

“This Is Our Testimony”

1 John 5: 9-13

We come to the end of John’s first letter and after talking about love, after talking about unity, after talking about community, we finally get John’s testimony. He shares what he knows is real and what he has experienced in his life of faith. He doesn’t give his testimony with flashy images or emotional stories to pull on the heart strings. He gives his testimony and confirms what we as people of faith already know. His testimony is simple: God loves this world. God is still working in this world and God has given us the gift of eternal life. That is the basis of his faith, the basis of his calling as a person of God. That is his testimony, his on-going witness to the world. It is a testimony that was true in the beginning, continues to be true today, and will continue to be true for all time. It is a testimony that is the basis for our very own testimony. It is a testimony about the great things God has done, continues to do, and will do in the future.

John’s simple witness is timeless and it is a testimony that we as modern day disciples have forgotten along the way, which is ironic because it is usually the very first lesson we learn when we first come to claim our faith as our own. We may have heard this timeless testimony through accounts of how someone experienced God in his life or we may have heard this timeless testimony by

experiencing that mysterious something that tells us that we are claimed as God's own. Regardless of how we heard or experienced the testimony, we are people of faith because of this powerful witness and the thing we need to realize is that the very basic reality is that every Christian, every person of faith, came to the faith by virtue of someone else's witness. We didn't arrive at our faith on our own. We experienced a powerful witness that shaped us, that formed us, that called us to follow. We came to faith because someone or something influenced us through the power of testimony.

Now for us disciples, this is usually when we shift in our seats. We don't like the word "testimony". It holds some uncomfortable images for us. Usually when we hear the word testimony, we think of the guy on the street corner, telling us the world is going to end and we need to be saved right now. Or when we hear the word testimony, we worry that we may have to stand up in church and speak. We try to avoid this situation, telling ourselves that someone else has a more powerful story than ours, that we have this ordinary story about how we came to faith. We tell ourselves that our story is not really powerful or life-changing, so we avoid the preacher's eyes, hoping that he or she will ask someone else.

But the fact is that we are here, as people of faith, as ones who celebrate the knowledge that we are claimed and named as God's own, as ones who answered the call of discipleship, all because someone shared his or her story with us.

That's why at this time I invite you to take some time and think about the first time you experienced this timeless witness of God's story. For those of us who grew up in the church, sadly this may be harder because this witness always seemed to be there and maybe we took that for granted. But even if that is true, if we take the time and really think about it, we can all come up with this one time, this one person, or this one experience that showed us what it truly meant to be a child of God, living in the light of God, experiencing the peace of God's Kingdom all through power of testimony and witness. I'm not going to ask you to share but we all have experienced the power of testimony, the grace of witness in our lives. And that is exactly what John wants us to hold onto as he concludes his letter. He wants to remind us that as people of faith it is not just the preacher types that have a testimony to share.

All of us as people of faith have a claim to this timeless witness of faith. We all have a story to tell. We all have been shaped by a testimony that was passed on from the beginning of time. And that's just part of the story. John says if we believe what humans who are fallible and imperfect tell us about God, why not believe what God is telling us about God? Why not believe in the transforming, life giving presence that God has shown us through the gift of God's son? God's testimony is bigger and better than any human testimony!

All we have to do is look around and experience God's testimony to God's love for us each and every day. From the abundance of grace that fills our lives to the love and support of the community of faith that walks with us along our journeys of faith- all are a part of God's testimony to God's love for us as God's children.

This is God's testimony: that God loved us so much that God sent God's only Son so that we might have new life. It is a witness to the great things God has done for us since the beginning of time as ones who are claimed and named as God's very own.

However the funny thing is that this life changing witness, this timeless testimony, gets lost along the way. It gets lost in the church. It gets lost in the mix of tradition and history that shape the Body of Christ here on earth. It gets lost in the business and the busy-ness of church life. It gets lost along our journeys of faith as we complicate the timeless witness of God's love and grace with things that don't really matter.

That's why, in our text today, John reminds that it is time to reclaim what matters most, what we know is true: God gave us the gift of eternal life through God's love for us and all that "other" stuff that surrounds the church and clouds our faith is secondary. As people of faith, what matters most and all we need to know is that through Jesus Christ, we have eternal life, a life that is beyond our

imaging and available for us to experience right now, a life that calls us to become one as the Body of Christ here on earth, a life that is freely given, not earned, simply because God loved the world so much that God sent God's only Son so that we might live.

It is time to reclaim this timeless testimony and begin living our lives, knowing that this powerful witness is true. How else is anyone going to believe in the good news unless we tell them? How else is anyone going to understand God's grace unless we show them? How else is anyone going to understand what it means to be embraced as one of God's own unless we do so as ones who have experienced this amazing gift ourselves?

For John and for us as modern day disciples, it is time to tell the story, to tell the story of God's grace, to tell the story of God's love, to tell the story of God's gift of eternal life. It is time for us as the Body of Christ here on earth to witness to what God has already done for the world through Jesus Christ. It is time for us to become the people God created us to be by becoming living witnesses to what God has already and continues to do for us in our everyday lives as ones who are claimed and named as God's own.

We are loved! We are claimed and named as God's own. We are embraced and welcomed as one of God's children. We know this to be true. We've already experienced it in our lives.

And that is the testimony that shapes us as the Body of Christ here on earth. It is a witness that was true at the beginning of time. It is a witness that continues to be true. And it is a witness that will forevermore be true.

God so loved the world that God gave God's only Son so that we might have new life and be transformed.

This is God's testimony ! And as people of faith, this is our testimony as well. It is also the good news that we are called to share with a world that is broken, with a world that is hurting, that is need of some good news, that is need of a reminder that God called it good. It is time for us to become living testimonies to God's love and grace in our community and in world by becoming the people that God created us to be.

We don't have to stand on the street corners, shouting at people. We don't have to go door to door, passing out pamphlets. We even don't have to corner the people we know and hold them hostage until they say they believe.

All we have to do is become living testimonies to God's love and grace through our words and our actions. All we have to do is become witnesses to God's Kingdom by loving our brothers and our sisters. All we have to do is to tell the story by reflecting God's love to all of God's children.

All we have to do is know that our testimony is only part of the story. God's testimony is bigger and better. And God is still telling the story each and every day

by filling our lives with grace, by surrounding us with peace, and challenging us to be people of hope in a world that needs to hear and experience the good news over and over again.

We are called to be living testimonies, reclaiming what we already know and what matters most: For God so loved the world that God gave God's only Son so that we could have new life.

Now that's a story to tell!

May we always witness to God's love and grace which fills all of God's creation.

Amen.