

Hope Rising: Preaching Luke in Year C (Advent to Easter)

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Simply defined, hope is an expectation of the future. Yet hope is so much more than that. Hope involves a larger story, as the past, the present, and the future are woven together in a delicate, life-changing balance. To be more specific, hope occurs when a past experience generates trust in a certain future that changes one's way of life in the present. To evaluate any situation of hope, we can consider these dynamics: how the past event and the certain future are joined together in a larger story that gives shape to present experience.

God has entrusted us as pastors with proclaiming the larger story of Jesus Christ that embraces our past, present, and future and causes us to live in Christian hope. As we do this, however, we speak to a world full of people who are living by other narratives, stories that offer them hope for the future and shape the way they live now.

The Gospel of Luke provides us with a profound opportunity to speak God's story in Christ with a keen sense of hope. During the season of Advent, the church transitions from expectant longing for the second coming of Christ to holy joy for the first coming. Thus, the readings take God's people on a reverse chronological journey, from the end to the beginning.

Liturgical Date	Gospel	Liturgical Themes	Thematic Relation to Hope
Advent 1	Luke 21:25-36	<p>This text opens the church year with a vision of the second coming of Christ. The movement through Advent will be from the second coming to the first coming and demonstrate how the church orients itself to the future by remembering its past.</p> <p>In the gospel of Luke, Jesus is responding to his disciples' admiration of the temple and revealing the greater work of God that is coming (including the destruction of the temple and the transformation of this world).</p>	<p>When the world falls apart, hope rises in God's people. They look expectantly to the future for the return of the Lord.</p> <p>The prophecy of Jesus highlights the chaotic unraveling of creation and yet the response of the people is not to lower their heads and hide but to raise their heads and stand "because your redemption is drawing nigh." Hope rises in the face of destruction and looks forward to the revelation of redemption.</p>

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Advent 2	Luke 3:1-14 (15-20)	<p>The season of Advent subtly shifts from the second coming to the first through the figure of John the Baptist who calls for repentance in preparation for the Christ. Thus, we move from the second coming to the first coming by focusing on the figure of a prophet, who calls us to preparation.</p> <p>In the gospel of Luke, John's vision of the work of Christ is radically reinterpreted by Jesus when he bears God's judgment on himself and sends his Spirit to form his people.</p>	<p>This reading highlights a community of hope. This community is not formed by the work of political rulers but by the simple words of a prophet and the simple acts of God's people.</p> <p>The lesson begins with an overview of the political world. Into that world, however, comes the work of God in the strange voice of a prophet and the simple actions of God's people who compose a community of hope.</p>
Advent 3	Luke 7:18-28 (29-35)	<p>The season shifts yet again as we now see the saving (rather than judging) work of Christ.</p> <p>In the gospel, Jesus' words echo his first sermon in Nazareth. Jesus reveals his ministry as one of salvation (in the fullest sense of the term). That salvation, however, is often misunderstood by the people and will ultimately be rejected by the religious leaders. Thus, Jesus brings a salvation found in suffering, his suffering and death to save the lost.</p>	<p>If the previous reading focused upon a community of hope, this reading focuses upon a personal hope. John offers a striking figure of the struggle of personal hope. Over against the wonderful promises of Jesus, John languishes in prison and eventually goes to his death – trusting in the words of Jesus and living in suffering hope.</p>

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Advent 4	Luke 1:39-45 (46-56)	<p>The season of Advent now focuses upon the first coming of Jesus in the flesh. The one who will come in judgment (beginning of the season) is the one who first came to save (ending of the season).</p> <p>In the gospel of Luke, we have the weaving together of the lives of John and Jesus as their mother's meet. Mary's song evokes the wonder of the ministry of Jesus in Luke, which fulfills God's promises to Israel and yet also attends to the poor of the world.</p>	<p>This reading offers us the vision of a pregnant hope. Nothing speaks of hope more than a pregnancy where parents care for their unborn child, dream of their child's future, and live in hope of that day. Mary and Elizabeth are both pregnant and living in hope. Their hope arises from a trust in the word of God that has the power to both penetrate to the heart (the baby leaping in the womb) and purposefully reshape the world (Mary's song).</p>

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Christmas	<p data-bbox="413 245 720 277">Luke 2:1-14 (15-20)</p> <p data-bbox="413 321 695 505">Joseph and Mary travel to Bethlehem for the census and Mary gives birth to Jesus.</p> <p data-bbox="413 509 716 727">The angels proclaim the event to the shepherds who go and see and then proclaim it to the world.</p>	<p data-bbox="741 282 1251 691">Liturgically, there are four services for the celebration of Christmas (Christmas Eve, Midnight, Dawn, and Day). The sequence of the services highlights the dawn of salvation with a growing revelation of the light of Christ. The Lukan account (here) emphasizes the visitation of the shepherds at night which will lead to the clearer proclamation of John's prologue on Christmas day.</p> <p data-bbox="741 696 1257 1024">Luke surrounds the birth of Jesus with startling contrasts. The political realm of Rome and the social realm of Bethlehem are ignorant of the significance of this birth, whereas the angelic realm breaks forth in proclamation to the migratory shepherds who become the first witnesses of this birth.</p>	<p data-bbox="1281 282 1734 428">The Christmas season could be developed in relation to the movement from songs of hope to lives of hope.</p> <p data-bbox="1281 433 1793 691">In this text, one hears the song of hope sung first by heavenly angels. The heavens are torn open and in the midst of the political and social turmoil of the world, they sing a song of hope to the most downtrodden of people – shepherds.</p> <p data-bbox="1281 696 1785 954">This song of hope is a gift from heaven to earth. It changes the perspective of how we look upon things. The shepherds find an infant in a stable to be the hope of all the world, bringing joy to all and peace on earth.</p> <p data-bbox="1281 959 1787 1136">Such a song shapes their lives as they not only see the Savior but then share this message with others as their lives are transformed by a song of hope that led them to their Savior.</p>

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Christmas 1	Luke 2:22-40	<p>Liturgically, the first Sunday after Christmas focuses upon the Holy Family.</p> <p>In this scene, Luke closes out the infancy narratives of Jesus and John. By locating this in the temple, Luke closes where he began (1:5-25) and brings the reader from the promise of the forerunner to the revelation of the Christ.</p> <p>Luke frames his whole gospel with individuals who live in hope. At the close of the gospel, after the resurrection, Jesus will walk along disciples on the road to Emmaus who had hoped that Jesus was the one to redeem Israel (24:21).</p>	<p>Simeon and Anna are two individuals whose lives are shaped by hope.</p> <p>Simeon has been waiting for the consolation of Israel and Anna speaks to others who are waiting the redemption of Israel. Both individuals wait for redemption and have a glimpse of its presence in the infant Jesus. In the end, however, their lives are faithful witnesses to hope. Even though they only see an infant, they trust in the promises of God.</p> <p>Simeon's song, the Nunc Dimittis, is a song of hope that is voiced liturgically by Christians after receiving the Lord's Supper and returning to their daily tasks. Having received the presence of Christ, they live in hope of the final redemption that is yet to be seen.</p>

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Christmas 2	Luke 2:40-52	<p>Liturgically, the second Sunday after Christmas continues the story of the life of Jesus before his public ministry begins with his baptism.</p> <p>Luke frames this story with reference to Jesus' growth in wisdom and favor. The story begins with the favor of God being upon him and closes with Jesus being in the favor of both God and humans.</p> <p>Focusing on the favor of God, one discovers that Jesus is aware of his relation to his heavenly Father as he speaks to his parents of being in his Father's house.</p> <p>In preparation for his public ministry, Jesus manifests his understanding of the ways of God and thereby grows in the favor of his parents and others.</p>	<p>Lives of hope. Contemporary films often play upon the tension between a character's hopes and his or her family of origin. Sometimes, one's family needs to be renounced to achieve great things and other times one needs to help one's family see one's greater call.</p> <p>While Jesus is certainly more than a character in a movie, his life in this text captures that tension which is present in the lives of all Christians.</p> <p>God brings us into an earthly family and yet we are also called to be part of the family of God. God desires for us to find our home in him in order that we may be redeemed creatures of God, loved by our heavenly Father because of the death and resurrection of his Son, and in order that we may pursue the things that God has called us to do.</p> <p>The human family can be a place of God's working but it never replaces the love of our heavenly Father and the work he does in our lives.</p>

During the season of Epiphany, the church enters into ordinary time. The epistle reading no longer links directly with the other readings and the church reads somewhat sequentially through the epistle and the Gospel appointed for that year.

In terms of the selection of readings from Luke, the lectionary sought to highlight readings that are particular to Luke. Thus, one has less of a sense of the flow of the overall ministry of Jesus in the readings from Luke and more of a sense of what is unique to Luke's witness.

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Epiphany 1	Luke 3:15-22	<p>The season of Epiphany opens and closes with revelations of Christ. The opening moment is a revelation of Christ to the nations (the visit of the Magi that marks Epiphany on January 6) and the closing scene is a revelation of Christ to his disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration. Some like to interpret the readings of epiphany as manifestations of the divinity of Jesus.</p> <p>Luke's account of Jesus' baptism is based on contrast. The contrast between the expectations of John and the people (of a Lord of judgment) and the revelation of Jesus (a humble servant, identifying with the sinful people being baptized, who is designated the beloved Son of God).</p>	<p>In this text, we discover the hope of reconciliation hidden in Jesus.</p> <p>Luke records the hopes of the people – that Jesus would come and wreak vengeance on their enemies and restore the kingdom to Israel. How often are our hopes shaped by victory over our enemies?</p> <p>Yet, Jesus comes to identify with sinners – he is baptized in the waters of repentance like any other sinner – and by fulfilling his Father's mission bring forgiveness to them. This is the hope of reconciliation through Jesus.</p> <p>The hope of the faithful is manifested not in cries for triumph over our enemies but in humble service that identifies with our enemies in confessing sin and brings the work of God to them. We live in a hidden hope that God will bring about reconciliation.</p>

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Epiphany 2	John 2:1-11	<p>This is the traditional reading for the Second Sunday of Epiphany. It records the first of Jesus' miracles and symbolically depicts Jesus as the Bridegroom, the Lord of the Church.</p> <p>In the narrative of John, one sees a change in perspective as Jesus moves from being a guest at a wedding with his disciples to being the one his disciples follow because he manifested his glory and they believed in him.</p>	<p>John tells us that this was the first of Jesus' miracles. It seems like a minor thing (to offer more wine at a wedding is certainly not the same as raising Lazarus from the dead). Yet, it offers us the promise of a much greater thing – the abundant reign of mercy from God.</p> <p>That reign of mercy, however, is still hidden in this world. Jesus has not yet brought about the end of social conflict and ecological destruction. He has not yet manifested the fullness of his holy community, which celebrates in his new creation.</p> <p>Instead, we are standing here with the first of his miracles, living in the hope of what is yet to come.</p> <p>This first of his miracles calls us to put our trust in Jesus, looking forward to the greater things that are to come.</p>

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Epiphany 3	Luke 4:16-30	<p>This begins the sequential reading of the ministry of Jesus from Luke, covering the ministry of Jesus in Nazareth and Capernaum.</p> <p>In Luke's narrative, Jesus' first sermon parallels the ministry of John the Baptist (Luke 3:1-20). Jesus is revealed as the fulfillment of prophecy, he preaches to the people, and suffers persecution. In his sermon, Jesus reveals himself as the one who has been anointed to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.</p>	<p>Our world has proclamations of hope, from advertising to campaign promises. This reading from Luke asks us to meditate on the church and how it lives by God's proclamation of hope.</p> <p>John begins the ministry of Jesus with his first miracle. Luke begins the ministry of Jesus with his first sermon. Looking at his first sermon, we see how Jesus forms a people who live by the proclamation of God's hope made real in Jesus.</p> <p>The reign of God promised in the Old Testament is remembered by Jesus and declared to be present in him. His ministry is a manifestation (in a small way) of God's reign.</p> <p>That ministry continues today among us, God's people. Rather than reject Jesus for the radical claims of God's reign (the way the people in the text rejected him), we live in those claims, gathering to hear them proclaimed and then leaving to put them into action in our lives.</p>

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Epiphany 4	Luke 4:31-44	<p>The reading continues the sequence of Jesus' ministry from Luke.</p> <p>In Luke's narrative, Jesus is seen in ministry in various spaces at various times of the day. He casts out a demon in the synagogue, he heals Peter's mother-in-law in Simon's house, he heals the people of the town who have gathered in the evening, and then he rises for prayer in the morning and departs to preach the gospel elsewhere.</p> <p>In this ministry, Jesus reveals himself to be the Cosmic Christ (ruling over demons), who has come for one (Peter's mother-in-law), for many (the townsfolk), and for all (preaching in other places).</p>	<p>Sometimes, it is hard to find a place of hope. Looking out at the world, one sees turmoil. Looking within one's work, or family, or even one's heart, one finds more turmoil and cause for despair. We long for a place of hope.</p> <p>In this text, one sees how Jesus is the person who brings hope to many places. We find him in the synagogue waging war on Satan, in the privacy of Peter's house, in the common streets of the city, and then in the roads that travel to other places in the world. Jesus claims all places in him as places where he can bring hope.</p>

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Transfiguration	Luke 9:28-36	<p>This reading concludes the season of Epiphany with the revelation of Jesus in his transfiguration. The three year lectionary allows the distinctive qualities of each gospel writer's account of this event to be heard.</p> <p>In his narrative, Luke emphasizes holy conversation. Only in Luke is Jesus going upon the mountain to pray. Also, only in Luke, do we hear the topic of conversation between Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. They are speaking of his coming exodus (the great saving event in the OT and the even greater saving work of Christ in Jerusalem). After Peter's lack of understanding of the unique status of Jesus, Jesus is revealed alone to the disciples and a voice from heaven converses with them, encouraging them to listen to Jesus.</p>	<p>Hope and Holy Conversation. Have you ever had the experience of someone raising your hopes by talking to you about something? "Don't get my hopes up," we say.</p> <p>Yet, God knows the value of holy conversation for Christian hope.</p> <p>In the gospel reading, God reveals how prayer and holy conversation strengthens one in the ministry of hope. Jesus engages in prayer with his Father and holy conversation with Moses and Elijah in preparation for his work of salvation for all people.</p> <p>God the Father, then, invites the disciples to be in holy conversation with Jesus. By listening to him, they will see the work of God in the world through his suffering, death, and resurrection, and be prepared for service as his disciples and witnesses in the world.</p>

During the season of Lent, the church prepares for Easter through repentant reflection and baptismal preparation.

In terms of the selection of readings from Luke, the lectionary reveals Jesus enduring temptation, trial, and testing until he ultimately suffers rejection and death on the cross. While Jesus endures these things for his people, he also speaks to his people, calling them directly and through parables to repentance and conversion.

Liturgical Date	Gospel	Liturgical Themes	Thematic Relation to Hope
Lent 1	Luke 4:1-13	<p>The season of Lent begins with Jesus being tested by Satan in the wilderness. The other readings for the day stress the faithful response of Jesus, calling upon God in the midst of his trial and trusting in God to deliver him.</p> <p>In Luke's narrative, the ministry of Jesus is bracketed with the attacks of Satan. Satan tempts Jesus before his public ministry begins and then at the end, "an opportune time" (v. 13). Here, Luke demonstrates Jesus' faithfulness to his Father and renunciation of seeking to serve himself, Israel, or the kingdoms of the world by any means other than faithfulness to God. This resistance and radical obedience of Jesus will lead from his temptation to his death.</p>	<p>At the beginning of any endeavor, it is easy to give up or give in when meeting resistance. Jesus, however, reveals the way of hope.</p> <p>At the beginning of his ministry, the Spirit brings Jesus into the wilderness where Satan tempts him to choose easier ways of caring for himself, for Israel, and for the world. To each temptation, Jesus responds with trust in God's word and ways. That radical commitment of Jesus to the ways of God opens his way into our lives.</p> <p>Having defeated Satan for us, Jesus now brings us into the certainty of his rule over Satan. Rather than take an easy way out, we trust in the faithfulness of God and hope in him while we endure trials in this world.</p>

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Lent 2	Luke 13:31-35	<p>The season of Lent continues with Jesus enduring another testing. This time, he is not in the wilderness but in the world and tested by political forces set against him. In response, Jesus remains faithful to his mission and longs for the return of God's people.</p> <p>In Luke's narrative, this scene occurs within the travel narrative of Jesus making his way toward Jerusalem (9:51-19:27). He has "set his face toward Jerusalem" (9:51) and perseveres in that mission, even when confronted with political opposition. Why? Because his heart is turned toward Jerusalem and his life is a living prayer for their redemption.</p>	<p>Jesus reveals the courageous cry of hope. Political forces in the world are set against him. Yet, rather than hide or seek to defend himself, he continues in his mission. Why? Because of his longing for the salvation of all people.</p> <p>How do Christians live as a community of hope in a post-Christian world? Some would argue for hiding, others for aggressive defense. Our Lord is calling us to courageous commitment to his mission and gracious longing for the salvation of all people.</p>

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Lent 3	Luke 13:1-9	<p>The Lenten readings now turn to the parabolic teachings of Jesus that manifest God's love in the midst of testing and rejection. The first parable follows Jesus' call to repentance to the crowds and emphasizes Jesus' radical care for those who have been judged by God.</p> <p>In Luke's narrative, Jesus is asked to offer an understanding of how God would read a contemporary event of violent suffering. Rather than allow his questioners to stand apart from the event, Jesus calls all people to repent in the face of God's just judgment upon all.</p> <p>Then, in his parable, Jesus offers a glimpse of the mystery of God's grace. Instead of focusing attention upon the fruitfulness or unfruitfulness of the tree, Jesus turns attention to the graciousness of the gardener (himself) who intercedes.</p>	<p>It is easy to get lost in arguments about God when faced with situations of suffering and violence in the world. Rather than answer with an explanation of God's ways, we live with a testimony of our hope.</p> <p>In the text, Jesus is confronted with arguments about how God relates to suffering in the world. Jesus uses this question as an opportunity to make a radical call for repentance. All people are found wanting before a just God. His call to repentance, however, is followed by his revelation of a life of hope.</p> <p>Through his parable, Jesus invites people to see the actions of God in him in the midst of a world filled with fruitless evil and suffering. When faced with evil and judgment, Jesus responds with hopeful love.</p> <p>Rather than get lost in arguments with the world, we find ourselves living our Lord's testimony of hopeful love.</p>

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Lent 4	Luke 15:1-3, 11-32	<p>The second parable in this Lenten series of parables offers Jesus' call of repentance to the religious leaders and emphasizes God's radical forgiveness for those who repent.</p> <p>In Luke's narrative, Jesus offers a layered response to the challenge of the religious leaders to his ministry. Accused of welcoming sinners, Jesus uses three parables to slowly lead the religious leaders to hear God's call for them to join his table of forgiven sinners.</p>	<p>The Christian church is often accused of being full of hypocrites. Cultural conversations highlight the hypocrisy of Christians, calling for purity in the lives of others while not living in purity in their own.</p> <p>Jesus challenges the church to be transformed from a community of hypocrites to a community of hope. By telling the story of a father's radical love that welcomes sons who have gone astray, Jesus places at the heart of our Christian community a Father's forgiving love rather than his children's obedience to his will.</p> <p>While Christians certainly should seek to manifest lives of holiness to the world, this story of Jesus helps them respond to sin not with hypocrisy but hope.</p>

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Lent 5	Luke 20:9-20	<p>The third parable in this Lenten series of parables looks both backward to Jesus' continuing ministry calling for repentance among the people and forward to his death and ultimately God's radical affirmation of him in his resurrection and enthronement.</p> <p>In Luke's narrative, this parable falls in the last days of Jesus in Jerusalem. He is in the midst of arguments with the religious leaders who are seeking to kill him. With this parable, Jesus confronts their plans to kill him. With his quotation of Scripture, Jesus promises God's vindication of his willing obedience to suffer unto death.</p>	<p>People sometimes talk about dashed hopes. Their plans of the future have been brought to nothing, dashed by a strange turn of events.</p> <p>In this parable, Jesus dashes the hopes of the religious leaders. They seek to control God's church and believe that ridding themselves of Jesus will guarantee their control. God, however, will dash their hopes by raising Jesus and rebuilding the church on him.</p> <p>When faced with the ruin of our plans, we are called back to the ways of God. Here, we see the hopes of God, which are for our future in Jesus, and will build that future on him and his work of our salvation.</p>

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Palm Sunday	Luke 23:1-56	<p>The season of Lent properly closes with Passion Sunday (a reading of Luke's passion narrative). From here, God's people will enter into a much closer reading and meditation upon the events of Christ's Passion through the days of Holy Week.</p> <p>In Luke's account of the passion, he places a moment of reconciliation at the heart of the crucifixion. One moves from the women who are weeping (v. 27) to the religious leaders who are scoffing (v. 35) to the soldiers who are mocking (v. 36) to the criminals who are dying with Jesus (v. 39). Then Jesus speaks to one criminal (v. 43) and dies (v. 44). Then, the perspective moves outward from the faithful centurion (v. 47), to the crowds (v. 48) and finally to the women who are weeping (v. 49).</p> <p>The scene of Jesus interacting with the criminal thus forms a central moment in his passion.</p>	<p>Jesus reveals to us God's mission of hope.</p> <p>People can sometimes speak of hopeless situations. "That person is beyond hope," they say as they write people off. Jesus, however, enters into most hopeless of situations to reveal that no one is ever beyond hope.</p> <p>The criminal's life had led him to this moment on the cross. To the world around him, he was beyond hope and therefore crucified.</p> <p>Jesus' mission, however, had led him to this same place. He came not to offer his life for himself but for others and to bring into the midst of this man's hopeless situation the promise of life with him.</p> <p>That mission of Jesus continues today through his people. He has come to bring you into his kingdom and work through you to reach out to others in his mission of hope.</p>

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Easter	<p data-bbox="415 237 722 269">Luke 24:1-12</p> <p data-bbox="415 313 722 678">The women go to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus and two angels appear to them and tell them that Jesus has arisen. Upon reporting this to the disciples, the disciples dismiss this an idle tale.</p>	<p data-bbox="743 237 1255 418">Easter begins by celebrating the resurrection of Jesus and then chronicling his resurrection appearances and his promises to be with his people.</p> <p data-bbox="743 423 1255 862">In Luke's narrative of the resurrection, one has three occasions of the resurrection being proclaimed. The first occasion involves the women who hear the testimony of the angels, the second involves the disciples on the road to Emmaus who interact with Jesus, and the third involves the disciples of Jesus who see him and hear him commission them for ministry after his ascension into heaven.</p> <p data-bbox="743 867 1255 1274">In this sequence, one has a growing revelation of the presence of Jesus (from not being present, to being there but not seen, to being fully seen as present) and a growing testimony of the resurrection from Jesus (v. 6) and the Scriptures (v. 27). Those who have both the words of Jesus (v. 44) and the Scriptures (v. 44) are prepared to witness Jesus fully to the world.</p>	<p data-bbox="1283 272 1799 378">In Luke's gospel, the message of the resurrection is at first dismissed as an idle tale.</p> <p data-bbox="1283 383 1799 716">As the story continues, however, Jesus appears and the witnesses to his resurrection accumulate. One has Jesus himself, the words of Jesus, the words of the prophets, and the living witnesses of people who have seen him. This idle tale is not idle but active as the Spirit uses witnesses to spread God's kingdom in the world.</p> <p data-bbox="1283 721 1799 938">The risen Lord now raises witnesses in you. He has conquered sin, death, and the devil for you and now he sends you forth, with his Spirit, to manifest how his hope rises in word and deed in the world.</p>