

May 24th, 2020

Acts 1: 6-14; Psalm 68: 1-10, 32-35; 1 Peter 4: 12-14; 5: 6-11;

John 17: 1-11

Easter, 7, a

Several of you have the Lutheran Study Bible. As you know, as in most study Bible's, there are all kinds of notes on the side of the page as well as the bottom of each page. Sometimes beside the scripture on the side, there is a question, usually a simple, few-worded question, but a question that often stops us in our tracks, makes us pause before reading on.

In our Acts reading for today, Jesus leaves his disciples. He ascends into heaven. But just before he does, he has some last-minute instructions. Jesus says to his disciples, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and *you will be my witnesses* in Jerusalem, in all of Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

The question over to the side of this scripture in the Lutheran Study Bible reads, "In what ways have you been a witness for Jesus Christ?"

Can any of us just rattle off a litany of our witness activities? Quite honestly the first thing that came into my mind was what I do not do

that is a witness. I try not to use foul language; I try not to be dishonest; I try not to be unkind; I try not to road rage when I want to. If we were sitting in a Bible study, you could also bring into the conversation what you do not do that is a witness to your being a disciple of Jesus Christ.

So, I guess that leaves, what do we do, that is a witness. Here my brain is not so active. However, rather than rattling off another litany of behaviors, I thought of the commandments of Jesus; “love God and love others as I have loved you”. The commandments of Jesus would be the basis of our witness as disciples, followers of Christ.

When we love God and love others as Jesus loved us, our lives certainly are a witness to the gospel of Christ, the gospel of love and forgiveness.

A couple of us are reading the book The Gift of Forgiveness by Katherine Schwarzenegger Pratt. It is story after story of forgiveness given by people who had been terribly wronged. One Chapter is by Elizabeth Smart, another by Sue Klebold, the mother of one of the Columbine shooters, another chapter by Mark Kelly, the husband of Gabby Giffords. In all there are 22 stories of forgiveness, all heart wrenching, all compelling.

There is one story by Polly Sheppard. You remember the story. On the evening of June 17th, 2015, Polly Sheppard attended her regularly

scheduled bible study group at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina. Toward the end of the session, her group rose for the benediction. As they all stood in prayer, eyes closed, a newcomer to their group that day, Dylann Roof, opened fire with a gun, taking the lives of nine church members. Polly's life was spared, as you may recall. When Dylann came to her, he told her to shut up and that he wasn't going to shoot her, that he was going to leave her to tell his story. However in court, Dylann said that he couldn't shoot her because she was looking at him.

Polly says that lessons from the Bible helped her over time move forward and live in a state of forgiveness. It took awhile for Polly to forgive, to be a witness for Jesus Christ, but she did.

Being a witness of Christ's love and forgiveness takes all forms, of course. I've often told you of my mother's witness of letting nearly every hobo in Oklahoma City into our home for a meal or out right giving them money when they came to the door. I don't think it ever occurred to her to be any different. "This is what Christ would do", I am sure she thought.

There are those of you who witness, and perhaps do not even realize it, because it is a habit of your behavior; you are accustomed to being led by the Holy Spirit to witness the love of Christ. It can be in

forgiveness, kindness, love, thoughtfulness, reaching out to others. Many of you have lived as a witness for so long and are so accustomed to it, that it does not take effort. In fact, if I asked you how are you a witness for Jesus, you might have to think about it, because what you do and say is so common, that you do not realize you are a witness. Being a witness for Jesus sometimes takes dramatic turns, such as the forgiveness mentioned earlier by Polly Sheppard, but most often being a witness for Jesus Christ is simply our day in and day out living.

What are we like? What words come out of our mouth? How do we behave in the grocery store, the drug store, the BMV, driving our car? That is our witness.

Last Wed morning, this was the end of this sermon. The following was written Wed afternoon.

As I was coming back from some errands downtown, I drove on my usual route of Joliet Road in Valparaiso. As I went over the railroad tracks, I saw an older woman who looked like she was picking up rocks that were next to the rails. I slowed and it looked more and more like she was stuck, in fact, down on her knees next to the rails and was trying to stand up. I turned around and came back to where she was, stopped and turned the blinkers on. Marie, who was with me, got out and asked the lady if she was ok.

Next thing I knew Marie was helping the lady stand up, and holding her hand, led her to the car. The lady was quite bent over. Marie helped her into the back seat, and she told me she was walking to the post office which, by the way, was a couple of miles yet. Her truck was in the shop, she said, and the package, which contained important documents, had to be mail today and get to New Jersey by noon the next day.

We took 87-year-old Irene to the post office, admonishing her all the way. "Do not do this again!" Marie went into the post office with her, where everyone knew her. After her transaction, Marie then took her hand again and led her back to the car and we took her home. I told her I was not leaving until I saw her wave at me from inside the front door. I said, "Do you have a key?" She took her key and waved it in my face. As I was waiting for her to wave at me from the front door, the next thing I knew she came out of the house, walking back out to the car with a bowl of fudge.

I told Marie this reminds me of the book, *Angel Unaware*. It was one of my mother's favorite books. Dale Evans, Roy Rogers' wife wrote it after their little girl died. I had a brother that died when he was 6 months old and my mother identified with Dale Evans story, that is, that Dale Evan's little girl that passed away was an angel, *Angel*

Unaware. This is how my mother saw Jimmy Lynn, the little 6-month-old boy that she lost.

Was Irene an Angel Unaware? Was she an angel that God had put in our path? But more importantly, was Irene being a witness to us, of the presence of the Holy Spirit? Were we being a witness to Irene, of the mercy of Jesus?

Yes.

And now for the third ending of this homily. This is Memorial weekend, when we give pause to remember those who fought to keep our nation --as well as other nations free. As many of you know, my closest friend, Marie, was a Vietnam War nurse. She saw and held in her arms many soldiers who died of their wounds. Yet, she witnessed and cared for many who lived. She told me yesterday about a time when she rushed two units of blood to two men lying on cots side by side. One soldier was American, the one on the cot next to him was a Viet Cong. She hooked up the blood to each and opened the valve for the blood to start going into their veins. She looked up to make certain the blood was dripping and when she did, she saw something that to this day, she remembers. Printed on each unit of blood was the word, "Detroit". The life-giving blood to those two men on the opposite ends of the war, came from a couple of people, who had no idea where their

blood was going to go. They simply walked into the blood bank and volunteered because they had heard about a desperate need for blood donation.

Life-giving blood infused into two of God's wounded creatures,
--blood given by two innocent, unassuming Detroit citizens..

We end as we began, "In what ways have you been a witness for Jesus Christ?"

Amen,

Pastor Scales