

Sermon for Sunday, September 20, 2009
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church
Hecla, SD

A Mission Festival sermon by Professor Emeritus, Clifford Kuehne; Mankato, MN, Sept. 28, 2003

Scott - introductory words: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God the Father, and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all! Amen."

Text: Luke 24:46-48 - *Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, "and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. "And you are witnesses of these things.*

Theme: YOU ARE WITNESSES

- I. Of what are we witnesses?
- II. Where are we witnesses?
- III. What are some ways in which we can be witnesses?

Dear fellow redeemed in Jesus the Christ,

As long as we are Christians in this world, we remain two things: we are disciples and we are apostles.

How can I say that you are disciples? When we hear "disciple" the first thing that probably comes to mind is the 12 Disciples of Jesus - Peter, James, John and so on. That would be the narrow or restricted meaning of "disciple." We are disciples in the broad sense of the word. A disciple is literally, a student. We all are students of Jesus Christ. We need to be disciples of Christ, because the Gospel is something we don't know about without God teaching us. *"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him." But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit.* (1 Corinthians 2:9-10a)

We are His students when we like Mary sit at Jesus' feet to be taught by Him. (Luke 10:39) We are Jesus' disciples when we open our Bibles and read God's Word, when we read a devotion based on God's Word, when we come to church and hear God's Word in the Scripture readings. We are His disciples when we listen to the sermon based on the Word. As disciples of Jesus we learn from Him and as long as we live we are never done learning from our Teacher Jesus. It is the will of our heavenly Father that we, *"grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."* (2 Peter 3:18)

We are also apostles of Christ. Again, when we hear apostles, we probably think in the narrow or restricted sense of the word. We think of the Apostle Paul or the other disciples following Jesus' ascension into heaven. But what is an apostle? It is nothing more than someone who has been sent forth to do something. In our text we have those disciples of Jesus being sent forth to be witnesses of what Jesus did in all the world.

We are apostles in the broad sense of the term. As disciples of Jesus, students of the Word, we have been sent forth to proclaim that which we have learned. We are apostles by the fact that we are believers. Listen to Peter: *"But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him*

who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” (1 Peter 2:9)

As apostles of Christ, we need to be encouraged to share what we have learned. In our text Jesus encourages us in this way. He declares to each one of you, “**YOU ARE WITNESSES!**” So the questions we have is “**What are we witnesses of?**” “**Where are we to be witnesses?**” And “**What are some of the ways in which we can be witnesses?**” May the Holy Spirit enlighten our hearts and minds through His Word and teach us!

OF WHAT ARE WE WITNESSES?

“Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?” I’m sure we’re all familiar with these words. They are the words used to swear someone in as a witness in court. I’m sure all of us have either seen or sat in on a trial and may be familiar with the proceedings. What would a witness be called to testify of in a court case? A witness might testify because he is an expert on a particular subject, say, examining DNA. A witness might have been an eye-witness to the crime now being prosecuted - they are there to tell the court what they saw. A witness might also be an ear-witness to the crime - they are called to the stand to tell the court what they heard. On the stand a witness has a choice - he can speak or he can be silent and say nothing. If he chooses to speak, what are his options? He can tell the truth or a lie. In our text Jesus calls us witnesses. So the question is, **of what are we witnesses?**

To better understand what type of work we are to do as Christ’s witnesses, maybe it’s a good idea if we lay the groundwork by defining another word in our text - that is “preach.” When we hear preach, what is the first thing that comes to mind? I would assume that when we hear “preach” we first think of a minister standing in a pulpit. But in its original meaning, preaching also meant “heralding.” Maybe you are familiar with how kings would use heralds in centuries past. A king would send out his heralds to bring a certain message to his subjects. Those heralds were given a specific message to proclaim and they were told to repeat that message wherever they went, EXACTLY as they had received it!

As disciples and apostles of Christ, we are also His witnesses and heralds. What message has the King of kings given us to proclaim? At the close of our text Jesus says, “***And you are witnesses of these things.***” What are “these things?” “***Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name.***” Here we have the content of the message we have been given to proclaim: the Gospel of the suffering and death of Jesus the Christ. But why does Jesus give us as the content only His suffering and death? That is the heart and core of why Jesus came to earth. That is the heart and core of our salvation. That is the heart and core of all Scripture.

“***According to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission.***” (Hebrews 9:22) Without shedding of blood there is NO remission. You see, Jesus HAD to die - His blood HAD to be shed, if we were to receive the remission or release from our sins. Jesus said it was necessary for Him to do this. And Jesus did it! He died on the cross for us to be released from the punishment of our sins. “***And the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.***” (1John 1:7) Thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer.

What about the resurrection? Why was that necessary? Do we know why? If it had not been for the resurrection of Jesus from the dead we would be without hope in this life. There would be no surety of our salvation. Paul writes in the resurrection chapter of his first letter to

the Corinthians, ***“If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!” (1 Cor. 15:17)*** Throughout the history of the world there have been many brave men who have died for a cause. I imagine each of you could probably name a few yourself. But each one of these brave souls all had the same end. They all died and remained in the grave. If Christ’s end had been the same, if He had remained in the grave after His suffering and death, we could never be sure if His payment was enough or acceptable. ***“But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” (15:20)*** Because Christ has risen from the dead we can join Paul in saying with CONFIDENCE - ***“O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?” The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor. 15:55-57)***

Thus it was written in Scripture that these things had to take place. Thus it was necessary for the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One, the chosen One of God to suffer death and rise from the dead the third day. Paul sums this up simply in one verse when he writes, ***“who [that is Christ] was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification [forgiveness].”*** That is the content of what we are witnesses - the Christ had to suffer for our sins and be raised again the third day for our forgiveness. No we are not eye-witnesses to these events like the first disciples of Jesus - that is we have not seen these things face-to-face. But just as a witness might be called into court to tell the judge and jury the truth about what he heard, so too we are witnesses of the truth we have heard.

Jesus also lays out here in our text the manner in which we are to proclaim this message. First He says we are to herald “repentance.” Why repentance? Repentance of what? I think we know - SIN. Failure to live a entirely holy life in the sight of the holy Creator God. We have failed and those to whom we are heralding Christ’s message have failed. We and they are sinners who are in desperate need of God’s forgiveness if we are to escape the eternal fires of hell.

But once our hearers have recognized their sins, we MUST be ready to herald the second part of Christ’s message - ***remission [lit. - release (forgiveness)] of sins***. Those very sins that we have committed and deserved God’s wrath for - they are the very reason the Christ suffered on the cross. Again we come to the heart and core of the Gospel. We must herald to them God’s love and His mercy. It was God’s love for you as an individual that He was willing to allow His only begotten Son to suffer and die on the cross FOR YOUR SINS. Now because of what the Christ has done all your sins are forgiven!

This is what we are witnesses of. This is the truth that we have heard. I have heard that my sins deserve God’s wrath and eternal punishment in hell. I have also heard of one who suffered in my place. YES! It is Jesus the Christ, the Son of God! He suffered on the cross because of my sins and He was raised the third day for my forgiveness. It is as simple as that passage we’ve known since we were children, ***“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16)*** We are simply to be witnesses of the truth that we have heard from God Himself!

WHERE ARE WE TO BE WITNESSES?

Every Christian wonders what we are to be witnesses of. Jesus answers it maybe more simply than we would think - we are witnesses of the Gospel of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Now that we know the message Jesus has given to each of us to herald, the question is WHERE?

Where are we to be witnesses? Again our King who has sent us out as His heralds makes it simple, ***“to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”*** Jerusalem is where Jesus ended His earthly ministry with His suffering and resurrection. It was in Jerusalem that His disciples were to begin as His witnesses proclaiming repentance and remission of sins in His name. Read through the book of Acts and you will see how this took place. Jerusalem was the center hub, but the Apostles spread out from there, taking Christ’s message to all nations.

But what about us? Are we to begin in Jerusalem too? We might take what Jesus says here and applying it to our situation say, to all nations, beginning in Hecla, Oakes, Britton, Aberdeen, and so on. Going to all nations began in the backyard of the disciples. Even so, being witnesses to all nations begins in our backyard. When you are sitting at the dinner table with your children or grandchildren and have a devotion, you are heralding Christ beginning at your own home. Some of the most important witnessing is done in your home! When you herald Christ to your neighbor that you’ve known for years, you are witnessing. When you arrange transportation to bring someone to church or a bible study, you are helping to herald Christ! When you speak of the love of God as seen in Christ to someone at work, you are witnesses of what you have heard.

I think it’s safe to say that when we think of doing Mission Work we think it is some grand project that has to be planned out. But no, it can be very little things to herald the love of Christ in various different ways. Beginning in our own backyards, we herald only that which we have heard from our King. That is the starting point, but Jesus also says - “to all nations.” We should be very thankful to God that we have such an opportunity to support the witnessing of Christ’s suffering and resurrection outside of our own community, our own nation, our own continent. We should be careful to not look upon this as a burden in our lives, but rather a privilege that our King has given us.

WHAT ARE SOME WAYS IN WHICH WE CAN BE WITNESSES?

Our King sends us as His heralds witnessing what we have heard from our own homes to all the nations of the world. But one of the chief questions with witnessing is HOW? What are some ways in which we can be witnesses of Christ’s suffering and resurrection?

We all are witnesses of Christ by the way in which we live. Some say that actions speak louder than words. True, we can proclaim the love Christ has for us, that is, the forgiveness of our sins that He has paid for, and the gift of heaven itself - that we can proclaim by how we conduct ourselves in life. That simple sentence of Jesus on the Sermon on the Mount, He encourages us, ***“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matt. 5:16)*** Glorifying our Father by how we conduct ourselves. It has been said that unbelievers may never read their Bible, but they do read Christians. What are they reading when they see us? Peter echos his Savior when he writes, ***“Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.” (1 Peter 2:11-12)***

We can be witnesses of Christ by vocally heralding the Gospel. Again Peter urges us, ***“always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.” (1 Peter 3:15)*** What hope do you have? Do you know? That’s all we testify of. Every Sunday we confess what we believe in our Creeds. Every Sunday we

confess that we are miserable sinners who deserve God's wrath. Every Sunday we rejoice for the hope that we have in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In one way or another we hear that Jesus suffered for our sins and was raised again for our forgiveness. Our hope is build on nothing less than this!

We can be witnesses of Christ also in less direct ways - by making God-pleasing use of our time, of our abilities, and our money - our material possessions. Everything we have from our time, to our physical gifts, to our monetary gifts - are just that a gift from God. How are we to use the treasures God has given us? Jesus tells us, "***Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.***" (Matthew 6:19-20) What better use in God's kingdom is there than to put His gifts to work than heralding what Christ has done for the whole world!

And there's one other way of witnessing for Christ which we ought not forget, and that's prayer — even as the early Christians prayed continually for the success of the Gospel. Jesus in Matthew 9 says, "***The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest***" (Matt. 9:37). Let's not underestimate the power of Christian prayer. The Bible says: "***The effective fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much***" (James 5:16) — and when God says "much," who are we do deny it? Pray then that the Lord would send forth laborers into His harvest, so that the Gospel of Christ might be preached to people of every nation, family, people, and tongue; and pray that the Holy Spirit would bring to faith all those who hear this Gospel. Pray for our missions in Africa and India and for all of their called servants. Pray for our church body's mission board and for our foreign missionaries, David Koenig, and his wife. Pray for Missionary Matt Ude. Pray for Pastor Nathanael Mayhew. Pray for our state-side mission congregations; pray for the students, faculty, and staff at Immanuel Lutheran College; pray for the mission endeavors of our congregation and its called pastors and teachers; and pray for our own effective witnessing of Christ to others. Prayer — that's something that everyone of us has the privilege of doing day by day!

As the disciples of Christ we learn what He has done for each one of us. Having learned by faith what He has done, Christ then sends us as His apostles to herald what we are witnesses of. Witnesses that the Christ has suffered for our sins and was raised again for our forgiveness. This begins in our own backyard and into all the world. Witnessing is made so easy by Christ's message and the help of the Holy Spirit, we have so many ways in which we can witnesses of these things. Then,

Lord of Harvest, let there be
Joy and Strength to work for Thee
Till the nations far and near
See Thy light and learn Thy fear. (TLH 507:6)
Amen

SCOTT: The peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

"Create in me a clean heart, O God..."