is our story, our history, our legacy and our cause. The end of Luke 24 paints a trinitarian picture of this mission.

- a. Accomplished by the Son – I bought him, you go get ‘em.
- b. Endorsed by the Father
- c. Empowered by the Spirit

The target audience of Jesus is all nations because he is making out of many, one. Our universal mission is to be seen and experienced in local settings. Do you see how this shapes, informs and motivates our lives and church? How do we as a local church live out the oneness that the gospel not only creates but is designed to accomplish? The gospel creates the people of God as one people. Here is what you can expect to hear emphasized from the book of Acts. Living out our unity in the gospel is not easy, but it is worth it.

For example, I know that if you are in your 20’s, that we can appear to be a bit stiff and formal and that some of the songs we do are not as cool and trendy as what you might find in other settings that are geared specifically for you. I know that. But our vision is not for just hip, trendy 20-year old’s. There is nothing supernatural about doing something that appeals to 20-year old’s and then having a room full of them. What is supernatural is 20-year old’s loving, caring for and fellowshiping with 80-year old’s. I know that if you are in your 80’s that our music can be a little too loud, fast and unfamiliar at times. I know that you can find settings where only your kind of music is done. But there is nothing supernatural about doing something that appeals to 80-year old’s and only having 80-year old’s. What is supernatural is white, black, poor, rich, old, young, sick, healthy, Wolverines and Buckeyes all loving each other and standing together with one another and for one another. I want you to see that the book of Acts is the road to Revelation 5. Our message is the gospel. Our mission is all nations and our vision is universal worship of Christ by one people. The glad, whole-hearted worship of God is the most satisfying thing that we can do. In giving ourselves to God, we become full of him.

In a few weeks, we will come to the actual birth of the church in Acts 2. It is called the day of Pentecost. This was a monumental event. On this day, the Spirit of God descended in power upon the believers and baptized them, meaning he immersed them into a new reality that he formed that is called the church. These believers were now united by the Spirit of God into this new relationship with one another. As evidence of the inauguration of this event, many of these believers began to speak in different languages, so that the people who had gathered in Jerusalem from other countries were able to hear the gospel in their own language. This speaking in other languages (known as speaking in tongues) was the public planting of a flag by God on the turf of this world. I know that some people think that speaking in tongues is some private prayer language designed to give you an existential experience of God. It really misses the point! What happened at Pentecost was God reversing the curse of the tower of Babel. What happened at the tower of Babel? God punished the rebellion of the people by making them many languages out of one and now he is setting the world on notice that he is now making one out of many.

Take away points:

- **Sin is the cause of disunity.**

- Sin ruptured our relationship to God
- Sin breaks our ability to have true relationship with one another
 - We build imitations of fellowship based on things that do not matter, but we act like they do.
 - If we try to build and organize our church on the basis of “things we have in common” like musical styles, riding motorcycles, being outdoorsy, then there is nothing supernatural about that. Anyone can do that.

- **Diversity grows from the gospel.**

Head-turning, curiosity-raising, head-scratching diversity grows from the gospel. Why would a group of young singles, go to a retirement center on a Friday night and sing hymns from a hymn book to one of our elderly members? Is it because they love to sing old hymns from a hymn book? Maybe not? Is it because they hate going to Buffalo Wild Wings and eating food and watching the World Series? Is it because that is their grandmother, or great aunt? No. It is because she is their sister in Christ and we love one another in ways that appear to the world to be very inconvenient, even sacrificial. Old people and young people, rich people and poor people, educated and uneducated, white collar and blue collar, successful and struggling, Asian, Latino, African, European, Native, and Jewish, all appear to be reasons for division. But the gospel changes that. We are a natural band of enemies who are supernaturally bound by the gospel into a family to which we are connected forever.

In other words, the gospel is the cause of the genuine enjoyment of diversity. Diversity is the supernatural effect of the supernatural gospel. If a church has all of the same kind of people in it, meaning, they believe the same politically, share the same kind of education, have the same musical tastes, dress the same, talk the same, eat the same kind of food, have the same kind of jobs, are basically the same ages, you have to wonder if they really understand the mission of the church.

- **Sin threatens our unity.**

- Unaddressed sin threatens our unity
- Sin addressed in a sinful way threatens our unity

- **Emphasizing non-ultimate issues threatens our unity.**

- Politics
- Diet
- Health/fitness
- Musical styles
- Educational issues

- Social issues
- Building program
- **Building, sustaining, and organizing the church around anything other than the gospel is not going to last.**
 - Nothing is as sticky as the gospel.

E pluribus Unum is a good motto. We have it on the back of our one dollar bills. It is Latin for: out of many, one. The idea is that the power of freedom and democracy will keep us unified even amidst our diversity. We are closing in 250 years of this, and while our nation has had some success, we are all witnessing a repeat of Rome. The glue of freedom is not sticky enough to hold us together. The book of Acts presents another vision. But, it is not easy.

Will this work? Can it work? What will happen? Acts begins to answer that question and we continue to answer it, every Sunday as we gather and every time we love, serve, care for and stand with people whom the world wonders why them and why us. They need to see and they need to hear, the answer is, the gospel of Jesus.