

Last year, when we had our cottage meetings to listen to God, to one another, and to our community regarding the mission of our congregation, we considered the question:

What is God calling us to be and do?

The response that came up over and over again in group after group was “witness”.

Witness is both a thing and an action, so it speaks to both aspects of the question.

God is calling us to *be* witnesses – and to *do* witness.

But what does witness mean?

I always think it is best to start with ordinary definitions.

A witness is someone who sees or experiences something firsthand.

As an action, to witness is to tell others what has been seen or experienced.

You with me?

So now we go a step further.

what does witness mean

- when we think about our life together as the church,
- as the gathering of people following Jesus,
- and the question of what God is calling us to be and to do?
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- Witness to what?

I know someone of you is already thinking “Pastor, that’s the wrong question – it’s witness to whom!”

You’re right, of course.

God calls us to witness a person-- Jesus.

But what does that mean, exactly? And how do we do it?

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Let’s consider the story Matthew tells us of the Transfiguration of our Lord.

It is the account of an intimate encounter with the Divine presence – like the encounters of Moses and others we read about in the Bible.

All the elements are there for a classic theophany (Greek for an appearance of God):

- a mountain,
- bright shining light
- an overshadowing cloud and
- A voice from above
- – in this case, a voice repeating what had been said at the baptism of Jesus.
- And witnesses – always at least 2

On the mount of Transfiguration, there are **two sets of witnesses** –

Moses and Elijah are witnesses to the glorification of Jesus, Son of the Father

- They see Jesus right before their eyes doing what only God does.
- They see Jesus revealed as God present with us – Immanuel.
 - **And they are witnesses for the sake of the disciples.**
 - Moses and Elijah – representing the Law and the Prophets, what we call the Old Testament
 - **Are witnesses to the truth that Jesus is indeed the long-awaited Redeemer promised of God.**

Moses and Elijah are witnesses to Jesus **as the fulfillment of all that God promised**

- from Noah to Abraham
- to Isaac to Jacob
- to Joseph to Moses
- to Elijah to Isaiah to Jeremiah
- to Zephaniah and Malachi to John the Baptist
- – and now to Peter, James, and John.

Moses and Elijah are with Jesus to show the disciples “He’s the one! Jesus is the guy we’ve been talking about for generations!”

They are witnesses so that Peter, James, and John would believe their own eyes and know the truth.

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Peter, James, and John are the second set of witnesses.

As Moses and Elijah helped them to believe the truth of Jesus,

so their telling of what they saw and experienced on this mountain would help others to believe the truth of Jesus.

But they had to wait until after Jesus' resurrection.

That must have been hard! I would have wanted to run back down that mountain and tell everybody what I had seen and heard and felt and come to know for certain.

But their witness needed to be made at the right time.

Because if they had gone and told everybody straight away, they doubtless would have been written off as downright crazy – out of their right minds.

No –their witness needed to connect the truth like cars on a railroad train:

- The resurrected Lord Jesus Christ who sent the Spirit upon the disciples is the same as
- the crucified and buried Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews
- who is the same as the Jesus baptized by John and called beloved Son of the Father,
- who is the same as the promised Messiah of Israel born to Mary,
- who is the fulfillment of all that God had promised from the beginning.

And He's the guy!, they would witness, whom they saw transfigured and glorified, talking with Moses and Elijah on the mountain.

And their witness would need to include not only what they saw, but also what they heard:

the word of the Father saying: “This is my Son, the beloved: with him I am well pleased.

Listen to him!” “Hear him” “Put his word into action”

The witness of Peter, James, and John would help people who hadn’t been on the mountain

believe that Jesus was not like any of the other rabbis.

Jesus is the Son of the Living God.

- Jesus is who all the scriptures are proclaiming.
- Jesus is the presence of God in our midst **and what he says gives abundant life for all who hear and do it.**
- **For he is risen from the dead!**

The witness of the disciples announces the truth:

- **The Messiah of Israel,**
 - **the Son of the Living God,**
 - **and Jesus of Nazareth risen from the dead are one and the same.**

He has destroyed everything that keeps people from living the life of God and **lives to shine brightly into the darkness of this world** through those who trust him.

No box – no booth or dwelling or tomb – can contain him

His glory is brighter than the sun’s fire.

That is the witness of the Transfiguration that Peter, James, and John experienced and told to the others.

And the people they told, believed and told others – and now I tell you.

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Someone of you is probably thinking

– that’s all well and good, Pastor, but Peter, James, and John actually *saw* something – they were eyewitnesses to this divine encounter.

They had something to crow about.

**We weren’t there – we didn’t see Jesus with our own eyes
– how can we be witnesses for Jesus?**

Jesus himself answers that question at the end of John’s gospel as he responds to Thomas the week after he rose from the dead.

²⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

³⁰ [and John writes] Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. John 20:29ff

Witnesses help others who weren’t there to believe what happened.

Peter, James, and John were the witnesses to the Transfiguration

- the eldest disciple,
- the leader of the church in Jerusalem,
- and the youngest disciple.

Their stories of witness helped others to believe in Jesus.

Eventually, their stories were written down – so that generations after them could still know their testimony and come to faith.

We are the heirs of their testimony.

We are the hearers and doers of the Word of God as we have it in the biblical witness.

But even more than that, the church is the gathered people in whom the Holy Spirit blows the life of God

– and through the waters of Baptism we belong to the church in which Jesus is present and active.

Firsthand, we see and experience Jesus:

- forgiving sinners,
- teaching us how to live abundantly,
- receiving our thankful offerings
- showing us the way of forgiveness and love
- setting his table of grace,
- laying on hands for healing,
- interceding for us to his Father in heaven and
- **sending his disciples out to make more disciples.**
- **Sending the witnesses to his gracious mercy to make more witnesses by sharing what we have seen and heard.**

And this is just on Sunday mornings!

There is so much more the Lord Jesus is doing through the church in the world during the week.

- What we say to others about Jesus,
- how we live our lives as those who follow Jesus day by day

- **is to help other people love and trust him as their Savior and Lord.**

As Christians, That is our purpose in life – that is our mission.

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I know this is one of my longer sermons, but I quickly want to leave you with 3 steps to being witnesses and doing witness:

1. **Be present where Jesus has promised to show up.**
 - a. Go to the mountain of worship as often as possible.
 - b. Be open to all that Jesus shows you of himself.
 - c. Be aware of how God is active in your life.
2. **Listen to what Jesus says and put it into action.**
 - a. Take to heart the words of scripture,
 - b. the sermon, the liturgy, hymns, and prayers.
 - c. Read the Bible daily and meditate on it, let God's word sink into your bones,
 - d. ask the Holy Spirit to open your ears and heart to the message of God.
3. **Share what you have seen and heard and experienced of God with others** – in conversation, in letters, through poetry or artwork, in social media, with photos, however you have opportunity.
 - a. Some of us will be loud and chatty and others will be soft and low-profile – but God calls and uses everyone
 - b. On each of us, God has poured out gifts to share the wonderful grace and mercy that we receive to overflowing.
 - c. **Use yours.**

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

