

“Jesus Speaks: You Are Witnesses!!!”

Easter 3 (Year B): 18 April 2021

Salado UMC, Salado, Texas 76571

Preaching Text: Luke 24:36b-48

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“There are times not to flirt. When you’re sick.

When you’re with children. When you’re on the witness stand”—(Joyce Jillson).

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I heard a scholar say that evangelism is inviting people into stories of God’s promise to the ancestors (Abraham/Sarah, Isaac/Rebekah, Jacob/Rachel), the deliverance from slavery, the gift of the land, and the like. Evangelism also means that as we invite people into the initial stories of faith that these stories become so descriptive for our lives that we abandon and renounce all other stories that shape our lives. In other words, the stories of scripture are the stories that characterize who we are and what values and meaning God’s gift of life has for us.

Likewise, evangelism invites people into a faith world that offers an alternative reality in which people seek to fulfill God’s gift of life to them. Another way to say this is in a little slogan: “Switch stories—change lives!” Hear today a story from Luke:

[36] While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." [37] They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. [38] He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? [39] Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." [40] And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. [41] While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" [42] They gave him a piece of broiled fish, [43] and he took it and ate in their presence.

[44] Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." [45] Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, [46] and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, [47] and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be

proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. [48] You are witnesses of these things (Luke 24:36-48).

Luke 24 describes the Emmaus road, where Jesus opened scripture stories to two disciples and ate with them. Returning to Jerusalem, Cleopas and his companion hear that Jesus also appeared to Peter. As Jesus says to the disciples “Peace be with you,” he offers the disciples a great gift. Yet, they think they see a ghost. So, Jesus in essence, asks them: “Why do you have trouble in believing that it is me, risen from death?” Jesus then invites them to “touch me and see.” Next, he asks for food and they give him some “broiled fish,” an appetizing Galilean dish. Ghosts obviously do not eat, so Jesus eating reveals God’s bodily resurrection of him. Jesus also discloses that his earlier words to the disciples have now come to pass. Similar to the teaching on the road to Emmaus, Jesus explains to these disciples that he fulfills the scriptures. Lastly, Jesus authorizes these disciples as the proto-Church: they are now witnesses.

“Witness” is a scary word for scores of modern Christians. It conjures images of “button-holing” people, or accosting innocent folks that one does not know with questions of eternal significance. But witness has not always been a frightening word for Christians. A gentle soul if there ever was one, St. Francis of Assisi, once said: “Witness at all times. If necessary, use words.”

What is important for us is the last word Jesus says in today’s text is simply “You are witnesses of these things.” So, what does this mean for us? In Greek, the word for witness is “*martyr*.” And if we know anything about the United States government’s Federal Witness Protection Program, we know that to be a witness sometimes means witness can be in danger of harm. There used to be a television series about the witness protection program called *In Plain Sight*. A witness provides proof and truth of something. The government provides a new identity for those entering the witness protection program—and the witnesses’ next of kin. In a way, a Christian witness gives us a new identity in Christ. Paul writes of those who dwell in Christ that “you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God” (Galatians 4:7) and “you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God” (Ephesians 2:19).

Thus, as those who have an identity in Christ, we are those who see an event and can report it to others. What we report is that life can change for the better by living in Christ. It means to offer our lives as an “exhibit A” of change and that our testimony or our witness is the truth and power of the gospel.

We are individually and collectively to witness by our words and works that our God is God! We make a good or bad witness by producing good or bad works. Good works glorify God—if we are a reliable witness to life in God’s way. We have a tremendous individual duty by our example to witness for God. As one writer put it, “Witnessing is not a spare-time occupation or a once-a-week activity. It must be a quality of life. You do not go witnessing, you are a witness.”

Have you ever heard this saying: “I can’t hear what you are saying because your actions speak so loudly?” In this vein, Paul Gilbert expressed a true principle of personal witnessing in a poem:

You write a sermon,
a chapter each day,
By the deeds that you do and the words that you say;
Men read what you write,
if it’s false or it’s true.
Say, what is the gospel according to you?

D.L. Moody once spoke with a woman who didn’t like his method of evangelism. “I don’t really like mine all that much either. What’s yours?”

She replied that she didn’t have a method. Moody said, “Then I like my way of doing it better than your way of not doing it.”

Jesus met unbelievers where they were. He realized what many Christians today still don’t seem to understand. Cultivators have to get out in the field. According to one count, the Gospels record 132 contacts that Jesus had with people. Six were in the Temple, four in the synagogues, and 122 were out with the people in the mainstream of life (*Why Christians Sin*,

J.K. Johnston, Discovery House, 1992, p. 142). A good witness talks to real live people in real life situations.

During the reign of Oliver Cromwell, there was a shortage of currency in the British Empire. Representatives carefully searched the nation in hopes of finding silver to meet the emergency. After one month, the committee returned with its report. "We have searched the Empire in vain seeking to find silver. To our dismay, we found none anywhere except in the cathedrals where the statues of the saints are made of choice silver." To this, Oliver Cromwell eloquently answered, "Let's melt down the saints and put them into circulation" (*How to Witness Successfully*, George Sweeting, 1978).

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