



THE ACTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

SPIRITED WITNESSES

ACTS 1:6-11

01-17-21

All = bold sections – read together

Leader = regular font – leader reads (choose or rotate leaders)

Sung together = italics

NOTE: Please have a white candle ready to light.

Reflect

“Run to and fro everywhere, holy fires, beautiful fires; for you are the light of the world, nor are you put under a bushel. He whom you cleave unto is exalted, and has exalted you. Run to and fro, and be known unto all nations.”

— Augustine of Hippo, Confessions

Welcome

Good Morning! This is the day that the Lord has made. **We will be glad and rejoice in it!** Let us remember that we live in a narrative that reaches back into eternity and extends into the eternal future! And right now, you and I are an active part of it. Right now, we contribute to the history of this unfolding Divine Drama. As disciples of Jesus, we journey this narrative with him, with the Holy Spirit in us to empower and equip us to live well and to love well for the Living God. So, this morning and always....

May the love and joy of the Father, the grace and peace of the Son and the courage and comfort of the Holy Spirit be ours in abundance.

Call to Worship – Psalm 41 -- TO THE CHOIRMASTER. A PSALM OF DAVID.

King David is in trouble, he is a sinner and he is sick, presumably near death. And those around him, from his enemies to his close friends use it against him (probably thinking this is a curse from God and that he deserves it somehow). Yet, David does not give up or give in. He turns to God. He recognizes both his contribution and those around him toward his difficult situation and asks God to be gracious to him and heal him “for he has sinned.” Today we know more than David. God does “heal us” in and through Jesus Christ by forgiving us our sins because of his finished redemptive work. We know that in the end, enemies will not triumph over us and that the Lord will deliver us and sustain us not by taking us out of difficult situations, but by being with us through them until our dying breath. Then, we get to be with him forever. Yes – blessed is the One who considers the poor. That is God. David, you and I are the poor. The day of trouble is ultimately the day of judgment in which we will be delivered from in Christ!

Blessed is the one who considers the poor! In the day of trouble the LORD delivers him; the LORD protects him and keeps him alive; he is called blessed in the land; you do not give him up to the will of his enemies. The LORD sustains him on his sickbed; in his illness you restore him to full health.



As for me, I said, “O LORD, be gracious to me; heal me, for I have sinned against you!” My enemies say of me in malice, “When will he die, and his name perish?” And when one comes to see me, he utters empty words, while his heart gathers iniquity; when he goes out, he tells it abroad.

All who hate me whisper together about me; they imagine the worst for me. They say, “A deadly thing is poured out on him; he will not rise again from where he lies.” Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me.

But you, O LORD, be gracious to me, and raise me up, that I may repay them! By this I know that you delight in me: my enemy will not shout in triumph over me. But you have upheld me because of my integrity, and set me in your presence forever.

Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting! Amen and Amen.

Song – Great Are You Lord -- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qKzXZPFBwLQ>

*You give life, You are love,
You bring light to the darkness
You give hope, You restore
Every heart that is broken
Great are You, Lord*

*It's Your breath in our lungs
So we pour out our praise
We pour out our praise
It's Your breath in our lungs
So we pour out our praise to You only*

*You give life, You are love,
You bring light to the darkness
You give hope, You restore
Every heart that is broken
Great are You, Lord*

*It's Your breath in our lungs
So we pour out our praise
We pour out our praise
It's Your breath in our lungs
So we pour out our praise to You only*

*It's Your breath in our lungs
So we pour out our praise
We pour out our praise
It's Your breath in our lungs
So we pour out our praise to You only*

*And all the earth will shout Your praise
Our hearts will cry, these bones will sing
Great are You, Lord
And all the earth will shout Your praise
Our hearts will cry, these bones will sing*



*Great are You, Lord
And all the earth will shout Your praise
Our hearts will cry, these bones will sing
Great are You, Lord*

*It's Your breath in our lungs
So we pour out our praise
We pour out our praise
It's Your breath in our lungs
So we pour out our praise
To You only*

Christ Candle – Mauritania (from Open Doors World Watch List 2020)

We light the Christ candle as a visible sign of God's presence with us; that he has come as light into a world of darkness. We light the Christ candle to remind ourselves that Jesus is the light and that in him we become light too. We are never a light on our own. The light we have and can offer to others is the light of Jesus of Nazareth. May we be God's light in 2021.

Jesus of Nazareth said that to be a Christian means to be maltreated for his name's sake (Matthew 5:11) and the apostle Paul said that "everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3:12). Mistreatment as a disciple of Jesus is not a matter of *if* but a matter of *when* and a matter of *degree*. Hope is a vital aspect of being a disciple of Jesus. This is especially true under heavy persecution. In America, the land of religious freedom, we have it pretty easy in that there is minimal outright persecution against Christians. **May we make the most of our religious freedom to honor Christ and give credible and coherent witness to him! At the same time, may we be aware of our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world who don't share the same freedom that we do. The 24th place that is most challenging to be a disciple of Jesus is Mauritania.**

Of the 4.6 million people living in Mauritania, only 10,000 are disciples of Jesus Christ (0.6%). For Christians in Mauritania, public worship carries a constant threat. Even churches that are largely tolerated have to be careful so they aren't accused of proselytizing Muslims, and for Christians converted from Islam, public worship is almost impossible. Baptisms must often be carried out in secret. Mauritania may be an increasingly dangerous place for Christians, as there is fear radical Islam may be on the rise.

Prayer Points: Pray for converts from Islam. They face intense pressure from the government, from their families and from their communities. Pray for the problem of slavery in Mauritania. This heinous reality sometimes stems from religious extremism. Pray for victims of slavery. Pray for safety and courage for Christians who fear the rise of more Islamic extremists. Pray for the hearts of radicals to turn toward Jesus.

Jesus is the Light. We are a light. Shine His light!

Song – He Will Hold Me Fast -- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=936BapRFHaQ>

*When I fear my faith will fail, Christ will hold me fast;
When the tempter would prevail, He will hold me fast.
I could never keep my hold through life's fearful path;
For my love is often cold; He must hold me fast.*



*He will hold me fast, He will hold me fast;
For my Savior loves me so, He will hold me fast.
Those He saves are His delight, Christ will hold me fast;
Precious in his holy sight, He will hold me fast.
He'll not let my soul be lost; His promises shall last;
Bought by Him at such a cost, He will hold me fast.
He will hold me fast, He will hold me fast;
For my Savior loves me so, He will hold me fast.
For my life He bled and died, Christ will hold me fast;
Justice has been satisfied; He will hold me fast.
Raised with Him to endless life, He will hold me fast
'Till our faith is turned to sight, When He comes at last!
He will hold me fast, He will hold me fast;
For my Savior loves me so, He will hold me fast.*

Song – Spirit of the Living God -- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fylslaNsJ5o>

*O Spirit of the living God, thou Light and Fire Divine
Descend upon Thy Church once more and make it truly Thine
Fill it with love and joy and power, with righteousness and peace
Till Christ shall dwell in human hearts, and sin and sorrow cease.
Blow, wind of God, with wisdom blow until our minds are free
From mists of error, clouds of doubt, which blind our eyes to Thee
Burn, winged fire, inspire our lips with flaming love and zeal
To preach to all Thy great good news, God's glorious commonweal.
So shall we know the power of Christ, who came this world to save
So shall we rise with Him to life which soars beyond the grave
And earth shall win true holiness which makes Thy children whole
Till, perfected by Thee, we reach creation's glorious goal.*

Centering Prayer

Please read James 3:13-18 below together.

Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

The Inauguration of Thomas Jefferson, our third President, marked the first peaceful transition of power between two common citizens (former president John Adams was leaving office) in United States history. George Washington chose to leave office after two terms, but John Adams was defeated prior to a second term by Thomas Jefferson. Since then, from President to President, the US has enjoyed a dignified



and noteworthy change in leadership throughout our two plus centuries as a nation.

As you pray: Adore God for His preserving power over America’s peaceful succession ever since the birth of our nation and for the wisdom given to the founders. Confess our sinfulness in how quickly we accuse those with whom we disagree while excusing those whom we favor. Thank God for the freedom we enjoy as citizens of the United States, asking that God would make us aware of those in our country who do not experience such freedom. Ask God to Supply us with the peaceful transfer of executive, legislative and judicial power and supply peace in the land thereafter.

Read again the passage from James as a prayer, asking for God’s wisdom for all the people of the land beginning with yourself. Write down the descriptions of our ungodly conduct James describes and sit with this before the Lord. Pray that those we favor will demonstrate meek conduct and godly wisdom in their decisions. Pray that the “Harvest of righteousness will be sown in peace by those who make peace (James 3:18).

Offering – Calvin Theological Seminary

Since 1876, Calvin Theological Seminary (CTS) has faithfully prepared leaders who nurture disciples and serve the church. Today, graduates of CTS can expect to be ready for effective ministry in a rapidly-changing, multicultural world. We know that a CTS education has accomplished its mission when graduates: preach and teach the Bible, grow in their pastoral identity, and discern and engage ministry contexts.

We remember that giving is an act of faith, a practice of hope and an expression of love.

(You can give by sending your offering to the church, P.O. Box 217, Oakdale Ca 95361 or consider giving online through your bank. Our deacons can help you with this if necessary.)

Youth Celebration – Covenant Children by Grace – Heidelberg Catechism

LORDS DAY 27

Question 74

Are infants also to be baptized?

Yes: for since they, as well as the adult, are included in the covenant and church of God; and since redemption from sin by the blood of Christ, and the Holy Ghost, the author of faith, is promised to them no less than to the adult; they must therefore by baptism, as a sign of the covenant, be also admitted into the christian church; and be distinguished from the children of unbelievers as was done in the old covenant or testament by circumcision, instead of which baptism is instituted in the new covenant.

Pray for our covenant children at CCRC to be valued, loved and nurtured in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Scripture Reading – Acts 1:6-11

We are in our second week of a new series entitled, Acts of the Holy Spirit. These first messages on the first chapter are laying a foundation for the rest of the book to be built on. As we mentioned last week, this foundation is rooted fully and wholly on Jesus of Nazareth of which the author of Acts, Luke wrote in his first book, the gospel according to Luke. Our passage this morning is Acts 1:6-11, just six verses. They are framed by a question and an answer. However, it is the middle section that Luke focuses on as a counter to the disciples wayward thinking about the timing of the restoration of Israel as a nation.



They are still wrongly mistaking the kingdom God for a political and national empire state. Jesus of Nazareth has already plainly told them that his kingdom is not of this world and that he was not there to take it by force (remember Peter cutting off an ear in defense of Jesus?). Furthermore, our recent Advent series, Waiting Well will be very helpful to call to mind with these verses. The heart of it was that our waiting for Jesus Christ to bodily return again was not a passive waiting but an active waiting in service to our him until he comes back again. Our text today will further that understanding of what we are to be doing with the time that we have been given to fulfill our part in God's Divine Drama; actively participating as his "Spirited witnesses." The key word I will be focusing on is the word "witness" (Greek root word, *martus*) and its relation to Jesus of Nazareth and the Holy Spirit. A secondary word will be "power" that the Holy Spirit give when he comes to the disciples at Pentecost. Please read Acts 1:6-11 now.

Gospel Message – Faithful Spirited Witnesses

There is a guy I know who was into sports pretty significantly. While he enjoyed a variety of them, baseball was his favorite. He often talked baseball and when he did there was an observable, a palpable passion for it. He knew the game well, not as well as some but better than most, the rules, the history and the ethos. He played the game himself and understood each position, the skills needed and how to train to be better. He would watch it regularly, religiously following one particular team. He knew all their players and coaching staff, where they came from, their strengths and weaknesses. He went to their games and spent money of food, memorabilia and other things baseball related. He often wore the team's shirt and hat and longed for their daily success. He would check ESPN and other sports news outlets to read up on the team, analyze their stats and to saturate himself with all things baseball. To those who would listen, he was a baseball evangelist, proclaiming the good news of the sport above all other sports, of which everyone ought to bend their knee in allegiance, reverence and awe. I know this person well because that person is _____. Now, I literally could fill that space with three dozen people I know. However, with a little bit of embellishing and embarrassment, that person is me! There was a time when baseball was a bigger deal to me than it is now. In fact, one could argue that my witness was more to the Oakland A's and baseball than to Jesus Christ and the gospel of his kingdom. I suspect many of you can relate. Maybe not to baseball but maybe another sport, football perhaps. Or, maybe you give more witness to music or video games or exercise or health. Maybe, you give more witness to a political party or a nation than to Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God. We all have idols that tempt us and pull our attention and energy from our walk with Christ as his disciples and children of the King. We all struggle in giving more witness to a thing or person in this world than the one who is greater than this world and whose kingdom is not of this world. Our text this morning is about witness. Particularly it is about disciples of Jesus of Nazareth being faithful Spirited witnesses of him in this place and to the ends of the earth until he returns again just as he left 2000 years ago.

The Greek word for witness is "*martus*," and is pronounced "martoos." It is very similar to our English word in that it primarily was used in a legal sense like we often use it today – a witness in a courtroom setting giving testimony for or against the defendant. This is how Luke primarily, but not solely uses it in Acts. In most of his use of the word *martus*, it refers to a person who was an eyewitness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In particular, it refers to the 12 apostles and their being eyewitness to the resurrected Jesus of Nazareth. Their witness or testimony has been called an "apostolic witness." Luke leveraged this eyewitness-apostolic witness and testimony of the Resurrection as certain and



convincing evidence that Jesus of Nazareth is who he says he is – the Son of God come in the flesh to be with and for his chosen people. In fact, we noted last week that the word “proof” in verse three carried this kind of legal, courtroom, eyewitness, beyond and shadow of a doubt certainty. *Martus* moved from this specific, eyewitness apostolic testimony to include a more generalized, non-eyewitness testimony to truth and beliefs. In a few chapters, Stephen will give his testimony, his witness, his *martus* regarding the biblical story of salvation and how that all culminates in Jesus of Nazareth. He is killed for this testimony. This dying for your faith was called by the early church, being a martyr. Martyr, as you can hear and see is derived from the word for witness. In Acts 20:22, Stephen is called a witness, a *martus* in this more generalized sense since he was not an eyewitness to Jesus of Nazareth and his resurrection (that we know of). He is not giving an apostolic witness but a faithful witness to what the apostles saw and believed about Jesus of Nazareth and that he too believes by faith.

The Problem of Witness. Before we go into the text, it will be helpful to address a couple concerns regarding the word “witness” in order to help us be more aware of the obstacles and opportunities associated with it. First, the word “witness” may be problem for individual disciples today. I suspect a substantial number of you, when you hear the word “witness,” might have negative feelings or thoughts associated with it. Besides the legal, courtroom image there may be the image of Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses coming to your door to try and convert you. Plus, witness is rightly associated with evangelism and evangelism is also thought of negatively these days. These images individually and together create a distaste and dislike for the word “witness” and what it stands for. How many people do you know who want and are eager to serve on jury duty? How many of you are excited and eager to see Mormon or Jehovah’s Witness missionaries coming down the street toward your house. I confess. I have turned off the lights in the house and went to the backyard on more than one occasion when I saw them coming my way! How many of us are avid evangelists? The problem is apparent: we may have negative feelings associated with the word “witness” and so when we see it in scripture or hear it in a message, we may transfer those feelings to the text and to the message. The result is that we will often move on to something a bit less negative or tune out and miss what is read or said about God and ourselves. So, if you are like me and have negative feelings associated with the word “witness,” I encourage you to acknowledge them, confess them and then be open to re-orientating them according to the biblical portrait of witness. Scripture really does have a radically positive use of the word “witness” that describes a significant role and responsibility for disciples of Jesus of Nazareth to engage in, including us today. In fact, past author and professor of theology Donald G. Miller says of a Christian, “the supreme commitment of life to the glory of God is a mighty witness to him.” That is quite the statement and I believe it is largely true. We don’t want to miss what this mighty witness is because of our negative association with that word. There is second issue with the word witness we need to deal with before diving specifically into the text.

Witness is a significant corporate problem for Christian’s today. It is no secret that Christians in America are being seen in a decreasingly positive light. There is a growing distaste for Christianity in America. In their 2007 book, *Unchristian*, authors David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons reveal what they discovered in their research regarding what this generation of people thinks about Christianity. And it’s not attractive nor Christlike. A paraphrased summary would be that the general perception of Christians in America is that they are bigheaded, hypercritical, homophobic, uncaring, power-hungry



and twofaced people. Thus, the title, “unchristian.” Ouch! On the back of their book is states succinctly, “Christianity has an image problem.” Yes indeed! Since then, there is little evidence to suggest that image has gotten any better. Admittedly, this is in large part to fringe radicals who claim to be Christians but do little to actually support that claim and the medias love to cover such disparity. However, there seems to me to be a low-grade culture of poor witness that fosters this image; a witness that is nationalistic, individualistic and materialistic, political, ethical and social focused, worldly, sinfully and pridefully charged. In other words, we can and often are a part of the problem. I know I often am. However, there is an important principle that is vital for us to remember here: Christians are not responsible for how others respond to their witness; they are most certainly responsible for the content of their witness and the means by which they present it to others for response. Maybe read that last sentence again to let that sink in a bit more. It’s important as it’s central to the message this morning.

Okay, you with me so far? Our text is about witness and witness is a word we might have some trouble with both internally through associated negative feelings and externally from negative perceptions from poor witness. We will address how to be a better witness once we understand clearly what Jesus says is foundational to being a witness. So, what does this text inform us about witness and how does that impact us today as disciples of Jesus of Nazareth in North America? First, the text informs us about the person of witness, that is, the content or “who” and “what” of our witness. Second, the text informs us about the power of witness, that is, our capability or the “how” of witness. Third, the text informs us about the place of witness, that is, the “where” of witness. Weaved into these three will also be the “So what?” of witness that links this information to our present-day context so that we might be more credible and coherent witnesses for people to respond to. This is the purpose or “why” of witness.

The Person of Witness – Who and What of Witness. Jesus of Nazareth says that “you will be MY witnesses.” This is the “who” of witness. Disciples of Jesus Christ give witness to him and him alone. Giving witness to the risen Jesus of Nazareth reveals the importance of our journey last year through the gospel according to Matthew under the title, Jesus of Nazareth. We emphasized the eternal importance of knowing and following the biblical Jesus of Nazareth and not some unbiblical Jesus that that we have fashioned after our own image and into our own likeness. These false-Jesus’s are legion: a legalistic Jesus or a licentious Jesus; a republican Jesus or a democrat Jesus; an American Jesus; a “John Wayne” Jesus (see the excellent book by my daughter’s professor at Calvin University, Kristin Kobes Du Mez entitled, *Jesus and John Wayne*); a social justice Jesus; a militant Jesus; a deist Jesus; a therapeutic Jesus; a human-only Jesus; a divine-only Jesus; a gnostic Jesus; a sinful Jesus; a prideful Jesus; a violent Jesus; a materialistic Jesus, an individualistic Jesus, a nationalistic Jesus; a genderless Jesus; a judgeless Jesus; a servant-only Jesus; a king-only Jesus; a nice guy Jesus and the list goes on and on with various shades and mixes of the above. We witness to Jesus of Nazareth as revealed to us in the Bible. This is the “what” of witness. The who is Jesus of Nazareth and the what is all that he said and did and all that the Bible says about him regarding who he is and what he has done, is doing and will do.

The biblical Jesus of Nazareth, what he said and did and what was said about him in the Bible, is the primary content of our witness that we are responsible for. If we get this wrong, we get our witness wrong. That doesn’t mean we don’t witness until we know everything about Jesus! It does mean that



we witness with a humility and delight in what we accurately and experientially do know, quickly admitting what we don't and eagerly seeking to faithfully grow in our knowledge and experience of him. This is why disciples need to be "Bibline." The great preacher Charles Spurgeon once said of John Bunyan, "Why, this man is a living Bible!" Prick him anywhere—his blood is Bibline, the very essence of the Bible flows from him." It is essential for disciples of Jesus to be disciples of the biblical Jesus and the way to be disciples of the biblical Jesus is to be Bibline by submitting oneself under the authority of Scripture to reveal all that we need to know pertaining to life and salvation in Jesus Christ. This is faithful witness to the biblical Jesus of Nazareth.

The Power of Witness – The How of Witness. The who and the what of faithful witness is Jesus of Nazareth. The how of witness is the Holy Spirit. Witness to Jesus of Nazareth is "faithful Spirited witness." Jesus Christ says that the apostles would soon be receiving power when the Holy Spirit comes to them. The word for "power" means ability or capability to accomplish or do something. It is the might or strength to perform some role. Electricity enables the lightbulb to give light. Gasoline enables an engine to run. Wind provides the force for windmills to turn. It is the Holy Spirit that enables humans to give witness to Jesus of Nazareth. We must be careful here. The examples given are all impersonal – electricity, gasoline, wind. And, for a lot of people, the Holy Spirit is just like that, an impersonal force like in Star Wars. This is decidedly not the Holy Spirit of the Bible. The biblical Holy Spirit is a person, the third person of the Trinity and is personal; that is, relational. And it is He who establishes the saving work of Jesus of Nazareth in those chosen by God. It is He who lives in us and unites us to God because He is God. It is He who empowers and equips us to be and live as disciples of Jesus of Nazareth. In this vital union there is a co-operation of the Holy Spirit with my spirit. Philippians 2:12 says that we are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who is working in you to will and act according to his good purpose. That is speaking of the Holy Spirit in us! Romans 8:16 says that the Holy Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God and 2 Timothy 1:7 says that we were not given a Spirit of fear but of power, love and self-discipline. Each of these characteristics are characteristics that scripture uses to describe the Holy Spirit. Our text this morning is about power but we are also told that God is love (1 John 4:8) so the Holy Spirit must be love too and furthermore, one of the fruits of the Spirit is self-discipline (Galatians 5:23). The Holy Spirit is the person who is powerful in me to be and act as faithful Spirited witnesses of Jesus of Nazareth.

Paradoxically and profoundly, this relationship of faithful Spirited witness flourishes in weakness; our weakness. In 2 Cor. 12:9 Paul is sharing what God said to him after his prayer was denied three times to remove the "thorn in his flesh." He says of God, "And He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.'" Power is perfected in weakness! The Greek word for "perfected" means to bring to completion, to fulfill, to bring to its fullest fruition. It is what we will be when Jesus Christ returns and forever removes evil from this world and we attain our "telos," our perfection in Christ through the Holy Spirit to the glory of the Father. But what is this weakness? What does Paul have in mind? Well, to be honest, this is going to be challenging for us in our mostly affluent and comfortable West. He says in the following verse, "Most gladly, therefore, I will boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in distresses, in persecutions, in difficulties, in behalf of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong." Wow! Two things that are significant for us this morning. First, note that Paul says it is the "power of Christ" in him. The power, or ability to accomplish something" in Paul is "of Christ" and is through the



Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Christ (1 Peter 1:11) in us. Second, and this is the hard part, the power of Christ (Holy Spirit) is manifested more magnificently in weakness! The weaknesses he is referring to are “insults,” “distresses,” “persecutions,” and “difficulties.” Why? Because all these drain us of our own fleshly strengths and subvert any false strengths or foundations that we might have been relying on – health, good looks, success at work, being liked, wealth, status, comfort, security and more. They erode false foundations and expose our need for Jesus of Nazareth to save us and for the Holy Spirit to empower us and remind us that there is way more to life than these worldly things; that we live in a story and drama far greater than the American story and drama or a particular political party story or drama; that we are not to over-identify with anything or anyone other than Jesus of Nazareth and his Holy Spirit living in us. And so, in our weakness, in our distresses caused by living in a sinful world, our sin and others around us, we turn to Jesus of Nazareth and we depend and rely and orient ourselves to him through the Holy Spirit in us. This is when we become strong in Christ. This is when we give glory and honor and praise and gratitude to God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit for being with us and for us and never leaving or forsaking us.

The Purpose of witness. This humble dependence on God is the purpose of faithful Spirited witness. Faithful Spirited witness points others to Jesus of Nazareth as our definitive Lord and Savior to the glory of the Father who sent him to be with us and for us. Remember from previous weeks that the giver gets the glory! Spirited witness testifies to what God has done for us in and through the gift of Jesus Christ. Faithful Spirited witness testifies that God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. Faithful Spirited witness testifies that Jesus of Nazareth lived the life they could not; that Jesus of Nazareth is the God-Man who lived the perfect life, never sinning ever, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. Faithful Spirited witness testifies that Jesus of Nazareth suffered and died the death we deserve. Faithful Spirited witness testifies to Jesus’ sacrificial, substitutionary and satisfactory suffering and death on the cross; that the debt of sin had been fully paid and the wrath of God against sin fully satisfied for his elect. Faithful Spirited witness testifies to Jesus of Nazareth’s being raised from the dead; that he conquered the wage of sin, death; that he traversed life after life after death as the second and better Adam. Faithful Spirited witness testifies that they are saved by grace alone, through faith in Jesus Christ alone, to God alone, for his glory alone as told by the Bible alone. Faithful Spirited witness testifies that they are wretches apart from Christ, sinners in need of a Savior, poor, blind, deaf and dead in their sins; that they are born in sin as enemies of God and rebellious to him and that only by the gracious regeneration work of the Holy Spirit they are now alive in Christ, forgiven of their sins and children of God. Faithful Spirited witness testifies that it is Christ Jesus who is their rock, their hope, their security, their peace, their joy, their comfort and their strength through the Holy Spirit in them and not anything or anyone else. Faithful Spirited witness testifies that God is love and that a disciple’s highest call is to love God and others well. How will others know we are Christians? By our love! Faithful Spirited witness, in its purest and simplest form, is love.

While our faithful Spirited witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ is verbal – since by definition gospel means, good news that is proclaimed by mouth – it becomes more credible and coherent when the witness of our faith is visible too; when our doing matches our being; when our walking matches our talking. We are to be both verbal and visible faithful Spirited witnesses. The Heidelberg Catechism, a Reformed standard Confession from four hundred years ago, speaks to this dual verbal and visible



witness. In Question 86, it is asked why we need to do good works if we are saved by grace. It answers that question with these words, “Because Christ, having redeemed and delivered us by his blood, also renews us by his Holy Spirit, after his own image; that so we may testify, by the whole of our conduct, our gratitude to God for his blessings, and that he may be praised by us; also, that every one may be assured in himself of his faith, by the fruits thereof; and that, by our godly conversation others may be gained to Christ. Yes, the “whole of our conduct! Both our words and our actions testify or give witness! Thus, what we say and how we say it and how we live out its truths are important too!

Love is both verbal and visible. It becomes more visible through the good works of faith that arise from the good news of Jesus Christ. Ephesians 2:8-10 says that we are saved by God’s grace alone, apart from works and that we are saved to good works as God’s workmanship so that others might see them and glorify the Father in heaven. Good works of faith that do not earn salvation but are evidence of it can be seen by others and will be a witness of faith that points them to God. These “good work” actions are summarized by the word, “love” and as we noted earlier, it is God in us through the Holy Spirit that empowers us to love God and others as faithful Spirit-ed witnesses. Think about how some people who call themselves Christians but identify more on the political left or right, give witness to their faith. It is often arrogant, judgmental, angry, destructive and violent. This is not love and it undermines anything they might truthfully say about Jesus of Nazareth. Their visible demonstration of faith does not match the verbal proclamation of God’s good news in Jesus Christ. That is, there is no coherency between the two but discord and dissonance that makes their witness not credible. This is not faithful Spirit-ed witness of the Holy Spirit but spirit-ed witness of the world.

In Galatians 5, disciples of Jesus of Nazareth are commanded to utilize the freedom they have in Christ to keep in step with the Holy Spirit by serving one another in love. This is visible, faithful Spirit-ed witness that goes beyond verbal witness. The text goes on to say that those in Christ, with the Holy Spirit indwelling them and empowering them, will demonstrate these fruit or characteristics: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, goodness and self-control. This is what, “keeping in step with the Holy Spirit” looks like and what is meant by using their freedom in Christ to serve one another in love. Imagine: where there is indifference and hate, a disciple of Jesus Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is loving. Where there is darkness and despair, a disciple of Jesus Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is joyful. Where there is hostility, a disciple of Jesus Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is peacemaking. Where there is impatience, a disciple of Jesus Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is patient. Where people are being mean, a disciple of Jesus Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is kind. Where there is debauchery and stinginess, a disciple of Jesus Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is good and generous. Where there is unfaithfulness, a disciple of Jesus Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is faithful. Where there is harshness, a disciple of Jesus Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is gentle. Where there is licentiousness and overindulging in the pleasures of this world, a disciple of Jesus Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is self-controlled. Instead of only imagining, how are we living this out today? How are we being faithful Spirit-ed witnesses of Jesus Christ? How are we falling short and being unfaithful spirit-ed witnesses of the world? What has your witness on social media been like? To your family? Your neighbors? Your co-workers? Your friends? Your employees? Your kids?

The truthful and gracious verbal proclamation of Jesus of Nazareth done in love and with the fruit of the Spirit from our weaknesses, is what we give the world around us as our witness, to respond to.



How they respond is not up to us. Our witness is successful when it is a faithful Spirited witness that accurately and authentically proclaims Jesus of Nazareth in love and from a position of humble, dependent confidence. Therefore, witness is not primarily about conversion. It is about presenting Jesus of Nazareth to others. We hope and pray for conversion, but the success of witness is not dependent on it. Stephen, in the book of Acts gives accurate and authentic witness to Jesus of Nazareth and is promptly stoned to death. He is called a witness, a *martus*, a martyr. He was successful because he was not responsible for how the others responded to his witness, only for a faithful Spirited witness of Jesus of Nazareth which he did coherently. And it was credible because he gave his life for it! This is what we are being called to live out today wherever we find ourselves. A faithful Spirited witness in which we are willing to submit even our very lives for, not in violent and destructive ways but in subservient love for one another as Christ is for us.

The Place of Witness (Where). Jesus tells the disciples that they would be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth. Each place mentioned is one step further away from the ground they were standing on. Jesus was saying that the whole inhabited world was to hear about him and the good news of the kingdom of God. The whole world was to encounter faithful Spirited witnesses of Jesus Christ. 2,000 years later, the inhabited world has grown and there are more places to be witnesses. However, our Jerusalem may primarily be our family. Our Judea may primarily be our extended family. Our Samaria may primarily be our neighborhood and the ends of the earth may primarily be our city.

Jesus of Nazareth is calling you and I to be his faithful Spirited witnesses today. What/Who are you giving witness to? If someone looked at your last week, last month, last year what would they have predominately seen and heard and central issues to you – the things or things your treasure and prize? Would it be baseball or football? Would it be Democrat or Republican? Would it be a certain lifestyle that you have grown comfortable with? Would it be a person, a child – a celebrity, a political figure, a sports figure, a media figure, a musician? Listen to the Holy Spirit in you. Repent of any idols you may have by confessing their inferiority to the superiority of Jesus Christ. Turn to Jesus of Nazareth. Pray for him to increase your desire for him; for your allegiance to him; for your delight in him; for your good works of love through him and his Holy Spirit. Preach the gospel to yourself over and over again. And then ask, “Who in my life am I being a faithful Spirited witness to?” Who might God be calling you to be a faithful Spirited witness to? How might you be a better faithful Spirited witness – read God’s word and become more “bibline!” Walk daily with Jesus in all that you do through the Holy Spirit. Friends, may we be open and ready to be faithful Spirited witnesses wherever we are – from our homes all the way to the other side of the world. May we seek to be coherent and credible faithful Spirited witnesses by our love for God’s glory and our joy. Amen.

Communion Meditation

Professing: (Apostles Creed)

We believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.

We believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,

Born of the virgin Mary, Suffered under Pontius Pilate,

Was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose and ascended to heaven



**Where he is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come to judge the living and the dead.
We believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church,
The communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,
The resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.**

Proclaiming: 1 Corinthians 11:23b-25 (Paraphrased)

On the night of his betrayal, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it saying, "this is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." After the meal he took the cup of wine and pouring it out said, "this wine is my blood, a new covenant of grace poured out for the forgiveness of sins."

Remember and believe that the body & blood of Jesus was given & shed for the forgiveness of sins.

Song – Sing To The King -- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WnFVXYnXWSU>

*Sing to the King who is coming to reign
Glory to Jesus the Lamb that was slain
Life and salvation, His empire shall bring
Joy to the nations when Jesus is King*

*Come let us sing a song
A song declaring we belong to Jesus
He is all we need
Lift up a heart of praise
Sing now with voices raised to Jesus
Sing to the King*

*For his returning we watch and we pray
We will be ready the dawn of that day
We'll join in singing with all the redeemed
Satan is vanquished and Jesus is King!*

*Come let us sing a song
A song declaring we belong to Jesus
He is all we need
Lift up a heart of praise
Sing now with voices raised to Jesus
Sing to the King*

Sending as Disciples of Jesus:

May we be sent and faithful Spirit-ed witnesses of Jesus of Nazareth to be a shining light in an ever increasingly dark land.

We are sent out by God into the world as his witnesses. As we go, may we know with our minds and believe with our hearts and confess with our mouths the gospel of Jesus Christ and his kingdom. And may we live in a manner worthy of that Good News at work, at home, at school and in our neighborhood to the glory of God and through the person and power of the Holy Spirit.