

“WHAT I SAID I WOULD DO: IV - WITNESS”

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Elkton United Methodist Church
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All Saints' Sunday

Psalm 34:1-10

Many years ago, a man went on a cruise, and in the middle of the first night, got terribly sea-sick. As he was quickly making his way down to his cabin, suddenly other people began rushing by him going the other way, toward the deck. Pretty soon, he began to understand what was going on. Someone had fallen overboard, and the crew was frantically searching for the man in the ocean.

Well, this man would like to have helped, but, because of his sea-sickness, he could do nothing other than escape to his cabin. When he got there, he still wished he could help, and then, on a whim, he picked up a lamp and put it up to the porthole. After a while, still sicker than a dog, he gave up and laid down.

The next day he heard the good news that the drowning man had been saved. Later that day, when he was finally feeling better, he went up on the deck, and as it happened, he met up with the man who had been rescued. Because he'd missed all the action, being in his cabin as he was, he asked the rescued man to tell him about it.

“Well,” he said, “I knew I was a goner. I had gone under once, fought my way back up, struggled as long as I could, hoping against hope that someone would see me. Then I couldn't fight any longer and I went under a second time. With all my strength I fought to get back to the surface, and prayed and prayed that someone would see me. Just when I was about to go under a third time, which I knew would be my last (he said), someone put a light up in a porthole, and someone else saw me, grabbed my hand, and pulled me into a lifeboat.”

As the renowned evangelist Dwight L. Moody, who recounted this story, said, “It seemed a small thing to do to hold up the light, yet it saved the man's life.” (*Moody's Anecdotes*, p. 44)

Well, my friends, in this fourth sermon in the “What I Said I Would Do” series, I want to suggest to you that when you joined the church, you said you would do what that seasick man did - and that is to hold up a light, or in other words, “witness.”

You and I, as followers of the One who literally saved our lives - Jesus the Christ - have committed to sharing that love with others by witnessing. We witness in any number of ways - with our words, with our lives, our actions. We witness by the choices we make on how we use our time, spend our money, give of ourselves. We witness all the time, whether intentionally or unintentionally.

For, you see, people are watching us. They know we are Christians, they know we come to church - so they watch us. Oh, they don't stare at us, like we're aliens, but they notice things. They notice the way we speak, the choices we make, the things we do. And all of those things are our witness.

It's challenging to be an effective witness for Jesus Christ. It can even seem downright daunting when you start to think about it. Think back on yesterday. If someone followed you around, watched what you did, listened to the things you said, saw the choices you made, noticed how you treated others - would they know that you are a follower of Jesus Christ? You see, it can be daunting, it can be challenging.

But this morning, I want to invite all of us to think about witnessing in a different way - not challenging or daunting, but as a privilege. Think about what it is about which we are witnessing. It is about life, full life, abundant life, eternal life. It is witnessing about never being on your own, never being alone, but always walking with God. It is about blessings, and forgiveness, and peace. That's what we have to witness about - and goodness knows, so many people are dying to hear that good news. So many people are caught in the trap of this world - a world of cynicism, and competition, and mean-spiritedness, and rushing from one thing to the next, and rushing to keep up with somebody else. Our witness to the love of Christ and the life that comes through Him can literally save others. The light that you shine through your witness can be a lifesaving light for somebody else.

Today, friends, on this All Saints' Sunday, we remember and give thanks for those in our church who have died since last October - and I want to tell you, the light of Christ shone brightly through them. Their witness touched so many lives.

As I looked over the list again this past week, and thought about each person, the ways they witnessed so wonderfully through their lives came spilling out. Some of them, like Delia and Mary and Roy and Ted, witnessed for years through hours and hours and hours spent caring for others by serving in kitchens - here in the church, in their homes, in restaurants, at the firehouse. Others, like Warren and Ranceford, witnessed through service to their country and then showing unabashed patriotism for the rest of their lives. Still others, like Bill, witnessed by their total dedication to caring for this church, even if it meant getting up at the crack of dawn to be here long before we arrived. And others, like Nancy, Frances and Florence

witnessed to God's love through the incredible love they shared with their spouses and families. And there were others, like Betty Lou, who witnessed by their delight in spending time with lifelong friends, laughing and lunching and going on adventures. And the others, Bob and George and Joy, witnessed too in their own special ways.

All of them were very special witnesses in our world, and oh, how we miss them in our midst. But how grateful we are that they took witnessing seriously - that, through them, God's love was evident in the world, and shined brightly like a life-saving beam of light. Who knows how many lives were changed because of their witness? Who knows how many came to know of God's love because these saints loved them?

And, who knows who will be touched when you and I witness? So let us go forth from this place today, empowered by the Spirit, and inspired by the lives of our fourteen brothers and sisters in faith, to be beacons of light and love in our hurting world.

As we prepare to do that, let us first pause to remember and give thanks for their lives among us. After I read their names, and then we have a prayer together, we'll sing a hymn, and during the singing of that hymn, if you brought a flower to remember someone you love, you're invited to bring it to the vases on the piano. Please stand now as we remember these wonderful witnesses whom we love and we miss so much.