

Easter People are Bold in Their Witness of Jesus – Sermon for May 3, 2009

The Lord is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!

We are Easter people and this proclamation is our victory chant. When sports teams are in playoffs, the fans are shouting, “We’re #1.” And, win a sports team wins the playoffs and are #1, then the victory chant, “We’re #1” is a reality, not just a desire. For Christians, the strife is over and the battle is won. We celebrate the victory of our Lord’s resurrection. We are bold to witness of Jesus’ resurrection as Easter people.

In today’s lesson from Acts we heard that the disciples, Peter and John, were speaking to the people about the resurrection of Jesus and the religious leaders arrested them. In their trial, Peter, being filled with the Holy Spirit, boldly spoke about Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection. This bold message included the proclamation: “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

In today’s Western culture, “tolerance” is the diplomatic correctness that is promoted. To pray in Jesus’ name is received as not being politically correct and Christians are called “intolerant” of others. Even in some religious circles Christians are asked to be tolerant of others. This raises a challenge to Christians who want to be faithful to God and His Word.

Being faithful means that our walk should match our talk. Lot of Christians talk the talk of being followers of Jesus but their daily walk gives a different message. Their actions do not match their confession of faith.

In the second lesson today we heard from John’s epistle these words, “If anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word and talk but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:17-18).

Jesus understood this, as exemplified in the Gospel lesson. Today is also known as Good Shepherd Sunday/ In the Gospel, Jesus refers to Himself as the Good Shepherd. Using the shepherd as an illustration, Jesus reminds His followers that a good shepherd has the concerns of his flock always in mind. He is also willing to put his life at risk for the sake of the sheep. Jesus walked the walk of His talk. He said, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep”...I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father, and I lay down my life for the sheep.” (John 10:11, 14-15).

Because of this act of Jesus, you and I and all believers receive the abundant life that Jesus offers. In verse 10 of this chapter of John Jesus said, “I have come that you may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). The abundant life is celebrating in the forgiveness of all our sin; having the assurance of life everlasting; and knowing that the old evil foe has no power over us. We have a loving Savior who has won the victory and our victory chant is: The Lord is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!

A witness is someone who has seen or heard with his/her own eyes or ears an event that they now share testimony too. We witness many events – movies, programs, news, etc. With today’s media coverage we can witness events around the world. There’s a difference. There are people who are actually present experiencing an event and then there are those who see it happening through means of the television or hear it via a radio. Both see and hear the event but they have a different perspective.

As we read Scripture, we read of the events of Christ's death and resurrection from those who were eye-witnesses. As we share the message, we are witnesses who have seen and heard the message of Christ's death and resurrection via the media of God's Word – the Bible. Via the technological airwaves, we can witness events. Via the power of the Holy Spirit we can witness events. Those watching television are trusting that what they are seeing is in reality true. Those reading Scripture are trusting that what they are reading is true. Both take faith. "Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see," the writer of Hebrews says in the 11th chapter, verse 1.

To be a bold witness, as an Easter person, is to have faith in Jesus, trusting that what the Scriptures reveal is true and that by the power of the Holy Spirit we are connected to the events of our Lord's death and resurrection. Those events are the basis for our life and salvation.

To be bold in our witness of Jesus is to also be prepared to witness when asked of the hope that is in us. All of us have a faith story. God has touched our lives in special ways. So, when asked of how you handle a crisis in your life, that's a golden opportunity to tell your faith story of trusting in God. When faced with illness and/or surgery and asked how you cope with it, you have a great opportunity to witness your faith to others by sharing of your trust in God to answer your prayers.

Easter people are bold witnesses of their faith in Jesus because they have the assurance of God's love; the assurance of salvation; the assurance of forgiveness of sins; the assurance of life everlasting; the assurance of God's presence that says, "I'll never leave you nor forsake you;" the assurance of the victory over sin, death, and the devil. We are Easter people and our victory chant is: The Lord is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!

What will your witness of Jesus be this week? What will your faith message be to those who ask you about the hope that is in you? What will be your witness when asked, "How are you?" or "What's the good news?" or "What's up?" Will your witness be "Better than I deserve!" or "Jesus Christ is alive and I'm living to serve Him!" or "My joy knowing that God loves me!"

Everyday we are given opportunity to proclaim the truth in love. We may, some day, be arrested for proclaiming Jesus Christ as Peter and John were. We are given opportunities to put our faith into action out of Christian love for one another. We certainly can live under the assurance that God loved us so much that He sent Jesus Christ who was and is our Good Shepherd that laid down His life for us and rose victoriously from the grave.

We have a wonderful and powerful message to tell. As Easter people, we can be bold witnesses of Jesus Christ who was crucified, died, and was buried and on the third day rose victoriously from the grave. Because He lives, we have eternal life. This is our comfort; this is our joy; this is our blessed assurance; this is our hope; this is our story.

The Lord is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia! Amen.