

April 7, 2019

Not by power, not by might but by my Spirit says the Lord (Zechariah 4:6)

Acts 1: 6-11 and 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

By a show of hands how many of us have children, grand and great grandchildren, nieces and nephews, and siblings and friends who are not saved.

In two weeks we will celebrate Easter the great God event in human history. It is Easter which allows us to declare Christ is dead, Christ has risen, and Christ will come again.

It is clear from our scriptures this morning you and I are to be Christ's witnesses. That we have a role in the reconciliation between people and God and to each other is awesome to contemplate. How are we doing? Are we counting on power and might or are we counting on the Spirit of our God?

Those we love, those we are concerned about are getting their fill of bad and confusing information from TV, the radio or newspapers. We do not have to add to it.

We are to be the people with good news, bringing light in darkness, and peace rather than fear. Our word evangelist comes from the Greek word for good news. Evangelism is sharing the gospel: the good news of Jesus Christ. An evangelist is a person who shares the good news of Jesus Christ. Are we evangelists?

It is Easter a time of celebration and thankfulness. The truth will set us free (John 8:32) but we tend to look right at the truth and then turn aside, rationalizing or excusing behavior that is not of Christ.

God's truth sets us free. We are the freest people. We are the people with choice and we are aided by our God. If we allow God, the Holy Spirit, he will guide our choices so they will lift up the name of Jesus. If our choices do not lift up Jesus then we must determine where our choices are coming from.

It was the first return of the captives before the temple was rebuilt and in the midst their fear, confusion and insecurity God, I AM THAT I AM, spoke through Zechariah telling believers then and us today Not by power, not by might but by his Spirit.

Power and/or might do not equal peace. Do we fear losing power or that our might could fail. The Spirit will always bring peace. Jesus tells you and me ‘Peace I leave with you. His peace he gives to us. He does not give to us as the world gives. Jesus tells us “Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid”. (John 14:27)

Do we find ourselves relying on verses from Romans (13:1-7)? ‘What part of illegal don’t you understand, always support those in authority, etc.’ I am sure you are as bothered by this as I am. We are to be spiritually alert and aware of the wholeness of God’s word. Peter is very clear in Acts 5:29 “We must obey God rather than any human authority.” Where there is a conflict between power and might and the Spirit of God we must always go with God. We have no idea who is listening and how God the Holy Spirit will touch them.

We are called as witnesses to the good news. Our message is to be one of reconciliation not judgment or condemnation. Listen to John 3:17-16. ‘Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.’

We have unsaved family or friends who are searching. Many claim to know God but reject Christ. Is this because our message is confusing: mixing power and might – often very little spiritual? Our hearts must ache for them for we know “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God”. (Hebrew 10:39) The words we share are to be a lamp for others’ feet and a light for their path. (Psalms 119:105)

We are to ‘Study, doing our best to present ourselves to God as ones approved by him, workers who have no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth’. (2 Timothy 2:15) We are to ‘treasure God’s word in our hearts, so that we will not sin against God’. (Psalm 119:11) We are to “Be ready with an answer for those who ask us of the hope within us”. (1Peter 3:15) The Spirit of the living God is living in us so that we might be the people of good news.

We are to share an answer; not add to the confusion. We are part of a royal priesthood a chosen generation, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that we may

proclaim the mighty acts of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9)

Jesus is very clear that we will be His witnesses “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)

Jesus is counting on us. How are we doing? Everyone is to hear good news. Everyone is important to God. How important you as? Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground unperceived by your Father. (Matthew 10:29-30)

We can be instruments of grace because we can do all things thru Christ. (Philippians 4:13) This is a mystery. It is Christ in me, Christ in you. (Colossians 1:26)

We face a dilemma praying for the unborn but remaining silent for the children separated from their parents. And now there is a threat to send unaccompanied children, children who are alone, back to the fear and danger they are running from. Would Jesus be silent? Can we?

We correctly pray for the unborn but we turn to power and might (government and law about abortion) to accomplish what we know can only come about when the expectant woman knows she does not have to make her decision alone. This is the spiritual answer.

Are we deaf to the needs of children separated from their parents? We lose our witness if we do not cry out for the children. Do we think God does not care about the living children? Our God cares about the sparrows. He says “Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise and they cry at all unto me I will surely hear their cry.” (Exodus 22:22-23) “The stranger and the fatherless and the widow which are within thy gates shall come and shall eat and be satisfied so the Lord thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hand which you do.” (Deuteronomy 14:29)

Do we look the truth right in the eye and then look aside and rationalize acceptance of un-Christ like behavior?

Mention prayer in school or rather the lack thereof and there is an immediate reaction. It is as if someone has robbed us of our faith. Someone has and it is us.

My parents went to grade school together in 1920's. Each day started with prayer. My mother remembered it. My father did not. They both were not born again until they were in their 60's. Prayer in school did not save them.

Is our faith so weak we are dependent on the power of the education system to make our kids pray? Are we so blind as to think if we can just get the schools to demand prayer unsaved children will find Jesus? It is as if we can be quiet about Jesus but loud about our concern over prayer in school.

Speaking about prayer remember Jesus disapproved of those who "love to stand praying in public". (Matthew 6:5) We need to be very aware of who is watching us and what they hear.

We cannot let a sense of "righteous" anger allow us to trust in power and might. Anger is our strongest emotion and we will turn to it to overcome our hurt, frustration and fear. Every one of us must deal with anger at some time and we must take responsibility for our reactions. If we are hurt is it our pride and sense of self-righteousness that is hurt? Are we frustrated because things are not going our way (forgetting to let God direct our paths)? Are we afraid casting aside God's promise that perfect love casts our fear? What do unbelievers see and hear in our anger?

We cannot be apologists for our own wrong behavior. We must take responsibility. Nor can we be apologists for the behavior of those in authority. We cannot rationalize our own or others un-Christ like behavior.

Share the gospel. Gospel means Good News not judgement of others. Lead by our witness of God's grace. Help others to find God's grace. Condemn sin yes (all sin not selective sins), but let God lead others to changes in their lives. This is the Spirit that changes lives not power. This is the Spirit that changes lives not might.

We must be alert to the voice of God. The master of lies, Satan, would have us believe that if we Christians just had the power and might all would be well. The Apostle Paul's words come down through 2,000 years of challenge to believers. "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having

done everything, to stand firm. Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication.” (Ephesians 6:10-18)

Do you remember the ‘woes’ Jesus identified? We must not let these woes describe us and our faith. “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you lock people out of the kingdom of heaven. ‘Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others. You blind guides! You strain at a gnat but swallow a camel! ‘Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup, so that the outside also may become clean. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which on the outside look beautiful, but inside they are full of the bones of the dead and of all kinds of filth. So you also on the outside look righteous to others, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.” (Matthew 23:13-29)

Today the Body of Christ seems divided. What is the reason?? We are to be one in the Spirit not one in judgement. Does our judgment appear to the unsaved seeker as Christ’s witness or something else?

Pray for the Border guards. They will live with what they are doing and we can assume some are Christians.

We are to pray for those in authority but we are not to condone wrong things. Pray that lies be exposed, that empathy and mercy will reign.

“From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation. Everything old has passed away. See, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation

to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God”. (2 Corinthians 5:16-21)

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death”. (Romans 8:1-2)

Jesus’ kingdom is not of this world (it is not about power and might) but by the Spirit. It is Easter. Jesus said “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” (John 12:32)

People are supposed to know we are Christians by our love not the law we support or do not support or the people we condemn or do not condemn.

Jesus is counting on us. We are the only voice of good news in sinful world.

God has not called us home yet: the rapture has not occurred. Until it does we are His witnesses, His evangelists, declaring good news. Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.

PRAYER: Lord, give us hearts that turn to mercy and grace. Make us your servants bringing light where there is darkness. O God, draw us by your Spirit and away from trust in power or might. Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer. From the end of the earth I call to you. When my heart is overwhelmed lead me to the rock that is higher than I. (Psalms 61:1-2)