

Third Sunday of Easter
Sermon Text: Acts 3:11-21
Luke 24:36-49
Date preached: April 22, 2012

Alleluia, Christ is risen!

He is risen, indeed. Alleluia!

When we bear witness to anything in life, we do so with a purpose. In a court of law, witnesses are called to testify to what they have observed, seen and heard. Their testimony is used to ascertain the guilt or support the innocence of an accused individual. In so doing, it is critical that their testimony be true.

The danger in giving false testimony is that lives are damaged. False testimony can lead to someone being wrongly convicted of a crime, and thus be unfairly jailed. In such an instance, his or her spouse and children suffer from false testimony and the outcome.

The victims of crimes suffer as well. If someone is wrongly convicted and then eventually set free, the feeling that they have received justice is lost.

When it comes to bearing witness to faith, the stakes become even greater. Failure to witness to the faith can lead to lack of belief or false belief. The judgment of whether one believes lies solely with the Lord, but it is

also clear through the witness of Scripture that saving faith is in Christ alone and comes to us only as a free gift.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are propelled forward out of love for God and love for our neighbor to be witnesses to Christ. Equipped with the Holy Spirit, Peter is bold in his proclamation.

He is also very succinct. He sticks to what he and the other disciples observed and learned. He sticks to the witness of the Old Testament scriptures that they saw Jesus fulfill. Much of what he says recorded in Acts 3:11-21 is stated in the Athanasian, Nicene and Apostles' Creeds.

Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate. Jesus was handed over by religious leaders. Both Jews and non-Jews, all of humanity then and now bear the responsibility for his death. It was our sin, our natural disobedience ingrained in us from Adam that led God to act for us.

God acted to save us. "See what kind of love the Father has given to us..." that he sent Jesus into the world to save and redeem us from the punishment of our sin. Christ entered the world with a purpose. As stated in 1 John 3:5, "You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin." Christ accomplished this purpose through his death and

resurrection. The result of this work is the forgiveness of our sins, that cleansed from all sin we may be found worthy through Christ to dwell in the house of the Lord.

This is our testimony. This is our witness. This is what we declare because it is true. In fact, so true is this good news, that the first apostles, and many disciples throughout the church in various times, willingly gave their lives for the sake of the Gospel.

They do this in faith that through Christ there is the forgiveness of sins. They do this in faith that God has united them in the communion of saints and the promise of resurrection.

Now, as it is true in a court, the testimony of a witness may not be believed. Friends, we cannot control how the news will be received. Jesus himself was rejected many times, even when he returned to Nazareth and found a whole town lacking in faith.

Our witness to the gospel of Jesus guides how we respond to the hate and evil of the world. First, it does not mean that we invite the hate and live our lives as victims. It does mean that in the power of the Gospel, we do not return hatred for hatred, violence for violence.

Second, as followers of Christ we proclaim the Word of God that convicts people of their sin and then gives testimony to the forgiveness of sins through our Lord. We bear witness with the one who from the cross prays “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”

Jesus knows he is sending us out into a hostile world. As He sends us out into the world, Jesus prays for the spiritual security of his disciples, which includes us. We are sent not by our own devices, but sent with the power of the Holy Spirit. We are sent wrapped in the prayer of our Lord, like a blanket that keeps us warm on a cold evening.

The Holy Spirit helps us to bear true witness to the love of God through Christ Jesus our Lord, by calling to our remembrance the testimony offered in scripture. The Holy Spirit helps us witness to those many moments in our life where God’s grace flowed over us like the soothing water of a refreshing shower.

Our witness comes in words and deeds of loving service. For example, consider the art displayed on the bulletin covers. Pam Garella has been using her artistic talent as a witness. The pictures call to our remembrance the good news of Christ Jesus. The anthems sung by our choir bear witness to the saving work of our Lord.

In a little while we will bear witness to the saving work of God as we come to the table and receive the body and blood of Christ. Here is offered the forgiveness of sin. Here the Good news of Christ triumph over sin, death and the devil abounds in our lives. As St. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 11:26, “For as often as we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim our Lord’s death until he comes.” Partaking in the sacrament is a witness to our Lord.

From this as our foundation, our witness unfolds in acts of loving service. We witness to Christ through tending to the needs of our neighbors. What a wondrous example today, that as fellow disciples of our Lord, we tend to the needs of one of his children, as we strive to aid the Weldon family in the purchase of a needed service dog.

When we leave today, as we leave each time of worship together, let us leave with the purpose of bearing witness to Christ, in word and in deeds of loving service. AMEN.