

We Are His Witnesses

LWML Sunday 2013

Luke 24:44-53

A witness gives a testimony to something. A witness testifies to something not just with words but also in thoughts, deeds, and actions. Another definition of a witness given by a pastor I heard is this “Someone who by explanation and demonstration gives audible and visible evidence of what they have seen and heard without being deterred by the consequences of their actions.”

There is a story of LeBron James and Nike sign in Cleveland when he still played there, “We are witnesses.” The sign is easy enough to understand. LeBron James is one of the greatest basketball players to have played the game. Some might say that when all is said and done, he may be the greatest. Nike’s simple slogan for LeBron- We Are All Witnesses- is meant to point people to LeBron’s accomplishments. We are supposed to stand in awe at his greatness and his basketball prowess. We are encouraged to see him in person so that we can testify to others about his thunderous dunks and amazing shot blocks. *Witness*. It’s a simple slogan. But it really does say a lot because it implies that LeBron is someone worth witnessing. And even casual basketball fan would agree that he certainly is.

It is a deeply human desire to be a part of greatness, is it not? We long to be witnesses to greatness. We long to give, by explanation and demonstration, audible and visible evidence of what we have seen and heard without being deterred by the consequences of the actions. How many of us love being the first to tell someone a juicy piece of news? In today’s Gospel reading Jesus told his disciples that they are his witnesses to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem (Lk 24:47-8). Jesus’ claim is that the work that God the Father has done through him and his resurrection is great. It is good news. And good news needs to and wants to be witnessed and shared. And so the witnessing begins.

Jesus the faithful witness spoke to His disciples so that they could understand the Holy Scriptures He fulfilled. He tells them why He came into the world, namely to suffer, die and rise from the dead to save us from sin, death and the devil. He sends His Holy Spirit so that His people may be witnesses as repentance and forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all nations. *You are my witnesses*, Jesus says to His disciples.

Christ Jesus our Lord speaks to us today. He raises up pastors to preach the Word in season and out of season. *How are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?* as the holy apostle Paul wrote to the church in Rome. Pastors are sent by God to preach and teach the Law, proclaiming what God expects of His people according to His divine goodness. That Word of Law shows us our sin, our blatant and rebellious disregard for Christ’s life and teaching and our ego-driven rejection of His promises. Thankfully, though, our Lord raises up pastors who also proclaim the Gospel to us that releases us from the vale of sin and death and brings the peace of God that passes all understanding to us. The Good News that Christ came into the world as the great witness to the Father’s abounding love to suffer and die for our sin and rise again so that we may live releases us from the bondage of suffering and death. Commissioned servants also work in our church body as teachers, deaconesses, directors of education, parish music, nurses and others witnessing the living Christ. The Word—who is Christ—is shared so that God’s people may embrace their true identity in His grace. *You are my witnesses*, Jesus says to us today.

Jesus has spoken to the women of the Lutheran Women's Missionary League so that they may be His Lutheran Women in Mission. Throughout the ages, the *Lutheran Woman's Quarterly* has included Bible studies that have been used by people all over the world. Through the Word, our Lord engages people for lives of witnessing. Stories of faith in those pages of the *Lutheran Woman's Quarterly* exhibit the mutual conversation and consolation of the saints that we believe, teach, and confess together. Mustard Seed devotions from the Lutheran Women's Missionary League left in hotel rooms, restaurants and greeting cards show how the witness of Christ continues to permeate the world. *You are my witnesses*, Christ says through His servants in the Lutheran Women's Missionary League. You are called to share the good news that needs to and wants to be shared. You are called to testify to greatness. There are times when we would rather not witness so boldly, are there not?

You see, we all are called to be bold witnesses where God has placed us with Christ leading our witness and the Spirit guiding us. But it can be uncomfortable at times to witness boldly. There are times when we would rather not. I think of Pastor Mike Bonner and his ministry to the prisoners of Donavon Prison. Most of you know him well. He filled in at Atonement during the vacancy period before I arrived. I would often call on him to preach for me while I was gone on vacation. He was a bold witness and desired to witness boldly. I don't know many lay people or pastors who would desire to be a witness to the greatness of the Gospel in a prison. It is a tough, uncomfortable place to go.

Do we have some tough, uncomfortable places in our lives where we would rather "fly under the radar" as Christ's witnesses? Why might that be? Is it because we all want to witness to greatness but only when it is comfortable and convenient to do so? When cultural pressures continue to mount against Christians and the Christian Church, how do we respond? I believe that in those difficult moments when we struggle to be faithful witnesses, the LWML model can be of some assistance. The LWML is a good model for us as Christian witnesses. The LWML pledge especially refocuses things for us: "In fervent gratitude for the Savior's dying love and His blood-bought gift of redemption we dedicate ourselves to Him with all that we are and have; and in obedience to His call for workers in the harvest fields, we pledge Him our willing service wherever and whenever He has need of us. We consecrate to our Savior our hands to work for Him, our feet to go on His errands, our voice to sing His praises, our lips to proclaim His redeeming love, our silver and our gold to extend His Kingdom, our will to do His will, and every power of our life to the great task of bringing the lost and the erring into eternal fellowship with Him. Amen." Christ Jesus was the One sent by the Father as the great witness to love and the people of the Lutheran Women's Missionary League, by the power and grace of the Holy Spirit, respond by witnessing to Christ.

He opened His hands and blessed His disciples in today's Gospel as He sent them witnessing His death and resurrection. Eventually, they would share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with countless people as day by day more were added to those who were saved.

Even today, Christ opens His nail-pierced hands in love to satisfy the desire of every living thing as He blesses us for His service in the world through our various vocations and stations in life. He opens His hands to give us His life-giving Body and Blood as He opens His hands to bless us and keep us, giving us peace. Receiving the Blessed Sacraments, we have been blessed with forgiveness, life, and salvation to share the truth of His all-atoning love as His witnesses in the world. Today, we especially celebrate how Christ blesses the Lutheran Women's Missionary League to be Lutheran Women in

Mission. We celebrate God's goodness shown to us in Jesus Christ by celebrating witness, mercy, and life together in the Lutheran Women's Missionary League.

As a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, a royal diadem in the hand of [our] God, as Isaiah the prophet reminded us earlier, the witness of God's people brings hope to the nations as we are His witnesses. It begins in worship as Christ comes to us to speak to us, lead us out, and bless us, just as He did His disciples in today's Gospel. It continues in worship as Christ speaks through us, leads through us, and blesses others through us. And it will culminate in endless worship as we look to the Day of His return when we who have been spoken to by Christ and who have been led out by Him are blessed to be raised from the dead and in our flesh to live in the joy of being His people forever. *You are my witnesses,* Christ our Lord says. Confessing the truth in love and serving the Lord with gladness, we rejoice that Christ speaks to us, leads us out and blesses us as He graciously entrusts us with the Gospel in our ears, eyes, hands, and mouths saying, *You are my witnesses.* Amen.