

May 9, 2021

We Will Be Witnesses

John 2:1-11 and Acts 1:6-8

PRAYER: O God open our hearts so that we might hear your Holy Spirit speak to each of us and we might be effective witnesses that Jesus is your son and that all people might be saved. We ask in Jesus' name.

The last year, and the recent past particularly, have given me pause to contemplate what being a Christian means. I will always believe Jesus is Lord and that God raised him from the dead but how am I to witness my faith?

Jesus says 'we will be his witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth'. Jesus calls me and you to be his witnesses. What do his words mean? How should we witness? How can we be good witnesses?
(Acts 1:8)

We have a very personal responsibility. My witness, your witness, what people see and hear: is it a blessing to Jesus or does it sadden Him?

God the Holy Spirit dwells in me as a believer just as he dwells in you and all believers. I accept this as true. Knowing this I realize those who are not believers do not have God the Holy Spirit dwelling in them. So I should never compare myself and them.

Our witness is personal. It is real whether pleasing to our Lord or hurtful. Our witness demonstrates who our Lord is and how we feel toward others.

It is Mother's Day, a very appropriate day to have this discussion. There was a wedding and the mother of Jesus and her son, his brothers and disciples were there. Jesus demonstrated for us what honoring our mothers looks like. The last words of his mother Mary are recorded in the Bible: "Do whatever he tells you".
(John 2:1-11)

To the servants she said "Do whatever he tells you." We cannot ignore the simplicity nor the clarity of her words. It was the servants who brought water, filled the pots and took pitchers full of the water turned to wine to the wedding

steward. It was the servants who knew there was a miracle. They experienced being a witness to the power of the Son of God. It was because they did what Jesus told them to do.

What does he tell us to do? He tells us to be his witnesses.

What kind of a witness are we? If we are a poor witness we are without excuse as the indwelling Holy Spirit will guide us unless we decide to do it our own way. Being a Spirit led witness of the grace and love of God in Christ Jesus is always a choice.

Sounds familiar: Raise your right arm. Do you promise to tell the truth, the whole truth (nothing left out or glossed over), nothing but the truth (nothing added or surmised)?

Does our witness tell the truth about Jesus? Does it reflect the fact the Jesus is the way, the truth and life?

It means don't leave out part of the truth you dislike or disagree with or that you may want to avoid for any reason. Even man's laws call this perjury and punishable by law.

You and I are accountable for our witness. We cannot claim we saw or heard something as an excuse for what we say or do. We are responsible as soon as we repeat it. Remember whatever comes out of our mouth comes out of our heart. (Matthew 15:18)

As witnesses do we "let the cross be our glory and Jesus be our song"? Be careful that our words and actions are Jesus not what we heard or saw on radio and TV.

If we are not focused on the Word and allowing the Holy Spirit to guide us we will get caught up in today's cultural wars rather than offering God's grace. The Psalmist tells us to 'hide God's word in our hearts so we will not sin against him.' (Psalms 119:11)

God sent the Holy Spirit to dwell in us making it possible for us to be the witness Jesus wants us to be. The Lord speaks to us and says 'the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you' (John 14:25)

Did Jesus set you aside? Did He sanctify you (setting you aside for a holy purpose)? Jesus prayed for us “They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.” (John 17:16-17)

The question is do you feel the world does not like Christians because they are pushy, arrogant, self-righteous, and judgmental or does the world not like Christians because our witness is a good one of Jesus and brings conviction?

Jesus chose us. (John 15:16) If we are His then the world will hate us (they can take away what we cherish in schools and society but not take away our salvation). If our witness is only to pass laws we are messed up. Even Jesus did not propose political or cultural answers to mankind’s sinfulness. So why should we?

What is important is that people see Jesus and not see us as self-righteous and overbearing. And we are free to choose to be either one. We are free to make this choice because Christ has set us free. (Galatians 5:1)

How do we witness? Oswald Chambers has a challenging answer “A spiritually minded person will never come with the demand – “Believe in this or that.” But will demand that you square your life with the standards of Jesus. We are not asked to believe the Bible, but to believe the One who the Bible reveals”. (My Utmost for His Highest, May 6)

Christianity is not about creeds or doctrine. It is about the Son of God. We are not to be known for our creed but for our love.

We are to be encouragers: People of faith, hope, and love. Does our witness tell people that Jesus Christ says “I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me”? (Revelation 3:20) Can we be the witness that shows Jesus to another person?

We must project love and unity. Jesus tells us this is how people will know we are his. Love, unity: that is how others will know we are Christians! (John 13:34-35)

We are witnesses. We have not been assigned the ministry of judgement and condemnation.

Jesus did not say judge, condemn, make a law, or punish the woman caught in adultery. He did not judge her. Why not? John 3:17 is very clear about this: “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.” So if he didn’t judge and we are his witness should we judge others?

We sing ‘Open the eyes of our heart Lord “and then how do we react to the homeless, the poor, the stranger, food lines, children separated from their family? The world is full of excuses, called the ‘yes-buts’.

But we are the witnesses. Maybe you are the only believer a person sees or hears and he or she makes a Christ decision based on your witness.

We are to stand in Christ and not become a victim if attacked but be people of grace. We should want to be like the disciples who were prepared to be beaten and counted it all joy. (Acts 5:41)

Do we want the high ground? Do we think of it as a sharp pinnacle of a mountain really hard for people to be there rather than a tabletop where there is room for many people and many ways of Christian living? Do you think gays and lesbians can be saved and live there? Are aborted babies saved and living there? Can women who have had or have abortions be there?

It is on Christ we stand. All else is sinking sand.

We are supposed to be unifiers, not dividers. What an opportunity for us in today’s polarized world.

Think about Jesus’ disciples. Simon the Zealot hated Romans and sought ways to kill or overthrow those who were collaborators with Rome. Matthew was a tax collector working for Rome and skimming money for himself.

What, or most importantly, who created an environment where these two enemies could become one with each other? It was Jesus. The same Jesus who said if he is lifted up he will draw people to himself. (John 12:32)

Do you see yourself here? Jesus is the same today yesterday and tomorrow. (Hebrews 13:8)

How is your witness on mask wearing? Do we wear it to prevent others from getting sick? Demanding our right to not wear one it then makes no sense to be against another's right to wear one. Where is the witness in not getting a vaccination saying it will be God's time when I die? Sounds like bravado possibly making one a disease vector rather than a good witness.

Once a week we are in church for an hour of worship that includes a 20 minute message then during the week we listen to hours of non-Christian stuff. No wonder we might question the effective of our witness.

We should not expect politicians to do God's work on the earth (although they are very free in using God's words). That is up to believers – by witness, not power.

We live in a dangerous time. There is a lot pulling us away from our Lord: power, group think, fear, etc. There is not a lot of encouragement for those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, pure in heart, or the peacemakers, let alone those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, or are reviled and falsely accused for Christ's sake. (Matthew 5:4-11)

Jesus' words judge and guide our witness. God has given us everything we need to be a good witness if we choose to use them.

A question? Do you now or have you in the past claimed to be a Christian? Each of us is in a different place in our faith journey. Would your witness of Jesus identify you as a Christian?

Let us finish this morning with God's words: for the truth will set us free.
(John8:32)

“Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”
(Philippians 4:8)

(Psalms 133:1) How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!

Paul wrote “I Paul, therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with

patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (Ephesians 4:1-3)

(Proverbs 14:5) “A faithful witness does not lie, but a false witness breathes out lies.”

Jesus speaks to us from Matthew and Mark “What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart and this is what defiles. For out of the heart comes evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander.” (Matthew 15:19)

“You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; you shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.’” (Mark 10:19)

“The commandments are summed up in these words, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Romans 13:9)

Proverbs 6:16-19 read “There are six things that the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that hurry to run to evil, a lying witness who testifies falsely, and one who sows discord in a family.”

Moses spoke to the people before they entered the Promised Land. “Cursed be anyone who deprives the alien, the orphan, and the widow of justice.’ All the people shall say, ‘Amen!’” (Deuteronomy 27:19)

God had the Prophet Zachariah confirm this. “Thus says the LORD of hosts: Render true judgements, show kindness and mercy to one another; do not oppress the widow, the orphan, the alien, or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another.” (Zechariah 7:9-10)

Peter left us a tremendous word of encouragement. “The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9) It is God’s will that no one should perish but all have everlasting life. We can be an instrument of grace or an agent of the enemy of our souls: Satan who is like a roaring lion seeking who can devourer.

So we come to the question asked in the Old Testament: “O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.” (Micah 6:8)

And the same question is asked in the New Testament. “Then they said to him, ‘What must we do to perform the works of God?’ Jesus answered them, ‘This is the work of God; that you believe in him whom he has sent.’ (John6:28-29)

Mary said “Do what he says”.

Jesus says “You will be my witnesses”.

PRAYER