

Moving from Membership to Discipleship: Witness
Isaiah 43:10-13
October 23, 2016

“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?”

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.

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? Suzanne showed me an ad that came in the mail and Heartland 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 Heartland 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 Heartland 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?

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.

You can witness by regularly attending worship services. Again, this is a witness to both

the saved and the unsaved. The saved are encouraged by your presence. And if an unsaved friend is ever at their wits end and needs somewhere to turn, you have a place to take them.

You can witness by serving our church, each other, and our neighbors outside the church. And if anyone has no idea how to serve these people just see me.

And, of course, you can witness by telling others that Jesus loves them, died for them, and freely gives salvation to all who believe in him. If that seems more than you can handle, just tell people what Jesus has done in your life. If you don't feel qualified to tell the whole Gospel story, just tell your story – how you were once lost and now you're found.

Listen as Jesus gives this witness lesson to a man he had healed. *As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. Jesus did not let him, but said, "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed* (Mk 5:18-20). **Nothing fancy, just tell your story.**

There's someone, or maybe several someones, who need to hear a special word about witnessing. There are people who feel they have past bad deeds or other things about them or their lives that make them unfit to be a witness for Christ. To dispel that untruth, I'm going to list for you some people from the Bible who were witnesses to the goodness of God. I'll tell you the person and the skeleton that lurked in his or her closet or the defect in their life that might have kept them from being a good witness.

ABRAHAM			was			too		old.
ISAAC		was		a		day		dreamer.
JACOB			was			a		liar.
JOSEPH				was				abused.
MOSES		had		a		stuttering		problem.
GIDEON				was				afraid.
SAMSON	had	long	hair	and	he	was	a	womanizer!
RAHAB			was			a		prostitute!
JEREMIAH		and		TIMOTHY		were	too	young.
DAVID	had	an	affair	and	he	was	a	murderer.
ELIJAH				was				suicidal.
JONAH			ran			from		God.
NAOMI			was			a		widow.
PETER				denied				Christ.
MARTHA			worried			about		everything.
MARY	MAGDALENE		was,		well,	you	know	...
The SAMARITAN WOMAN			was	divorced	five	times	and	currently living in sin.
ZACCHEUS			was			too		small.
PAUL			was			too		religious.

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.