

Remember: Witness

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WE are not the story. Jesus is the only One who can wear the T-shirt, “*I’m kind of a big deal.*” We aren’t commissioned to call attention to ourselves—but to spread the good news about Him. Witnessing is simply sharing how great Jesus is and how our lives have changed because of His love, acceptance, forgiveness and empowerment. That is not complicated. Witnessing isn’t arguing. St. Francis of Assisi noted that sometimes when we witness, we even use words. I like the description of faith-sharing as “*one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread.*” We are witnesses of the great things God has done through Jesus. We want others to know this great story and surpassing good news. We should not be hung up on having all the answers (the blind man in John 9 certainly didn’t, but Jesus certainly changed his life). Jesus commissioned us to be His witnesses.

APPLICATION: I trace my conversion to other teenagers (not preachers) sharing their faith with me. Letting others know that we can be forgiven, comforted, empowered and given eternal life is a wonderful gift. Letting others know they are loved is powerful. How is your witness at home, school, work and recreation? For whom are you praying that they might know Jesus Christ as Lord? Would you be willing to share with them how God invited you into His story? Are you ready?

Acts 1:6-11

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

1) The Gospel message in a very simple form:

1.) God came **down** (the Incarnation - Christmas) and witnessed to the Glory of God. Jesus witnessed with grace not condemnation. Zacchaeus – a terrible person (tax collector). He spoke to a Samaritan (horrible to Jews at the time – like a Jew speaking to ISIS today) woman at the well who had a sexual history. He loved Simon, a vulgar fisherman, and called him by name and gave him a new name a new way of life. He led with kindness and generosity. He called people by name.

Jesus loved people. Love is magnetic. However, Jesus never excused sinful behavior. He redirected people: "Follow me, and I'll make you fishers of men" – rather than just fishing for fish. Jesus loved the sinner; but hated the sin. He offered grace to all – but grace is intended to draw us to Him and to change us from the inside out. He didn't ask people to clean up their lives from the outside to make sales presentable on the inside. Rather he went right straight to the heart.

2.) He was crucified for our sins (the **cross**)

3.) He was dead and buried (**entombed**)

4.) God **raised** Him from the dead (He appeared to the disciples over a 40-day period) Our readings this week focused on "we are witnesses" to the resurrection. It's all about the resurrection.

5.) He **sends us** into the world to share the Good News with others = "*Helping Others Follow Jesus.*"

6.) He will **return** again. This gives us the "**why.**" Jesus came, died for our sins, God raised Him from the dead. He is alive in heaven and will come again. He invites us to be part of this story.

2) Salvation People have asked 2 questions about my recent parachute jump: First, "**WHY** did you go?" Because Melissa and Katie invited me. I would NEVER have gone w/o an invitation. Second, "**WHAT** did you do?" The answer is: I paid for it. However, I did not pack the parachute. I did not fly the plane. I did not strap myself in. I did not pull the cord. All that happened was being thrown out of a plane and "Stooby" did all the work. If he messes up, I have no back-up plan. I am 100% dependent on him. I am dead weight. It doesn't matter if I'd worked out, worn the right clothes, kept all the Commandments, had perfect attendance in church. It didn't matter who my parents were, where I went to High School or how many theological degrees I have or that I have the 4 most adorable grandchildren in the whole world. If Stooby doesn't do his job, I'm dead. I am not the hero. I am not the message – I'm only someone who has an experience.

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Salvation is a matter of recognizing the only thing we contribute to our salvation = our sin. I was jump #7,667 for Stooby. It is probably safer to parachute to the Skiatook airport than to drive there. I put my trust completely in him. I'd never met him before. He was a total stranger. All I contributed was dead weight. I didn't do 50% or 25% or 5% of the work - I just let myself be thrown out of the plane. But I had to make the leap of faith: "*Yes. I'll go.*" When I said "*Okay,*" we were out the door. If I'd said, "*Let me think about it longer*" or "*I've changed my mind*" that would've been the end of the story.

Salvation is a gift offered to us, but we must go out the door. Stoooby has had people pay, fly in the plane, look out and say, *"I can't do it."* You can't parachute unless you jump out of the plane. Some people know all the facts and have all the information. You can wear the suit, know what you're supposed to do, get strapped in – but at some point, we must trust. The only One trustworthy is the One who came down from heaven and will take us up.

3) WITNESS Likewise, the early disciples brought nothing to the table, either. They boasted about their courage but scurried like rats leaving a burning ship. They contributed absolutely nothing to the resurrection. All they knew was that they had seen what God had done. A "witness" is someone who sees something or has an experience and tells others. The witness is not ultimately about US, but about another. We just tell the story of what GOD has done. Jesus is the story – not us.

Some get anxious about witnessing. We can make it weird. I don't witness to myself – it's about having relationships with people. It is listening to them and hearing their stories. We don't have to answer every question. We don't have to defend God. We don't argue others into the Kingdom of God.

SEE people as people. He didn't label people; He loved them. He called them by name. Some of his most important and dearest people to Jesus were children. If statistics are true that around 80-85% of people give their lives to Jesus by the time they are 18, shouldn't our #1 mission be to help our families reach their children and students for Christ? Shouldn't this be our biggest investment as a congregation? Shouldn't this be THE prayer that is upon our hearts. 62 children expressed some type of faith experience with Jesus at VBS. 62! (I saw 163 kids up here on Friday night when we had "Parents Night Out.") Children and students provided the greatest return on investment we can make here. We must do everything in our power to reach our children and students. We need to have the best volunteers, the best programs, the best buildings for them. If we don't reach them with the Gospel, someone else will reach them with something else.

ALL people are **loved** by God. Our scripture readings in our journal this week noted this. Jesus loved children. He loved the Rich Young Ruler. He loved Nicodemus. He loved the thieves on the cross. He clearly states the gospel is for ALL people as he included Samaria (gasp!) and the "end of the earth." Gentile nations were loved. It would take enormous effort to make this witness, but they did so. Neither Jesus nor the early church wrote off other people. People who hate Jesus and Christianity are loved by God. Let me ask another question – do you feel YOU are loved by God?

LISTEN to people. The best witness = to pay attention to people. Being present is so important Listen more than you talk. Ask questions. Don't act superior, smug

or self-righteous. Those people aren't attractive. Become friends. Be genuine. The gospel went closest to farthest. Who is closest to us? Our family, our neighborhood, our church, our schools, our workplace, our city...Friends, relatives, acquaintances and neighbors. (**DONUT video**)

TESTIFY. We have a simple message – what God has done in Jesus = the Resurrection. My testimony is about Him. There are enormous benefits of following Jesus. I found forgiveness, a community of others, a meaning/purpose in life, a source of wisdom from the Bible, the presence of the Holy Spirit and the gift of eternal life. Power from the Holy Spirit – not on our own. There is also a cost to be a disciple. It means to shift from our own Kingdom into the Kingdom of God.

Have you started to Follow Jesus? Is very simple. He has done all the work. We simply Trust Him.

Once this happens, our sole mission in life = “HELPING OTHERS FOLLOW JESUS.”
How can you do this?