

“Bold Witness”

Acts 2: 22-42

We continue this Sunday taking a look at how the Book of Acts can help us as modern day disciples reclaim our faith and become the church God calls us to be here on earth. And today, we are taking a looking at how we are called to be bold witnesses for our God just like Peter and the other disciples were following that first Pentecost morning.

I hesitated writing this sermon because I was worried everyone would think that I wanted us to stand on the street corner, yelling out what we believe as people passed by. But as I lived with this sermon this week, my worries and fears were replaced by a rekindled passion for the Gospel story and for my God. At first when I began to work on this sermon, all I could think about was that sadly it has been on more than one occasion that I was more like a luke-warm or even mild observer for my God rather than a bold witness. And then as the week continued, I started thinking about all the prophetic and yes, uncomfortable sermons that God had laid upon my heart over the years to share with God’s people but instead of preaching those, out of fear and worry, I shared mild-mannered platitudes. I realized that on more than one occasion I have played it safe with the Gospel message rather than being a bold witness for God. And as the week continued, I started thinking about

all those moments when I felt compelled to speak out against the injustices that I had seen but instead I kept my quiet because I was of afraid of the consequences of my actions. Once again, realizing that I have played it safe with the Gospel message rather than being a bold witness for God. I started thinking about all those moments when I have heard people saying “Why would I want to worship a God that is so judgmental, so hurtful, so full of hate?” And instead of being a bold witness for my God, instead of telling them that they were wrong, that God was full of love, full of grace, I simply kept my mouth shut and watched as they continued to crucify my Lord. Once again, realizing that I have played it safe with the Gospel message rather than being a bold witness for my God.

As a preacher and as a person of faith, this text and this sermon lead me to an uncomfortable insight. I am ashamed to say that on more than one occasion, I have not been a bold witness for my God but rather a passive on-looker who denied even knowing Jesus my Lord, fearing what others would think of me, fearing what might happen if I spoke up, worried what people might think of me. I was more worried about myself rather than actively and passionately, being a bold witness for my God, all the while playing it safe with the Gospel message rather than being a bold witness for my God.

As I lived with this text this past week, I thought about how many times I have refused to show grace to Peter and have instead lifted him up as an example

of what not to do as a disciples without really considering that I have acted in the exact same way on many occasions. He denied his Savior three times and to be honest, there is no telling how many times I have sat back and let the Gospel message, a message of love, a message of grace, a message of hope, be distorted and denied over the years.

And all I could think about was, “Why is that?” Why have I stood back rather than proclaim the good news? Why haven’t I step forward like Peter did on that first Pentecost morning? He looked at the crowd, and regardless of what they thought of him, he proclaimed what he believed, what he knew to be true. He proclaimed and professed his faith right then and there. He no longer denied. He claimed the Gospel message as his own and transformed the world. Why haven’t I done that?

In all those times, in all those moments why have I been more like a passive observer than a bold witness?

And I know that I am not alone in this wondering. Many of you have said the same thing to me in passing conversations. You have shared your frustrations that the loudest voice coming from the wider church is one of hate and judgment. You have shared with me your wonderings about why we have kept silent when we have such amazing and life-giving news to share. You have shared your thoughts on why we aren’t sharing the good news about God’s love today.

As I struggled with this text this week, it does seem like we, as modern day disciples, do have a tendency to sit back on the sidelines, letting others tell us what we believe, letting others tell us what the Gospel message really is, letting others tell us that as Christians, we need to play nice. No wonder the modern day church is in decline. We've lost our flavor. The fire has been put out. As people of faith, we are not proclaiming the amazing work of God. Instead, the message that we as the church are sending is that we don't want to make anyone mad. Just come and be comfortable. Come and stay for an hour. Hear some good music. And then leave, not changed or transformed. No wonder no one is inspired by the Church anymore. We have played it safe with the Gospel message instead of being bold witnesses for our God.

So not what Jesus taught us or showed us by his example when he was proclaiming the good news here on earth! In fact, almost every time, Jesus got up to preach, he made someone mad. Almost every time, Jesus healed someone, he made someone mad. Almost every time, Jesus lived out the Gospel message by inviting the tax collectors and prostitutes to dinner, by embracing people on the margin as his brother and sister, by challenging the powers that be, he made someone mad. Jesus made people mad because he embraced his calling to be a bold witness for our God who from the very beginning has done some outrageous things to show God's love for all of God's creation. God sent bread from heaven to feed God's

people even though all they were doing was complaining. God sent prophet after prophet to try and bring back God's people in right relationship with God even though all they were doing was ignoring God and ignoring the injustices in their midst. God even was born in a dirty manger, taking on the risk of being a newborn baby in a time of oppression and uncertainty even though all the people wanted a mighty warrior to come and save the day. Everything God has done for us has been a testament to God's bold and daring and life-giving love for God's creation. So why do we as modern day disciples show anything less for our God? So why do we as modern day disciples do anything less than being just as bold as our Lord and Savior who died upon the cross for us? The certain fact is that the Gospel message stirs things up, shakes things up, and yes, makes people mad. The certain fact is that the heart of the Gospel message does not call us to be comforted but to comfort the afflicted, just like Jesus did when he was here on earth, changing lives, transforming lives and making people mad. So why do we as modern day disciples expect anything less when we truly embrace our calling to be followers of Jesus of Christ?

I have often wondered in our attempt to "play nice" and strive for Christian unity, if we have not sacrificed our voice and our calling as well. If in our attempt to keep everyone happy, if we have not also sacrificed our ability to stand up for what we believe in. I have often wondered if in our attempt to make everyone

comfortable, if we have not sacrificed the heart of the Gospel message and have forgotten our call to seek justice and make kindness for all of God's creation.

This week, as I reflected on what it means to be a bold witness for God, I couldn't help but think about how history would have been so different if a courageous few had not step forward from the sidelines and spoken up and become bold witnesses for God. I wondered if they had not stepped forward, if they had not had a life transforming experience with God that shaped their faith and their understanding of who God was calling them to be, how our lives would be different today. Where would we be if Dietrich Bonhoeffer, because of his belief in Jesus Christ, had not spoken out against the cruelty he saw in Nazi Germany? Where would we be if Mother Teresa, because of her relationship with God, had not spoken out against the poverty and disease that she saw on the streets of Calcutta? Where would we be if Martin Luther King Jr, because of his study and understanding of the Gospel message, had not spoken out for civil rights for all of God's people?

Where would we be if countless others, because of their passionate belief in a Gospel message of love and peace, had not step out from the sidelines and spoken up and become bold witness for God?

As modern day disciples, we are not called to play it safe with the Gospel message. We are called to be bold witnesses for our God. As modern day disciples

we must begin to proclaim what we believe because how else is this world going to know about God's love and grace unless we tell everyone about it! God has done some outrageously wonderful things for us as God's people. Now is the time to tell about these things, to share our stories, to tell about God's grace and God's peace, to be a bold witness to God's outrageously life giving love for all of God's people. As modern day disciples, we must quit playing it safe with the Gospel message and tell our stories.

The good news for us as modern day disciples is that there is grace and there are second chances. Just look at Peter! Who would have imagined that the same guy who once denied Jesus would have made such a speech, proudly proclaiming Jesus as his Savior, becoming a bold witness for God, and transforming lives on that Pentecost morning.

We are called to tell the story, the wonderful wild and dangerous story about how our God who loved us so much that he sent his only Son so that we might live. We are called to tell the story of how we were lost and now we are found. We are called to tell the story of how God's love changed us and continues to challenge us to be prophets and people of the God's Kingdom here on earth. Who knows what will and can happen when we truly become bold witnesses for God?!

Maybe we might just find our flavor. Maybe we might just find our fire.
Maybe we might just start bringing healing and wholeness to this broken world.
Maybe we might just experience God's Kingdom here on earth.

We are called to tell the story.

May we stop playing it safe with the wonderfully life transforming message
of the Gospel and become bold witness for our God. Amen.