

“Sharing Our Faith – It's Who We Are”

Matthew 5:14-16

πJanuary 19 and 26, 2020

Every year on New Years Day, Kristine would watch the Rose Parade in Pasadena and comment on how beautiful the floral floats were, and how she would someday like to attend the event

So for Christmas a year ago, that was her Christmas present – a trip to the Rose Parade

And it was a unique event – going to a place we'd never been before

Witnessing the intricacies of the floats not only from the grandstand at the parade, but right up close in a big field after the parade ended

As we were waiting for the parade to get underway, Colorado Blvd was closed and people were finding their seats

In the midst of it all, a street preacher was moving back and forth in front of the stands

Quoting scripture; offering commentary; urging people to turn to Jesus

I had to admire the man's dedication, but wasn't too sure about his methodology

People around us were pretty much ignoring what he had to say

I was interested because of my role as a pastor, but few others listened

Some would point at him and laugh

Whether anyone was moved by what was said, I don't know, but it caused me to think about my own role as a witness for Christ

*In our membership vows, when we join the church, we pledge to support it with our **Prayers, Presence, Gifts, Service and WITNESS** - Give yourself a grade A to F on these points:*

Do you pray for Ingomar Church?

Are you present for worship and other occasions?

Do you offer financial support?

Do you serve when the opportunity presents itself?

And do you share your faith with others?

I'd venture to guess that the last one on that list, about sharing your faith, got the lowest score

The perception is that we live in a society that pretty much wants us to keep matters of faith to ourselves

Public prayers, references to God or particularly to Jesus are discouraged and sometimes even suppressed

Our national motto, “In God We Trust” was actually removed from the Capitol building in Washington a few years ago, until a challenge was mounted and it was restored

That's the environment and if you're like me and you don't like confrontation and conflict, it's easy to hold back on expressing your thoughts on matters of faith, either because you don't wish to offend someone, or because you don't want controversy – just easier to say nothing

But consider this: while half of people who attend church believe non Christians aren't interested in hearing about faith or religion, yet it turns out 78% would listen

So, being silent is not what we're called to be as a church – we are, in fact, called to be witnesses to the world - Consider a few Bible verses that remind us of that

Matthew 5:14-16 – We are to be the light of the world

Consider, before the days of GPS, the role of a lighthouse along the rugged shoreline of the ocean or Great Lakes

The light could be seen for miles warning of danger from rocks and shoals

If the light went out, the warning wasn't present and ships would be in peril

Christianity offers an alternative to the rocky shoals of our confused world and it is the role of the church to be that lighthouse warning of the dangers and providing a safe route to follow

Jesus says, “You are the light of the world. Let your light so shine that all may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” (5:16)

So, maybe you're a bit like Moses at the Burning Bush who said to God, “Send someone else to free the slaves, I don't speak so well.”

*You may recall, God didn't negotiate with Moses on that – his call was his call and God assured Moses and assures us, He will provide the **words** needed to carry out the task of witnessing*

Acts 1:8 quotes Jesus as saying, “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.”

Have you ever wondered what I pray when I approach the altar at the beginning of the service each week? It's always the same prayer

“Lord, speak through me today that you may be glorified and Holy Spirit, be my interpreter, that these words may give to someone what they need to hear today.”

I don't have anything to offer, other than what God chooses to provide through me, and that's true for most of us – we don't know what to say to others, but if we are open to the Spirit's guidance, those words are provided

Along with this are the words of Jesus in Luke 12:12, “The Holy Spirit will teach you in that hour what you ought to say.”

We are called to share our faith because if we don't, how is anyone outside a religious community going to hear about God's will and purposes; about God's love; about Jesus' assurance of salvation? The world surely won't provide it

*2 Timothy 1:7 - “God did not give us a spirit of **timidity** but a spirit of **power and love and self control**”*

I've sensed as I've grown older, that I'm more inclined to speak about spiritual things outside the church setting more than in my earlier days

It's easy to talk about God, about Jesus, about faith here from a pulpit or in a SS class

You expect it from inside the church building, but out there, it's more challenging

I'd hope you're here today because you want to hear about and learn about the things of faith

So it's pretty easy to talk to you about those things, but outside these walls, when it comes to talking with family members, friends or coworkers who don't share your faith, you might feel a bit hesitant to speak up, BUT...

*1 Peter 3:15 - "Always be prepared to make a defense for the hope that is in you; yet do it with **gentleness and reverence.**"*

I want to be respectful of others, listen to what they say, have conversation with them and not be judgmental or overbearing

I don't have all the answers; I have a lot questions, but I also have a foundation of faith that gives me encouragement and peace which can do the same for others if I offer it
If I keep it to myself, it isn't going to make a difference for someone else.

And if someone asks about what you believe, the door is open to offering those thoughts, simply because they did, in fact, ask you – take advantage of that!

Religious surveys show that only 8% of active Christians believe sharing their faith is important and because of that, $\frac{3}{4}$ rarely do discuss their beliefs regardless of the fact that as the church, we are to witness – it's who we are; it's what we're suppose to do

John 13:35 - "By this, all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Song we used to sing at camp, "They'll know we are Christians by our love."

*Our witness is as much through our **actions** as it is through our **words***

How we treat others, how we speak to them, how we respect or disrespect them

I've seen surveys that indicate that among waiters and waitresses, the Sunday after church crowd is the most despised

Too many are demanding, disrespectful and cheap

Some complain of picking up what looks like a folded in half \$5 tip only to discover it is a religious tract – not a good witness

Because of that if Kristine and I stop somewhere for lunch on our way home after church, I realize we'll be identified as coming from church because I have a suit on and Kristine is dressed nicely, so I go out of my way to be kind and considerate of whomever is waiting on us.

I don't want my behavior or demeanor to make for a poor witness and turn someone off to religion or church

Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:11-12, that when you are persecuted for your faith, be glad

The reason for that is, you're being persecuted because someone actually sees that element of faith in your life

Too often, we as Christians demonstrate no apparent difference from anyone else

We watch the same trashy media, spend our money on the same stuff, maybe use language that isn't Christ affirming (not just profanity, but unkind things we may say)

I pulled up to a full service gas pump in New Jersey one time

The attendant came out and I asked him to fill it up and the guy says, "You're from Pittsburgh, aren't you" - he allegedly gathered that from how I talked

I don't really care if someone knows where I'm from, but I surely hope that others can look at me, or listen to me and say, "Hey, you're a Christian, aren't you?"

There are too many places in this world where that is something that must be hidden

To be a Christian in Sudan, N Korea, China, Nigeria and many other places, that label can not only guarantee persecution, but put you in prison or even to death

And yet, Christianity is growing in those forbidding places because people are witnessing to their faith, often in very subtle ways, but effectively to the point where others will put their very lives on the line to be a part of the faith someone has demonstrated to them

*Projections are that by 2030 (10 yrs) there will be more Christians in **China** than in the US despite the suppression – that can only result from the faithful living out their beliefs and in whatever way, sharing them with others*

One final point I'd make today is that each of us is an individual

Some of us are very outgoing, quick to share our thoughts and opinions

Others of us are more reserved, quieter about what we think and believe

Whichever you are, it's how God made you; it's part of what makes you unique

*So to effectively share our faith with others, we need to be **ourselves***

That doesn't mean if you're the extrovert you should be overbearing, but should also listen and relate to others with sensitivity

And it doesn't mean if you're an introvert, you get a pass on witnessing, but rather that you should be mindful and aware of opportunities to express your beliefs

70% of people unrelated to a church have never been asked to attend one.

That's a lot of folks out there – Who might you influence? Who might you invite?