

Almost 2,000 years ago a powerful force was unleashed in this world – for you. This force gives hope where there is despair, light where there is darkness, guidance where there is lostness, life where there is death.

Last week we celebrated this marvelous Gift and we worshipped the Giver. The gift is Resurrection Power and the giver is Jesus Christ.

The Bible says that we are to be witnesses to this Gift and to this Giver. As Paul was told long ago, so we are told anew this day: *"You are to be his witness, telling everyone what you have seen and heard."* [Acts 22:15] We are to be witnesses to the these things.

A man – let's call him John – prayed this prayer one morning: "Lord, if you want me to witness to someone today, please give me a sign." John found himself a little later on an empty bus. At a bus stop a big, burly man got on and sat down next to John.

John anxiously waited for his stop so he could get off that bus! But before his stop, the big, burly guy burst into tears and began to weep. He cried out with a loud voice, "I'm a lost sinner and I need the Lord. Won't somebody help me?"

John started studying all of those cool advertising panels on the bus. Actually, though, he was really avoiding the big burly man sharing the bus with him!

The big, burly man turned to John and pleaded, "Can you show me how to find the Lord?" John discreetly bowed his head and silently prayed, "Lord, is this a sign?"

Most of us can relate to John on the bus. Mention the word "witness" and we want out. We have a desire to let Billy Graham do the witnessing. We will do the rest of the "church stuff."

Remember the "church stuff" we are called to be a part of? Remember the Five Purposes for which we as a Church exist?

- We are involved in Worship so that God can give us power to live on.
- We are involved in Fellowship so that God can give us people to live with.
- We are involved in Discipleship so that God can give us principles to live by.

- We are involved in Ministry so that God can give us a profession to live out.
 - We are involved in Invitation so that God can give us a purpose to live for.¹
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We are talking about that last purpose this morning: God wants to grow his family. And God wants his family members to be the bearers of his Good News, and the inviters into his Kingdom. We are involved in Invitation so that God can give us a purpose to live for.

Let me put three Bible verses up on the screen about being a witness:

- *“... You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”* [Acts 1:8]
 - *“This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses.”* [Acts 2:32]
 - *“And we are witnesses to these things....”* [Acts 5:32]
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The connecting word in those verses is *“witnesses.”* It begins with Jesus declaring his intentions: *“You shall be witnesses.”* And it ends with Peter proclaiming: *“We are witnesses.”*

How do we get from the decree of Jesus that “you shall be witnesses,” to the bold statement of Peter that “we are witnesses?”

A few stories on being a witness: last Monday morning Jan and I were returning from St Paul, and we stopped at Albertville for fuel for car and body; mostly fuel for body; mostly fuel for my body!

I was going into a Subway, and a family called out my name: friends of ours. They were on their way to Minneapolis to the Twins game.

I had just heard on a morning Twin Cities TV station that the “evil empire” was coming to play our Minnesota Twins. When you are talking baseball and you hear the term “evil empire” what does that stand for? Yep: those New York Yankees.

I mentioned something to this family about the evil empire coming to town. I laughed heartily – ha-ha-ha-ha. I noticed they were not laughing with me. There was a moment of silence in the parking lot.

It was then that I noticed that every member of this family had on a New York Yankees sweatshirt, or a New York Yankees coat, or a New York Yankees hat. They were walking witnesses to the fact that they were Yankees fans.

Point #1: You witness by what you wear, either on your body or in your heart.

Another story of witnessing – one that touched my heart this week. I was paging quickly through the Fargo Forum one morning when I noticed on the obituary page a picture of a delightful looking young girl.

Her name was Josie Greenwood, and she was 3 years old. She had, according to the article, “a brief and sudden fight with acute lymphocytic leukemia.”

The obituary said that Josie “loved to dance and sing, put on makeup and ride bike with her sisters, wrestle her dad, and snuggle with her warm mommy.” It was a wonderful witness to the precious life of Josie. But there was more...

The article also said this: “Josie was carried to Heaven by angels, to be with God and his choirs... May she be kept forever near God, and may we always find here there, and gloriously meet her there.”

Point #2: You witness by the burdens you bear, and how you respond to them.

One last story of witnessing – one that has to do with forwarding email. I saw a statistic this week about sharing things by email.

We are not talking about just a quick email to ask what we are going to have for supper. We are talking about sharing content: like forwarding a news story, or sharing pictures from a special event, or sending on an inspirational story.

Here are the statistics:

- 63% of Internet users share content via e-mail at least once a week.

- 25% daily share content daily.
- 11% never pass on stories or inspiration by email.
- And Mona Fagerwick passes on inspirational stories hourly.

Of those who share Internet content:

- 88% share jokes or cartoons.
- 56% share news items.
- 32% share health care or medical info.
- 30% pass on spiritual material.

Let me share with you what some of that 30% spiritual material might be like. I received this one this week about making and keeping promises. Look at this with me:

Yes, somewhere people still make and keep promises. They choose not to quit when the going gets rough because they promised once to see it through. They stick to lost causes. They hold on to a love grown cold. They stay with people who have become pains in the neck. They still dare to make promises and care enough to keep the promises they make.

I want to say to you that if you have a ship you will not desert, if you have people you will not forsake, if you have causes you will not abandon, then you are like God.²

That email this week was a witness to me of the God who makes and keeps promises.

Point #3: You witness by the items you share, and how you pass them on.

We all witness every day. Sometimes the witness is for a minor thing in the grand scheme of things – wearing Yankee clothing. Sometimes the witness is for the ultimate things in life – to entrust a 3 year old to God for eternity.

We all witness every day. What type of witness will you leave behind you this week for your Lord?

- We witness with our words. Our words witness to what we wear in our hearts, and how we carry our burdens, and what we feel is worthy of being passed on.

The news was saturated this week with three words spoken by a radio/TV personality. Is there power in the words we speak, or do not speak? Three words.

It has been said that women use on average 20,000 words a day, while men use a mere 7,000. But that is an Urban Legend. No one has actually done a study and confirmed that women use more words on a daily basis.

The fact is we all use words. This week we are invited to speak Resurrection words. As Paul said, *“Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.”* [Ephesians 4:29] We witness every day – positively or negatively – with our words.

- We witness with our deeds. Our deeds witness to what we wear in our hearts, and how we carry our burdens, and what we feel is worthy of being passed on.

Last Thursday night I was at a banquet in the Holiday Inn. I was there, and 999 other people: 1,000 people celebrating the 100 year mission of the New Life Center.

It was a powerful witness of how Jesus calls us to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, visit the lonely. 1,000 people celebrating a ministry and committing to continue to care for the least of those in our midst.

We witness every day – positively or negatively – with our deeds.

So, let me ask each of us this morning: what will we wear this week, what will we bear, and what will we share? It is in these ways that we witness the faith that moves us and shapes us.

On the first Easter evening the disciples were behind locked doors, and for good reasons:

- Their Master had been betrayed by one of their own - Judas. They were left without a Master.
- The crowds that had once cheered Jesus were now against them. Their leader had been executed.
- They had slept while Jesus was tormented, and had denied their relationship with Jesus.
- They had nowhere to go.

Into that locked room walked the One person they did not think they would ever see again – and the One person who could save them.

The presence of Jesus startled them. But then he said these words: “Peace be with you.” With those words Jesus forgave their past, brought joy to their present, and secured their future.

That is what Jesus brings to us this day and every day. In what you wear, in what you bear, and in what you share you can witness that Jesus brings peace and life. Amen.

¹ Rick Warren.

² Lewis Smedes, "The Power of Promises," A Chorus of Witnesses, edited by Long and Plantinga, (Eerdmans, 1994)]