

Moving from Membership to Discipleship – Witness
Isaiah 43:10-13
February 12, 2012

“You are my witnesses,” declares the Lord, “and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me. I, even I, am the Lord, and apart from me there is no savior. I have revealed and saved and proclaimed— I, and not some foreign god among you. You are my witnesses,” declares the Lord, “that I am God. Yes, and from ancient days I am he. No one can deliver out of my hand. When I act, who can reverse it?”

Before I actually begin today’s message, there’s something I have to say. Have you seen the price of milk lately? Isn’t that ridiculous? Well, Suzanne showed me an ad that came in the mail and Aldi’s is selling milk for a \$1.29 a gallon. That’s a bargain. If you hurry out after this service, you might be able to get in on it.

Some of you are looking at me a little funny. Do you find it odd that I’d be standing in the pulpit and telling you about a good price on milk? It is a little odd, isn’t it? But you know what, people might think you’re a little odd if you stand around in Aldi’s and talk about the good news of the Gospel.

Now, do you know what I find odd? I find it odd that people are more likely to tell their neighbor about a bargain at Aldi’s that could save them a couple of dollars than they are to tell their neighbor about Jesus Christ, when that little piece of information could save their eternal souls from damnation. Do you find that odd?

With that out of the way – Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father, who sent his Word into the world; from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who is the living Word of the Father; and from the Holy Spirit, who gives us the courage to proclaim the truth of God’s Word.

Today’s message is based on the Old Testament, the Epistle, and the Gospel readings. Since I don’t want to reread all three in their entirety, I’ll give you a small piece of each one condensed into one thought.

“You are my witnesses,” declares the Lord, “and my servant whom I have chosen” (Is 43:10 NIV).

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Ac 1:8 NIV).

“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Mt 28:19-20 NIV).

What I just read is God speaking to the Israelites, Paul writing to Timothy, and Jesus speaking to his disciples. It’s also all three – God, Paul, and Jesus – speaking to us. If you were here last week, you heard me say our only purpose on earth is to be God’s

chosen vehicles to reach the lost with the love of Christ. Last week I talked about reaching the lost with our service. This week we are looking at reaching the lost with our witness.

So, let's look at a few things regarding our witnessing to our faith and to the Gospel. First, just how serious is God about our witnessing. Other than today's three readings, does God tell us to be witnessing? Let's see.

1 Chronicles 16:8 – *Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done.*

Jeremiah 51:10 – *the Lord has vindicated us; come, let us tell in Zion what the Lord our God has done.*

2 Timothy 1:8 – *So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord.*

1 Peter 3:15 – *Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.*

And, of course:

Matthew 10:32-33 – *Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.*

Next, are we supposed to be witnessing all the time, or just when we see a good opportunity. The answer to both is yes. Our very lives should be a non-stop act of witnessing. I'm not saying that we should become Bible-thumping, hell fire and brimstone radicals who stand on a street corner and scream that the end is near. In today's society, that is a negative witness.

We need to be positive witnesses for Christ. We need to be monitoring everything we do and say to be sure that the world doesn't so much see us, but that the world sees Jesus in us. And of course, you're aware of the fact that if the world knows that you are a Christian, you are always a witness. Everything you do and say is a witness to your faith. The only question to be answered is whether you're a good witness or a bad witness.

It's easy to check the condition of your witness. You can be an effective witness for Jesus just by being the Christian you're supposed to be – all the time. If that's too vague, let's try this. You can witness by studying your Bible and being in Bible study. This witnesses to both the saved and the unsaved around you.

You can witness by making prayer a regular part of your life. Not just praying in private, but praying in all circumstances. By praying without ceasing. By telling people who are experiencing life problems that you'll be praying for them – and, of course, then following through on that promise.

I think that should make my point. If you believe in Jesus Christ as your Savior, then you are covered with his blood and your sins are washed white as snow. That means that you are the perfect person to be witnessing about the love of God. The fact that you are a sinner who has been forgiven is the very thing that qualifies you to be a good witness.

The only thing left to talk about is the effects of witnessing. And the effects of witnessing are many. So, let's just talk about a few. From the personal perspective, witnessing will increase your own faith. Like a muscle, in order to be strong, faith must be exercised. Witnessing is a real exercise of faith. For many of us, it's a true leap of faith to tell someone else the reason for the hope that we have. If you have ever wished or prayed for stronger faith, start witnessing.

Witnessing also has a tremendous effect on the unsaved. God doesn't just zap happy heathens into Christians. He could do that if he wanted to, but he doesn't. God has a chosen plan for reaching out to the lost. His plan is us. That may sound like a pretty silly plan but that's what God wants.

God wants to use us as his chosen messengers. The apostle Paul writes: *How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ* (Ro

10:14, 17 NIV).

It is very important you understand that the lost of the world cannot be saved without hearing the good news of the Gospel. That's not something I dreamed up. That's the way God designed it. And the way the lost hear the saving message of the Gospel is through the faithful witness of the saved – that's you and me. In plain language, our witness reduces the population of hell via the work of the Holy Spirit. It accomplishes our number one job.

It's time for all of us to do the job that Christ gave to us; to start doing things to reach the lost – to make disciples of all nations. I am fully convinced that, if we do the one thing God wants us to do, God will bless our church beyond our wildest imaginings. It's going to be an uphill fight, but when was the time that a bunch of stubborn Lutherans were afraid to take on a challenge?

Notice one thing. I'm speaking in the plural. It's not just the pastor's job to reach the lost with the Gospel. That's our job. And if we don't do the job the job won't get done.

On to this week's review. The Bible is God's love letter to you. Prayer is God's open line of communication so his kids can stay in touch. Worship is our thankful response for all the love God daily showers down on us. Service is God's way for us to stay together as a family and the way we physically reach out to the lost with the love of our Savior. Witnessing is our number one job as Christians and it's also God's chosen plan for the world to hear the good news of Jesus Christ.

My fellow members of Prince of Peace, as children most of us probably sang, "Jesus

loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so.” Well, Jesus doesn’t just love us he loves everyone and it’s time we started saying so.