

“Witnessing In His Name”

One of the exciting stories in the Bible is found in Acts, chapter 3. Peter and John go up to the temple to pray. A man is there, lame from birth, begging for money. (People carry him there every day to beg). Peter stares at him, and says, “Look at us...we don’t have any money, but we’ll give you what we have: In the name of Jesus, get up and walk!” And he does!

He starts to walk all around the temple grounds, walking and leaping and praising God. Then he hangs on to Peter and John, and a crowd gathers. Peter seizes the moment, and tells them about Jesus: God sent Jesus, the “Author of life”. You killed Him. But God raised Him from the dead – and we are witnesses to that. We didn’t heal this man in our own power, but Jesus did! You acted in ignorance, but now you need to repent of your sins and trust in Jesus to save you.

People are amazed (obviously). All except - guess who! The religious leaders. They are irate that Peter is telling people Jesus rose from the dead. The Sadducees are most bent out of shape, because they taught that there is no resurrection from the dead!

So they arrest Peter and John. The next day they bring them before the religious authorities and warn them not to tell people any more that Jesus has risen from the dead. The response of Peter and John is our Scripture text for today: “We cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). He’s telling them, we have witnessed what the Lord has done, it is changing our life, and we can’t help telling others about it!

I want to talk about bearing witness to our faith in Christ with others. ***Peter and John felt compelled to tell others about Jesus. They couldn’t help it!*** Let’s be honest: Most Christians today shy away from doing that. We feel intimidated. Inadequate. We don’t know what to say. We’re afraid we’ll be laughed at or rejected. Or we may believe to witness means we are imposing our beliefs on others.

Is there a way we can share our faith that will not come across as preaching or judging others? I think there is. Let’s think about that. (Sure, it will take many of us out of our comfort zone – but that’s ok. It will help us to grow). ***The first requirement for witnessing to others about Jesus is that we have a first hand experience of the Lord ourselves.*** We can’t witness what it is like to be in a tornado unless we have experienced one. We’re not going to be called into court to testify about an auto accident unless we were actually there and saw it! Peter and John spent 3 years following Jesus around, living with Him, learning from Him. When He rose from the dead, they actually saw Him in His risen form.

If we are just a nominal Christian, if we have never experienced Jesus and the change He brings in a life, we’re not going to be motivated to witness about Him. We can’t share what we don’t have. So, if you have never turned from your sins and asked Jesus to come into your life and make you a new person in Christ, I encourage you to do it!

Then too, we witness by our actions (our life) and our words. Peter and John were used by God

to heal a man. That act of healing was a loving, caring thing to do. It got peoples' attention! What they *did* backed up whatever they *said* about the Lord! *A lot of Christians today have this attitude: I don't need to witness with words. I just let my life speak. My good deeds are my witness. Really!* Christian author Ros Rinker has written, "The spoken word is never really effective unless it is backed up by the life. The living deed is ultimately inadequate without the spoken word. The reason for this is obvious. No life is good enough to speak for itself. Any person who says, 'I don't need to witness; I just let my life speak', is unbearably self-righteous." Episcopal priest and author Sam Shoemaker says, "I cannot by being good, tell of Jesus' atoning death and resurrection, nor of my faith in His divinity. The emphasis is too much on me and too little on Him." Both *deed* and *words* are needed. In our culture, many are suspicious of Christians and the church, so we need to back up what we say about Jesus with acts of kindness and unselfish concern. But also, in our culture, more and more people are ignorant of the basics of our faith, so presenting what the Bible says about Jesus is essential to effective witness.

We can also keep in mind that *there is an objective side to our witness, as well as a subjective component*. The *objective* part represents the facts, the truth about Jesus. What do the Scriptures tell us about Jesus? To grow in our ability to witness we should make use of Bible studies, small group lessons, Sunday School classes, and our own personal study. The *subjective* side to our witness is: This is what Jesus means to me; this is how He is affecting and changing my life.

A way to present our "story" can be as simple as this: 1. This is what I was like before I gave my life over to Christ. 2. This is how I came to meet Christ. 3. This is the difference Christ is making in my life.

For instance, the "popcorn" version of my story I can share with others is something like this. I began to think about God when I was perhaps 10 years old or so. At the time my parents didn't go to church, but I started to go to Sunday School and Vacation Bible School at a church very near to my home. I felt drawn to God. I went through confirmation class and joined the church, but it was in my teenage years that I began to wonder about the meaning of life, and what my purpose was in life. Through the influence of a very evangelistic pastor I gave my life over to Christ. I began to feel the hand of God on my life, and found a new purpose in living – that is, to glorify God and do His will.

Your story of how and why you've become a follower of Jesus can be just a simple, but it can have an effect on others when we share it.

Another thing to keep in mind when we want to witness to others about Christ is this: *"lead from weakness"*. What do I mean by this? Don't come across as being better, more superior, more righteous than others. Be honest about your failures, your weaknesses, and how you struggle with some things in life, even as a Christian. For instance, one way to "witness" would be: "You know, Linda, you need to go to church. Quit living the kind of life you're living. Look at me – I don't do the kind of bad things you do now that I'm a Christian." Compare that style of witnessing with this: "Linda, I'm not here to judge you. Heaven knows. I still struggle

with a lot of things. I'm not very patient with my kids, and I still have a hard time controlling my temper. But I do know that since Christ came into my life I have found a strength beyond my own to overcome some of my bad traits and habits."

Or, if you are sharing your faith with someone who doubts the Bible: "Jim, I don't understand everything in the Bible. Some days I read it and don't get anything out of what I read. But there have been times when it's like God is speaking directly to me from this Book, and it's really helped to give more direction and hope in my life." *Lead from weakness* – coming across to people as knowing more than them or being better than them because you're a Christian is a real turnoff!

We are looking at some ways we can be a more effective witness for Christ. Let me say some things about ***the importance of love and caring as we witness***. I was serving my first church as a young pastor – I was probably 20 years old when this incident happened. I went to visit a parishioner at Harrisburg Hospital. I had on a suit and was wearing a clerical collar. A man came up to me and said, "Father?" I said no. "Rabbi?" No. Then he says, "Are you a Christian?" I said yes. "The born again kind?" he continued. I answered, "Yes. Is there any other?" But you know what? Afterwards, as I thought about what had happened, I was really angry. I felt he showed no respect towards me, not genuine concern for me as a person. I was just another soul to be put in his bag of people he had helped convert.

Maybe my attitude towards him was unfair. I'm sure he would have said he cared about my soul. But what it felt like was that he in no way valued me as a person, with no regard for what I thought, or felt, or believed. And he had appointed himself as a judge over me, that I had to answer to him for my life.

Over the last number of years the term "relational evangelism" has been used. This simply means that the most effective evangelism often takes place when we first take time to build *a relationship* with the people we want to win to Christ. I realize there are situations where we can witness to *strangers*, or to people we will *never see again*, and God uses those encounters and the Spirit can lead us into those situations. But often, before people will listen to what we have to say about Jesus, they have to sense that we value, respect and genuinely care about them. As it's often been said, people won't care about what we know until they know that we care.

It helps our witnessing if we take an interest in people. Ask them questions. Asking the right questions can sometimes lead to a spiritual conversation: questions like "Do you go to church?" "What do you think about _____ (some current event)?" "What would you like most to accomplish before you die?" "If you could have one part of your life to live over again, what would that be?" Be curious, be creative. Such questions may lead to a serious discussion about God.

Linking love and caring to our witness can also involve looking for special times when people may be more open to Christ and the spiritual side of life. What are some of those times? Sickness. Loss of a loved one. Loss of job. Children leaving the nest. Separation or divorce.

Family problems. I've already mentioned Christian author, Ros Rinker. One of her books – an old one, but a good one – is called *You Can Witness With Confidence*. In it she tells this story. The setting is a dormitory for nursing students. A student named Jean just learned that her fiancé was killed in a car accident. Other nursing students tiptoed and whispered as they passed the door to Jean's room. Meanwhile, Jean was packing her suitcases to go home, to attend the funeral. Another student, a Christian named Mary Gordon, found that she couldn't just walk past, so she knocked on the door. Afterwards, Mary related to a Christian counselor what happened: "All I could say to her was that I understood, because I'd lost my father not long before." She also said to Jean, "I know there isn't too much I can do to help, but I know One who can. Try praying to Him. That helped me when I thought I couldn't stand it."

When Jean came back from the funeral, she looked for Mary right away. She said, "You were the only girl in the whole dorm that came to my room after I got the (news). I want to know you better. You were kind to me. I did pray, and it helped." As result of this newfound friendship, Mary shared her personal faith, and Jean eventually became a follower of Jesus.

A few weeks back, Nancy and I had dinner in a restaurant with a husband and wife couple who are friends. As we were leaving, the lady we were with went to the ladies room. Her husband, and Nancy and I waited outside the entrance and talked. We waited, and waited. I said, half joking, "I hope she's ok." Finally she came out, and remarked how that was quite an experience. They were going back to our house for dessert, so she said she would fill us in.

Well, our server that night was a young lady who was especially pleasant and cheerful. She joked with us, and we had a delightful time as she waited on us. When our friend was going towards the lady's room, she noticed our server was alone, and looked very sad. . "Are you ok?" Stephanie asked. "Yes". But she still seemed subdued. "Are you sure you're ok?" Stephanie asked again. Just then our server started to cry. She shared her story. She was upset and concerned for her daughter, who was 11 years old. She was causing her mom trouble, and she feared for her. In fact, she admitted that she was afraid of her daughter. "Do you have a pastor?" our friend Stephanie asked. Yes. I've already talked to him. Then Stephanie said, "Can I give you a hug?" So she did, and left by saying to our server, "I will pray for you."

Everyone is carrying some secret burden, fighting some battle, hoping for a better life. And we just might be the person God wants to use to touch their life! **Love**...without love, any attempt to witness is hollow, and an imposition.

Let me say something about the work of the Holy Spirit in our witnessing for Christ. Jesus didn't command us to share His message with the world, then leave it up to us to figure out how to pull it off! *He equips us with the Holy Spirit as our "Helper".*

How does the Holy Spirit help us share our faith? For one thing, He is the one who makes people aware of their sin and need of Jesus. Jesus said this regarding the Holy Spirit, or the Advocate, "Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he

comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned” (John 16:7-11). The Holy Spirit shows us our need, and creates faith in us. We don’t have to tell people how bad they are! It is the Holy Spirit’s job to convict people of their sin and of their need for a Savior. Also, the Holy Spirit arranges encounters with people and opportunities to share our faith. Pray each day that the Spirit will guide us to people who need Christ, and open up opportunities to speak with others about the Lord.

Simon Peter, warned not to speak any more about Jesus, said, “We cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). If you’re a follower of Jesus, you are called to bear witness of Christ by the way you live, and at times, to speak to others about Christ and what He’s done in your life. This business of witnessing for Christ is not just up to “preachers”, nor a few lay people with the gift of gab!

You may say, “But what if I try to witness, and the person rejects what I have to say?” That can happen. Our job is to witness. We have to leave the outcome in God’s hands. Author and pastor Dr. Wallace Fisher, who served Trinity Lutheran Church in Lancaster with distinction for a number of years once wrote, “The basic objective in person to person evangelism is to present Christ *as he is* so that persons as they are will decide for or against him and his church...some people say yes, others procrastinate; some say no, others become hostile...each of those responses reflect *effective* Christian witness.”

I pray that followers of Jesus today will have that same passion Peter and John had to tell the story of Jesus to others. Let me close with a few verses from the gospel of John. In John, chapter 1, it tells of Jesus beginning His ministry. A man named Andrew begins to follow Jesus. Then it says this of Andrew: “He first found his brother Simon and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus” (John 1:41-42a). Andrew introduced his brother Peter to Jesus.

Just after that Jesus called Philip to follow Him. Then look at what Philip did. “Philip found Nathanael and said to him, ‘We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.’ Nathanael said to him, ‘Can anything good come out of Nazareth?’ Philip said to him, ‘Come and see’” (John 1:45-46).

Here we have it! One person, inviting another person, to check Jesus out! That’s what God is calling us to do!

Harry L. Kaufhold, Jr.
Community United Methodist Church
July 7, 2019

