

## PASSING THE BATON by Rev Denice Leslie

Denice Leslie  
Ascension Sunday  
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Acts 1: 1 – 11  
Luke 24: 44 – 53

### PASSING THE BATON

I think I've shared with you I was a skate boarder as a kid. Ever since I've enjoyed watching the kids skate board. I remember going with our son Ian to have a skate board made—the vicarious thrill was wonderful!!

So I'm looking forward to the Olympic Games this year—especially the skate boarders! I remember watching them during the last Olympics.

Every time one of these amazing young athletes swept up off the edge of the skate bowl and into the air, flipping in space and then reconnecting with the edge and race up the other side, my jaw would drop and I'd say, "No way!" in utter astonishment and admiration—thinking-not me! I could never do that!

According to a Christian commentator, "No way you can do that," is what people said to Jesus. Then he would go ahead and do it: Heal the sick, raise the dead, love his enemies.

Jesus shows us the jaw-dropping power of God in human life, and invites us to channel that energy into world-changing work.

Leader: In the synagogue there was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon, and Jesus said, "Be silent, and come out of him!" [Luke 4:33-35]. What did the people say?

They said: "No way, Jesus!" Say it with me:

People: No way, Jesus!

Leader: When several people brought a paralyzed man on a bed to Jesus, he said, "I say to you, stand up and take your bed and go to your home" [5:24]. But the people said,

People: No way, Jesus!

Leader: He commanded his disciples, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you" [6:27-28]. But the people said,

People: No way, Jesus!

Leader: In the house of a dead girl, Jesus took the little one by the hand and called out, "Child, get up!" [8:54]. But the people said,

People: No way, Jesus!

Leader: Then he told his disciples, "The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised" [9:22]. But the people said,

People: No way, Jesus!

Leader: And after his resurrection, he promised them, "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth [Acts 1:8]. But the people said,

People: No way, Jesus!

Jesus got used to it. "No way you can do that, Jesus." Absolutely no way. Then he would go ahead and do it.

You could call him No Way Jesus.

Jesus drove out demons, healed the sick, taught love of enemies, raised the dead, predicted his own resurrection and promised the gift of the Holy Spirit to all of his followers.

Then he was lifted up and a cloud took him totally out of sight (Acts 1:9).

To such a tale, you might be tempted to say, "No way!" But the testimony of the first

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believers and all who have followed as his disciples since is “Yes ... Way!”

The jaw-dropping story of No Way Jesus gives us a new way to experience the power of God in human life, and a new opportunity to channel that divine energy into world-changing work.

Is there any way we can do this? Jesus says we have the power. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, we can become No Way Christians following a No Way Christ.<sup>1</sup> who said to the world, “Way Yes!”

It’s our turn, people! The baton has been passed to us!— Others have run the race with perseverance, forging ahead and doing amazing things they themselves may very well have said to themselves if someone had said to them “What if...?” “No way!” But when presented with the moment:

- The disciples—a bunch of illiterate villagers and fisher folk stopped gazing up into the sky and went out and proclaimed Jesus Christ.
- Rosa Parks, a tired working woman sat down on a Montgomery city bus at the end of a work day and launched the civil rights movement for African Americans.
- ordinary folks in northern Europe hid their Jewish neighbors and lied to the Gestapo—putting their own lives on the line.
- members of this congregation in the face of public opposition supported Japanese Americans during the WWII internment—holding their land for them, going down to the train to provide sandwiches and beverages for those on their way to the camps
- Our Hmong pastor, Paul Joseph Yang with his wife Melody said to my request, “Yes, we will come.” And began with one family—his own and then eventually one

more ---and sat in this big empty sanctuary Sunday after Sunday, week after week, month after month until by sheer dint of prayer and perseverance and reliance on the Holy Spirit grew and is growing a new congregation.

People, Jesus tells us today, It’s our turn. Hear him say, “You are my witnesses” —my team—with my going I have sent you a new coach and bequeath to you my power—the power you need to do way risky life-changing, life transforming things! You can do it!

The choice is ours. The baton is in his hand. He extends his hand—will we reach out and grasp it?

We can sit here and wish to goodness he’d write it big on the wall exactly how – look at one another in hesitation like the disciples who stood out on that hill gazing up into the empty heavens—not quite sure what to do next. But remember:

That’s when those two guys in the white sheets showed up. You know the brilliant light guys we saw at the tomb on Easter morning who said to Mary Magdalene, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here!”

Today they say to us, “Why are you hesitant? This Jesus will return in God’s good time —meantime —get on with it!”

The way I see it we have two choices—we can sit here in alternating contentment or bewilderment behind the closed doors of this sanctuary and alternate between enjoying what we have here or fret about the by gone good old days or we can engage in new and iffy ventures like the one we are on the verge of embarking on this fall: starting a different style of worship to reach out to a new generation of Christians.

The Risen Christ teaches us that his resurrection and final ascension is all part of God’s plan of salvation for the whole world— God’s plan to build the church. That plan is not complete—it’s on going until Jesus returns—we sometimes forget that part.

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<sup>1</sup> Homiletics, Acts 1-11.

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Jesus' going permits the Spirits coming to give us power to accomplish this purpose. We are part of God's purpose--through us others will be brought in to feast at Christ's banquet table.

Let's get ready. There's something for everyone in this venture to do: First and foremost, you can pray. You can verbally support the effort to each other and encourage those undertaking this new witness vs. raising skepticism and prognosticating doom and gloom; You can flex vs. complaining about having to rearrange your life to get out to church at a new time. You can announce hope instead of drape crape. And you can not only get hopeful --you can share your enthusiasm with folks outside this congregation.

We can bury our heads in the sand or sit down in the road and demand everyone who comes through the door be a clone of ourselves or we can open our arms as Jesus teaches us to do and embrace those different from ourselves—and in doing so hopefully we will not miss this opportunity to pass the baton to the next generation of disciples who will minister in this place after we are no longer here. The choice is ours.

The pause for reflection is now. But those Men in White are also here among us reminding us in no uncertain terms that God's time stops for no one!

This Jesus will return in God's good time, meanwhile he gives us the power to go forward. Therefore let's reach out our hand, grasp the baton and run our share of the race with perseverance.

Let the people say, "Way Yes!" Alleluia!  
Amen!