

## I.M.'ing the Great I Am

Luke 24:44-53

Confirmation Sunday

Ypsilanti First United Methodist Church

May 4, 2008

There's an old but good joke that Jesus and the devil were having an on-going argument about who was better on the computer. They had been going at it for days, and frankly God was tired of hearing all the bickering. So God said "THAT'S IT! I have had enough. I am going to set up a test that will run for two hours, and from those results, I will judge who does the better job."

So Satan and Jesus sat down at their computer keyboards and typed away. They clicked, they faxed, they e-mailed, they IM'd or instant messaged, they downloaded, they sent attachments, they did spreadsheets with Excel, They created labels and cards and charts and graphs.

Then, ten minutes before their time was up, lightning suddenly Flashed across the sky, thunder rolled, rain poured, and, of course, the power went off. The devil stared at his blank screen and screamed every curse word known in the underworld. Jesus just sighed.

Finally the electricity came back on, and each of them restarted their computers. Satan started searching frantically, screaming: "It's gone! It's all GONE! "I lost everything when the power went out!"

Meanwhile, Jesus quietly started printing out all of his files from the past two hours of work. Satan observed this and became irate. "Wait!" he screamed. "That's not fair! He cheated! How come he has all his work and I don't have any?"

God just shrugged and said, "JESUS SAVES!"

This joke points out that of course Jesus is good with technology and my guess is that not only does Jesus save, but he also knows how to e-mail, I.M., txt, blog and podcast.

If you didn't understand the communication terms I just used, ask our confirmation class about them. No matter the technology you use, the point here is that Jesus has a message for each of us. And Jesus wants to communicate with us this message about God's amazing love. And Jesus finds all sorts of ways to speak to us in our daily lives, if we will just open our eyes, ears and hearts to hear the message. Jesus has a message for us, for me and for you and for each of the confirmands gathered here today. Jesus has a message for each of us.

In Chapter 24, at the very end of Luke's gospel story, we find the resurrected Jesus about to ascend to heaven. But before he goes, he gives some last minute instructions to the disciples. He tells them of the importance of the scriptures—the laws of Moses, the prophets and the psalms-- and then he goes on to open their understanding about the word of God.

When you think about it, it IS kind of amazing that the Bible still matters. The Bible is more than 2000 years old, and yet it still matters in our lives. The Bible is like no other book because it contains messages from God to us. Kind of like God's texting us—or IM'ing us. God communicating with us—all here in this book. This is why the resurrected Jesus just as he was about to leave them, opened the disciples' understandings of the scriptures—for he wanted them to understand God's personal messages contained in the scriptures. And as disciples, Jesus wants us to understand God's messages to us as well. So we have this gift of the scriptures, where we can learn about who God is and who we are. In this amazing book God uses words to form and bless us, to teach and guide us, to forgive and save us. No wonder so many of our confirmands receive Bibles as gifts to mark this day. For this book is like an instant message to us from God—a message about who God is and about who we are.

So before he leaves them, Jesus took time to remind the disciples about the importance and power of the scriptures—and God's message to us. That's the first thing that Jesus did, but he did something else as well. After he opened the disciples' minds about the power of the scriptures, Jesus told them—You're my witnesses. Jesus sent them out and told them that they were the ones now to tell the story—to give the message, to share the love.

And that is still the point for us today. God speaks to us through scripture and prayer, music and technology and God also calls us to be the witnesses—God tells us that the word lives in us---and that we need to live it out—to share it with others.

Each of us is called by God to share this message and to live the word contained in this old but powerful book. The point is that we are called to share the message and to live out the words that God has given to us. Once we have heard the message, God calls us to live it out in the world. Jesus tells us, "You're the witnesses—I live in you." Or to put it in more contemporary language. Jesus did not command the whole world to go to church. Jesus commanded his church to go to the whole world.

There is a story that I've told before. But it bears repeating. His name is Bill. He has wild hair, wears a T shirt with holes in it, jeans and no shoes. This was literally his wardrobe for his entire four years

of college. He is brilliant. Kind of esoteric and very very bright. He became a Christian while attending college.

Across the street from the campus is a well-dressed church. They want to develop a ministry to the students, but are not sure how to go about it. One day Bill decides to go there. He walks in with no shoes, jeans, his T-shirt and wild hair. The service has already started and so Bill starts down the aisle looking for a seat. The church is completely packed and he can't find a seat. By now people are really looking a bit uncomfortable, but no one says anything.

Bill gets closer and closer to the pulpit and when he realizes there are no seats, he just squats down and sits right on the carpet. (although perfectly acceptable behavior at a college fellowship, trust me, this had never happened in this church before) By now the people are really uptight, and the tension in the air is thick. About this time, the minister realizes that from way at the back of the church, an usher is slowly making his way toward Bill. Now the usher is in his eighties, has silver-gray hair, and a three piece suit. A godly man, very elegant, very dignified and very courtly. He walks with a cane and, as he starts walking toward this young man, everyone is saying to themselves that you can't blame him for what he's going to do. How can you expect a man of his age and of his background to understand some college kid on the floor? It takes a long time for the man to reach the college student.

The church is utterly silent except for the clicking of the man's cane. All eyes are focused on him. You can't even hear anyone breathing. The minister can't even preach the sermon until the usher does what he has to do. And now they all watch in silence as this elderly man drops his cane on the floor. And with great difficulty he lowers himself and sits down next to Bill and worships with him so he won't be alone. Everyone chokes up with emotion. When the minister gains control, she says "What I am about to preach, you will never remember. What you have just seen, you will never forget. Be careful how you live. You may be the only Bible some people will ever read."

Jesus tells us "you're my witness. I live in you." As disciples and witnesses of Christ, we are called to share the message with the world. We are called to sit down with others to let them know they are not alone—we are called to be the message for a hurting world.

Today as some of our young people make their confirmation, let us all remember the message God has for us through the scriptures and let us also remember the message we are called to share with the world as Witnesses of Christ. Amen.