

You Are Witnesses

Luke 24:44-53

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First Presbyterian Church, Luling

What do we do as Christians? I mean, what is it that would show people that we are Christians, that we are followers of Jesus? Well, we go to church on Sunday morning, even though that's been online. We gather together to worship however it looks. But that alone doesn't do it. I mean, anyone could come in any other church on Sunday morning and sit and stand and sing at the appropriate times, or tune in to any church's YouTube channel and not be the least bit interested in following Jesus.

Well, we do good things. We help out at the food pantry, we contribute to the homeless shelter, we pray for sick people, we take care of neighbors. We are good people. And that is true. But that doesn't mean necessarily that we are disciples of Jesus. There are plenty of good people who are not, but who do good things.

There is that question—what is it that we do or how we act that lets people know that we are Christians? There are lots of answers, lots of incomplete answers, anyway. It's probably a combination of many, many things, including what we say and how we say what we say, and how we live our day-to-day lives, and much much more.

Then there is another question: how do our lives reflect on our faith? What I mean is, what do our lives say about Jesus? If we say we are Christians, how does our behavior show the world who Jesus is?

We are witnesses to everyone we meet. We show them what Christians are like, what Christianity means, the character of this Jesus that we say we follow. Even if they themselves are Christians, our witness makes a difference to them. We are witnesses. Our testimony may not be formal or intentional, but we testify to our faith and to our Lord in everything we do and everything we say.

Jesus tells the gathered disciples, in the last words he says to them before he rises to heaven, "*You are witnesses of these things.*" You are witnesses of these things, he says. He does not say, "you have been witnesses of these things," meaning the events of Jesus's life and death are over and don't have anything to say to future generations. Jesus does not say "you will be witnesses of these things," meaning, you have to wait until you have it all figured out and can make a well-reasoned and logical argument for the Christian faith until you can be a real

witness. Nor does Jesus say, “you ought to be witnesses of these things.” This is most often what we think he said, thinking that we really should do or say something specific in order to be witnesses to Jesus. That we could choose when we are a witness to him and when we are not. But Jesus doesn’t say any of these things, doesn’t say that you were or you will be or you ought to be witnesses. What Jesus says is “you are witnesses of these things.”

As Christians, whether we like it or not, whether we want it to be this way or not, our conduct and our attitudes and our actions and our words reflect on Jesus. Let me make an analogy. If, for instance, you come upon someone wearing a Longhorns shirt, who behaves badly, it might lower your opinion of the school itself. And, to be equitable, if you come upon someone driving a car with an A&M sticker who cuts you off in traffic, you might mutter to yourself, “Ugh. Aggies.” Claiming to represent something, claiming to be an example of some place, gives us a responsibility and a duty to reflect well on that place. So it is with claiming to be Christian. What people can see of us, what they notice about our behavior and words, what they know of us, then reflects on what they think of Christians in general, the church, Jesus himself. We don’t have a choice whether to be witnesses to Christ, but we do have a choice about what kind of witness to be.

How, then, can we be a good witness to Jesus Christ, an accurate witness, a respectful witness, an engaging witness, a witness that draws people near rather than mutter under their breaths about us?

Jesus tells the disciples they are witnesses “of these things.” What are the “these things”? It’s not entirely clear in Luke what he means, but it seems most likely that he is referring to what he just told them about the message of the Scriptures: *“the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed In his name to all nations.”* That says to me that we are witnesses to the basics of our faith. We aren’t expected to have all the answers about all the controversial issues ever raised, nor the wisdom for deep theological difficulties. Our call is to be witnesses about the good news of the gospel, about the life and death of Jesus, about the resurrection, and about repentance and forgiveness of sins.

We are witnesses. Not because we have chosen to be witnesses, but because we are followers of Jesus. We can choose to live in a way that witnesses to our faith in his life, death, and resurrection. We can choose to live in a way that witnesses to the repentance and forgiveness found in him. These choices may not always be easy, but to make the other choice is to discourage others from also being followers of Jesus. These choices to be a good witness for Jesus must be

made over and over, many times a day. But we are witnesses to the good news of the gospel.