

**Part Two**  
**Acts 1:1-26**

**Rev. Kenneth M. Locke, Interim Pastor**  
**St Paul United Church of Christ; New Bremen, OH**  
**April 7, 2024; 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter**

How do we know when we've finished a book? We're reading a novel. How do we know when we're done?

Obviously, when there's nothing left. When we come to the last page. But really, the story isn't over until the action is resolved. The story isn't over until there's nothing left to say.

Maybe it ends with a kiss. Maybe it ends with an explosion. Maybe it ends with a sunset. However it ends, we know the story is finished when the action is resolved.

If you are new to Christianity, I can see how you would think Easter is the end of the story. Jesus rose from the grave, that's the end. Put that book down and pick up another.

But you and I, we know better. We know that in their own way, each of the Gospels tell us the story is **not** over. In Mark, the disciples are told to meet Jesus in Galilee and there they will see him. In Matthew, Jesus charges the disciples with the Great Commission. Go forth into all the earth teaching and baptizing. Luke's Gospel has Jesus telling the disciples to stay in Jerusalem until they have power. In John's Gospel, the risen Jesus tells Peter, "Follow me."

The biggest clue the story is not over, of course, comes from today's reading. "In the first book, Theophilus . . ." Where there's a first book there has to be a second book! And this is it.

But pretty quickly we learn this book is not about Jesus per se. It's about Jesus, but it's not about him. First of all, note how Jesus tells the disciples, "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

This book is going to be about the disciples, and what they do. Jesus has a part, but we know the main story is about the disciples. They are going to tell the story of Jesus both close to home, Judea and Samaria, and far away, to the ends of the earth. Because of the disciples, the story is not over. Christianity is going to spread to the ends of the earth.

We also know this book is not actually about Jesus because Jesus leaves. “As they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.” Jesus is gone. In fact, Jesus has to go. How are the disciples going to grow in faith if Jesus is always there fixing their problems? If Jesus stayed, their eyes would always be on him rather than the ends of the earth. Jesus leaves so the disciples can grow in faith and create a church for their time and their needs.

We shouldn't be surprised at this. It's why people who start a business in their garage eventually must step aside and let others run it. It's why pastors can't stay at a church too long. The organization has to adapt to changing needs and changing times, and new people need to lead it.

The disciples remain rooted and grounded in Jesus. But for the church to spread Jesus can't stay. He has to leave. And he does.

The disciples, then, do what Jesus tells them to do. They wait. But notice they are not twiddling their thumbs. They're not down, depressed, weeping. They're waiting, but their waiting is not static, it's purposeful. They have an eye on the future.

The church's waiting is spiritual. They pray. A lot. But their waiting is also active. They fill a hole in their leadership, electing Matthias to take Judas' place.

The waiting, both spiritual and active, cannot be separated. They are two sides of the same coin. Praying allows them to elect strong leaders. Strong leaders help them pray.

The first story, part one, is relatively short. The life and ministry of Jesus, including his death and resurrection. Doesn't take long to read. We could finish it in a few hours.

Part two is much longer. It's still being written today. And we are part of it. We are part of this very long but very important second book.

And what is our part? What are we to do? We are to do what Jesus said. Spread the good news of God's love both locally and to the ends of the earth.

Friends, doing our ministry well means being like that first gathering of disciples. We need to be spiritually strong **and** have strong leadership. They are two sides of the same coin. They can't be separated.

We have to worship. We have to celebrate the sacraments. They are essential to who we are and to sharing our message. We also need strong committees and a strong council. Strong leadership is also essential to who we are and to sharing our message. When we have them both, meaningful worship and leadership, we are better able to share the good news of how much God loves us.

The first book, the story of Jesus' life and ministry, has been written. As Christians, we should know it backwards and forwards. But the second book, the story of the good news traveling to the ends of the earth, is still being written and we, St Paul UCC, are a key part of that story. Telling it well requires strong leaders who are excited about that first book and want to share it. And the stronger our leaders, the more we will worship God and celebrate the sacraments Jesus gave us. The two go hand-in-hand. May we embrace them both well. Amen.