

Easter 7. Sunday After the Ascension. 21 May 2023.

Sermon: You will be my witnesses. Revd David Treharne

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses.” Acts 1:8

If you have been coming to church since Easter Sunday on 9 April... 42 days ago then you may have picked up a pretty significant theme in the bible readings...

Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news... “I have seen the Lord.” John 20:18  
Peter preaching to the crowds in Acts... “You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all... beginning in Galilee after John baptised him... how God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and with power... how we went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him. We are witnesses of everything he did... Acts 10:34...  
Jesus’ words ... “As the Father has sent Me, so also I am sending you.” When He had said this, He breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.... John 20:21-22  
Paul preaching on the Day of Pentecost... “Repent and be baptised every one of you...” Acts 2:38  
The disciples on the road to Emmaus... “They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem... found the 11 disciples... and said “It is true! The Lord has risen and appeared to Simon. They told what had happened on the way and how Jesus was recognised when he broke the bread.” Luke 24  
St Paul preaching and sharing the Good News in Athens  
And today... “you will be my witnesses” Acts 1:8

Yes, there is a theme of ‘witnessing’ ... sharing the news about Jesus Christ.

People of God... as Christians we have a God given calling to share the good news of the Gospel, to pass on that which we have received, to be witnesses for Christ (Acts 1:8), to make disciples (Matthew 28:16) and to give an account of the reason for the hope we have in Christ (1 Peter 3:15). There is nothing here about private beliefs not to be shared.

There is a saying, “If you were accused or arrested for being a Christian witness, would there be enough evidence to convict you?”

What are some of the features of being a witness that we see in the Scriptures?

- 1. Witnessing is personal.** A witness is someone who testifies to what they have seen and heard... and experienced. What have you seen, heard and experienced about Jesus Christ, God’s love and mercy, forgiveness, reconciliation, peace, hope, joy, fellowship, prayer, presence, resurrection, new life...? Have you found purpose and meaning for your life in and through Jesus Christ?

It’s not so much about sharing what we know about God... but sharing who we know... who we have encountered. Not information about the Lord... but the transformation of the Lord in us. Sharing our story of encounter and salvation in Jesus. This is what the Lord has done for me. This is my story of his presence, his power, his love, his grace. What is your story that you can tell? E.g. God changed my life around when I was in a mess. I have known the power of being loved and forgiven by the Lord. I knew his presence when...

- 2. Witnessing can be through deeds and lifestyle and authentic Christian living.**  
The Bible reminds us that it is our lives, our attitudes, our behaviour, our conduct and character... and not just words that witness to the love of God in Christ or not. Our lives tell a story. The life of a person infused with the love and life of God speaks volumes and can have a massive impact on

someone else. Our lives can display whether we know God (Titus 1:16) and whether we are the disciples of Jesus (John 13:35).

When the life of a person of faith matches their words the authenticity is wonderful!

Witnessing can be very practical... offering to pray for someone or given a person a holding cross.

St Paul talks in 2 Corinthians Chapter 3 about our lives being a letter from Christ to everyone. It's a lovely image of lives being an open book that others can read... how the love and goodness of God is written in our lives. Brothers and sisters, we can be God's love letter to the world.

**3. Witnessing is Christ centred.** It's not about us... it's about him! The message we have received is about Jesus Christ... his life, his death, his resurrection, his Lordship, his love. The encounter we have had is with the Living God. We point to Christ.

**4. Witnessing speaks of resurrection things.**

We do not speak merely of a God who is loving, a Christ who forgives sins, or a salvation that provides second chances. We speak of the Lord who died and rose again... the one who secures forgiveness and eternal life through his death and resurrection. The One who is ALIVE! Acts puts emphasis on his resurrection and we should too.

**5. Witnessing is a Holy Spirit thing.**

Jesus said he would be in us and with us through his Holy Spirit (John 14:17)

Jesus breathed on the disciples... and said "receive the Holy Spirit" John 20:21-22

Acts 1:8. "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you".

Witnessing is not something we do in our own strength, it requires the gracious work of the Spirit in us.

We don't convert people; God does that job... but he can use us as the catalyst.

It is perhaps a good point to ask ourselves, how do you feel about witnessing to what you have seen, heard and experienced of God in your life? How do you feel about sharing your faith?

- **Excited?**

If we're excited about something we share the news. Most of us when we have good news in our lives can't wait to tell Mr or Mrs Jones next door about it. How many of us just can't wait to witness about our football team, someone getting married or having a baby, getting a new job. Are we not proud and ready to crow about it all!?? Sometimes we might see a notice in a shop window saying that the shop will be shut on ... because there is a family wedding. They are proud and excited about the good news.

The first disciples had some wonderful news that changed their lives. Jesus is alive. Jesus is Lord and Messiah, Jesus heals, forgives, renews, changes, brings light in the darkness, meaning to meaninglessness. They couldn't wait to testify, they could wait to be witnesses, they couldn't hold it in. They were excited to speak about the wonderful things they had seen and heard.

Are we excited about the One we have encountered? If not, then perhaps we need to wait upon God to receive power from on high and have our excitement rekindled.

- **Are you uncomfortable at the thought of sharing faith?**

We worry about putting our foot in it. We don't want to alienate people from God, from church, from faith. We've heard tales of people being pushed away from God rather than towards him

because of well meaning efforts of evangelism, and we don't want to be a catalyst for that, so very often we don't say anything even when opportunities present themselves.

As well as saying the wrong things or just not knowing what to say many Christians are concerned they will be ridiculed for verbalising faith. Well, there is a risk of that. People rejected Jesus and ridiculed him, as they did his early followers. And yes there is always a risk it could happen to us (Luke 10:16). But there's also a risk they might listen and respond as we share the gospel!

We need to recover our confidence in the risen Christ and the Good News of the Gospel. We have a gospel to proclaim that is good news not bad news. And if it's good news for us who believe, why is it not good news for others? If Christ Jesus makes a positive difference to our lives why would we not want that for others? If you know something of the presence of Christ and the power of prayer, why wouldn't you want that for others? If you find peace and reconciliation, mercy, and vision for life ... this is Good News to share, not bad news! If you hear of a neighbour, friend or colleague who is struggling for a reason, sharing faith and witnessing to the love of Jesus can be as simple as asking how things are and offering to pray for them, and saying that you have found prayer to be helpful when you have faced times of distress. It could change their life. I know people who have placed a holding cross in a dying person's hand and it's made a massive difference.

Brothers and sisters, please don't withhold your faith on the unfounded assumption that people don't want to know about God or even go along to church.

- **You might be nervous... or an imposter**

Just like the disciples! Yes, I get that! That's where trusting in God and relying on him to give the words and live the life comes in. You may not feel worthy to call yourself a Christian to others, but perhaps that is your story... that you have felt and known and the love and acceptance of God which you have not felt worthy to receive.

- **You might be empty/tired...**

That's where coming to the filling station to be filled with God's love afresh is so important. Back to waiting upon God again. Let Jesus heal and refresh and renew. They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. Then when he does, we can let others know about the One who gave us healing, refreshment and renewal!

## **6. Witnessing has a goal.**

God wants all people to come to a knowledge of him. We want to see people converted and lives transformed and by his grace we can be used to connect people to the Lord.

I thank the Lord for those people on my journey who put themselves out there and overcame their nerves, their uncomfortableness and their tiredness to tell me about the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank the Lord for those people who have been a love letter from God in the way they have lived their lives. I thank the Lord for those people who prayed for my conversion and my ongoing transformation. We too can be those people!