

SERMON - "You Are Witness To These Things" v47 by Pastor Leena Jensen

I have been keeping diary from a very young age. I still keep a daily journal for my devotions, my thoughts, my prayers. I still remember my first diary was a blue cover with a little lock to keep my meanderings to myself and no one else. I still like to keep some thoughts and writings private.

There are the writings by more renowned people of various vocations that have survived and been shared through the ages, The Diary of Anne Frank, Letters of world leaders such as Winston Churchill, or the journals by Albert Einstein, Marie Currie, Mark Twain, and Charles Darwin to name a few. For us Lutherans the writings and witness of Martin Luther.

The practice of keeping a diary or journal goes back hundreds of years, with the earliest known example coming from Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius. Journaling, or keeping a diary is the art of jotting down thoughts and daily musings has been found to be beneficial for everything from depression to organization and stress. Not surprisingly, this cathartic exercise is also good for your memory, allowing the recollection of events and ideas that might otherwise be lost.

I name just a handful of visionaries across a wide spectrum of professions who benefited from the practice of keeping a diary. More than a historical record, these pages offer rich insights into the personal lives of figures who in their own unique way helped to transform the world. Their writings are their testament to their witnessing of life and the world.

There's something of that same quality in today's readings. Peter speaking to the people outside the temple, John the Elder writing to a particular church, and Jesus speaking to his own beloved disciples following his resurrection. These are all conversations which were recorded by the biblical writers not only for the benefit

of their contemporaries but also for readers in the future. Including us!

In our gospel reading Luke writes “You are witnesses of these things” (verse 48).

Notice, how, Jesus’ speaks to the disciples, he does not say, “you *will* be witnesses or does he ask them, “please be witnesses.” And he does not request, “consider being witnesses if you have time.” No, he says to his disciples “ you are witnesses of these things.” And in turn “We are witnesses.” As it turns out, witnessing is not voluntary, but a state of being. Of course, exactly to what things we witness requires some interpretive imagination. Maybe, “these things” in Jesus’ statement is the real bodily resurrection of our Lord. Maybe, “these things” is the content of Jesus’ own confession – the suffering of the Messiah, rising on the third day, the proclamation of repentance and forgiveness of sins. Or perhaps “these things” is the entire experience of Jesus’ ministry. After all, Jesus’ whole life was witnessing to the “holistic character of God’s salvation.” His disciples were there with him throughout his ministry. In case we need another reminder another clue of who we are, enter Peter, “to this we are witnesses” (Acts 3:15). Matt Skinner theologian at Luther seminary, writes about the people of God in Acts, “The empty tomb of Easter eventually propels the disciples to tell, through words and actions, what they have seen and what they know and what they experienced.” If an empty tomb doesn’t get you out there, it’s hard to imagine what it will take.

But that’s part of the problem. We seem to want to wait around for a more grandiose revelation of God’s activity before we are willing to acknowledge our witness to our God.

As if our God who defeated death, who overturns empires, whose salvation seeks to go to the ends of the earth isn’t enough.

What are we waiting for? What more do we need? What are we afraid of?

But more so, Jesus and Peter remind us that while we are busy expecting another miracle to come our way, our silence, our looking the other way, our inaction also testify — and in volumes. How often we forget that our words and deeds, or lack thereof, are indeed giving witness to how we imagine God to be — and we might want to stop and consider just what our words and actions are saying about God.

I suspect that for many of us, hearing that we are witnesses is not necessarily good news. Do we ever think about opportunities lost to share with someone what Christ has done in our lives. I am sure we can all remember a time or two when we have declined our identity as followers of Jesus.

We might feel that our testimony of Christ presence and activity in our lives is not worthy of sharing or even more its none of anyone else's business. We might tell stories of someone else's witness to others. We might think how often we have determined that our witness wouldn't make a difference anyway, so why bother?

But, in doing so, we deny the truth of who we are and who Jesus needs us to be. We give up telling the truth of what we believe about God that not enough people get to hear or experience. So, we forgot the fact that we are never NOT giving witness to God.

I know it is a challenge to accept our witness to Christ. But I see our witness in how we live our lives. Our words and our actions are our witness, our testimony of our faith and our trust in God.

Here's the catch, .

“We are witnesses” is not only who we are but also then how others see God to be.

“We are witnesses”, gives witness to our selves, our faith, our belief. And that is the hardest truth to hear — that perhaps we don't believe in the identity God has given us,

Or we don't believe God needs it, or don't believe others will see it, or even don't believe that it actually matters. All the while, denying God's expanded horizons and God's relentless attempts to expand our imaginations.

"We are witnesses" does not depend on our acceptance or agreement or approval.

"We are witnesses" does not depend on our readiness or recognition or responsiveness.

"We are witnesses" just is.

Left to our own devices, we would make up every excuse imaginable to give away such responsibility. We would convince ourselves that more qualifications could more certainly justify speaking and witnessing to Christ. We find ways to live out our faith without acknowledging what we know and what others are looking for in this thirsting hungry world.

And there lies the good news because witnessing is not optional. It's not a tap you can turn on and off when it comes to living our faith. It is not something you can decide to do one day and then resolve to take the next day off. It is constant. It's a way of life. It's who you are.

Collectively our witness helps us celebrate the goodness of God, to the many good things he does for us. Peace be with you!

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