

---

WE ARE WITNESSES

My mother thought I should be a lawyer.

- She thought that because when we would watch lawyer shows like Perry Mason or Matlock, I always knew when to object and for what reason:
  - leading the witness; citing information not in evidence; badgering.
  - And I'm sure real jury trials go just like they do on TV.
- In fact, some television shows can affect what happens in courtrooms.
- It's called "CSI Syndrome."
  - During the time that the CSI shows (Crime Scene Investigators) were on television, juries were finding those on trial innocent at a much higher rate because they didn't see the kind of evidence they show on the CSI shows,
    - even though much of what they do on the TV show isn't actually doable.
    - But people who watch those shows expect to see in the courtroom what they've seen on TV.
- Trial lawyers, though, know that the best way to get a conviction is from credible eyewitnesses.

---

"You are witnesses of these things," JESUS says.

- Notice, that JESUS isn't saying, "You *will* be witnesses."
- Nor, "Please be witnesses."
- Not, "You *could* be witnesses."
  - No, JESUS says, "You *are* witnesses of these things."
  - And HE's talking to us. We are witnesses.

---

As it turns out, witnessing is not an occasional event, but rather a state of being.

- Of course, exactly to what things we witness requires some interpretive imagination.
  - Perhaps "these things" are the bodily resurrection of our LORD.
  - Maybe it is the content of JESUS' actions—the suffering of the MESSIAH, rising on the third day, and the proclamation of repentance and forgiveness of sins.
  - Or, it could be the entirety of JESUS' ministry.
    - After all, JESUS' whole life was witnessing to the true nature of our loving and gracious GOD.

In case we need another prompt to who we are, consider Peter's sermon in Acts, chapter 3 where he says, "to this we are witnesses."

- The empty tomb of Easter moved them to tell, through words and deeds, what they have seen and now knew.
- After all, if a formerly occupied but now empty grave doesn't get you talking, it's hard to imagine what it might take.
  - But maybe that's part of the problem.
    - We seem to want to wait around for a more majestic revelation of GOD's activity before we are willing to witness to our GOD.
    - Yet, if our GOD overcomes disease, triumphs over nature, and defeats death isn't enough, what then are we waiting for?
      - What are we afraid of?
      - What more do we need before we start witnessing?

---

Actually, we are witnessing when we *aren't* witnessing.

- You see our silence, our looking the other way, our inactions also testify.
  - Often, we forget that our words and deeds, or our lack thereof, are indeed giving witness to who and how we imagine GOD to be.
    - And we might want to stop and consider just what those words and deeds, or again lack thereof, are saying about GOD.
- Witnesses who choose not to testify also impact the outcomes of trials.
  - In the courtroom, the guilty are set free.
  - The innocent suffer.
  - Justice is not done.
    - Simply because those who are witnesses refuse to tell what they've seen.
- What are the outcomes when we fail to witness?

---

I suspect that for many of us, hearing that we are witnesses is not necessarily good news.

- How often we have failed to identify ourselves as witnesses—as believers in the risen CHRIST?
- How many times have we convinced ourselves that our witness wouldn't make a difference anyway, so why bother?
  - But, in doing so, we deny the truth of who we are and who JESUS needs us to be.
  - We give up opportunities to share the GOD that not enough people get to hear about or experience.
  - And we deny the truth that by not saying anything, we are still testifying to what we believe about JESUS—that JESUS doesn't mean enough to us to tell others about HIM.

---

That's the rub.

- "We are witnesses" is not only who we are but also how others see GOD to be.
- "We are witnesses" points both to our calling as well as our commitment to it.
- "We are witnesses" gives witness to our own selves, our own faith, our own belief.
  - And that is the hardest truth to hear—that perhaps we don't believe in the identity GOD has given us,
    - don't believe GOD needs us,
    - don't believe others will believe us,
    - don't believe that anything we might say really matters.
      - And all the while, GOD's expanded kingdom and new possibilities for people who don't yet know the love of GOD go unfulfilled.

---

What is the truth about JESUS to which we are called to witness?

- We were not at the tomb when it was discovered to be empty.
- We were not locked behind solid doors when JESUS suddenly appeared.
- We were not in that room where and when JESUS ate.
  - But we have the testimony of others recorded in the scriptures and hopefully know it well.
    - JESUS will open our minds so that we can understand the scriptures just as HE did for those who were present back then.

---

Our witnessing has a purpose.

- "Repentance and forgiveness will be preached in HIS name to all people."
  - Our witness announces forgiveness.
  - Our witness offers hope.
  - Our witness comforts the afflicted.
  - Our witness brings salvation to others.

---

During World War II, Jews in prison camps were forbidden to worship.

- But they did, week in and week out.
- This was not an act of rebellion against their captors, however.
  - It was a witness to who they were and what they believed.

---

When we were gathering in the parking lot each week to worship during the pandemic, we were witnessing.

- A number of our neighbors were watching and listening.
- Sometimes they would come out on their porches.
  - It would have been wonderful if they had come over and joined us, though being on their porch was safe.
- But now we're back indoors.
  - Have they come to join us?
  - Have we gone and invited them to come?
    - Or will they no longer hear the witness?

---

There is a church in Berkeley, CA that, when they built their new worship center some years ago, made all the walls out of glass.

- It wasn't so that people inside could look out on the world.
- It was so those walking and driving by could look in and see them worshipping as a witness to what they believed.
  - That, in part, is what we had been doing in our parking lot.

---

The bottom line, though, is that it doesn't matter if we believe it or how much we believe it.

- It doesn't change the fact that we are witnesses.
  - "We are witnesses" does not depend on our acceptance, or agreement, or approval.
  - "We are witnesses" does not depend upon our readiness, or recognition, or responsiveness.
  - "We are witnesses" just is.
    - And that is the good news.
      - Left to our own devices, we'd make up every excuse imaginable to relinquish such responsibility.
      - We'd convince ourselves that more qualifications are needed to justify this responsibility.
      - We'd find other openings through which to escape this calling.

---

But all of that is based on the idea that we have a choice.

- We don't. We are witnesses, and witnessing is not optional.
  - It's not an occasional activity of faith.
  - It's not something you decide to do one day and then resolve to take the next day off.
  - It's constant.
  - It's a way of life.
  - It's who we are.
    - We are witnesses.