



Testifying to the work of Jesus



A theme reflection/sermon starter for the 2021 Pentecost Offering

“When the Advocate comes . . . the Spirit of truth . . . will testify on my behalf. You also are to testify.” ~John 15:26-27a

Not a day goes by that we aren't bearing witness to something. Sharing about today's local weather and how well it matches the forecast. Talking about the incredible meal we had from our favorite restaurant. Telling confidants about the person who went out of their way to help (or harm) us. Whenever words pass our lips, we are sharing a testimony.

As the resurrected Christ prepared for his transition to the heavenly realms, he outlined the essential elements of experiencing new life in the Holy Spirit. Jesus trusted his followers to continue his work and promised to provide them with what they needed to do it. The emerging advocate, the Holy Spirit, would bear witness about Jesus, reminding his followers how to hold him in their minds. In addition to receiving words from the Spirit, to continue the work of Jesus meant the disciples would bear witness as well.

As we hear the words of Jesus from the 15th chapter of John's Gospel, the mission to testify should not surprise us. The whole account of John prominently features the Greek word “martyreō” meaning “to bear witness”—more than any other gospel, in fact. In the NRSV, variations of the word “testify” are present 30 times and “testimony” is mentioned 12. Indeed, to follow Jesus is to reveal in word and deed what we have seen, heard, and experienced.

Beyond the faithful act of sharing testimonies, the apostle John also reveals whose testimonies to whom we should stay attuned. In the family of faith, our witness is collective. Just as we aim to lift Jesus by the words that we share, so also do we elevate him in the world by the voices that we hear, amplify, and echo. To honor the testimonies in John's Gospel involves inclining an ear to the same people today. This means listening to the stories of social outcasts (who, like John the Baptist, may be very aware of the redemptive work of God), believing the testimonies of women (the only preachers on Resurrection Sunday), and hearing the voices of people of color (without whom we wouldn't have a single letter of the entire biblical narrative). Though some voices might be overlooked in other circles, expressions of new life in Jesus can be found everywhere that the church lends an ear.

With your help, the ministries of the Church of the Brethren testify to the work of Jesus and amplify unique life-giving testimonies that need to be heard. Through online conversations and webinars, fearless disciples and leaders are equipped to reveal the ministry of Jesus in new ways. Thank you for supporting this collective work that builds up the body of Christ and speaks words of healing and hope to a hurting world.

How are you testifying about the work of Jesus? Whose testimonies are you hearing regularly? What new voices need to be heard (in your household, church, community) for the redemptive work of Jesus to become more tangible near you? Together, empowered by the Spirit, how can we reveal the new life we have found in Christ to people in a broken world?

Whatever the conditions, the location, or the people you encounter, may we faithfully testify to the work of Jesus with each day that goes by.