

**Pentecost 20, October 15, 2023**

**“I Am a Christian – Part 5 I Am a Witness”**

**Read: Act 1: 3 - 11 and/or Memorize: Acts 1: 8**

**A little over thirty-five years ago I became a member of Kiwanis. I was single and my life revolved around church. How was I to be a witness when the people I was around, for the most part, already knew Jesus. It’s not that all Kiwanians were unchurched, but it gave me an opportunity to meet and interact with people, I might never have met. That’s really how you get the best opportunity to witness.**

**Sometimes, what scares us is we think the only way you witness is to knock on a stranger's door or walk up to people on the street and ask, "Do you know Jesus?" For the most part, it doesn't work that way.**

**That's not to say that you might be in a situation that you meet a person and somehow get the opportunity to tell them about Jesus. But those incidental occurrences rarely lead to people deciding to follow Jesus.**

**George Barna, who has studied American church behavior for many years recently sent an email saying: "Four of five**

**Gen Z'ers (82%) agree that having a conversation about faith is most effective when you have already established a significant relationship with that person." I don't think any of us are radically different. The people we are most likely to be effective in witnessing to, are the people we know. They're the people we work, play and socialize with, or find ourselves in similar circumstances.**

**When the boys were growing up, Roxann and I spend many, many hours on soccer fields with a bunch of families who we grew to know very well. Those types of relationships may give you the opportunity to speak into their life of faith**

**things. I want to emphasize that. You cannot use Jesus as a hammer to bang Him into people's lives. You want to introduce people to Jesus and invite them to know Him.**

**What is our witnessing based upon? It is based on the Great Commission. Matthew 28: 19 – 20, where Jesus says to His disciples: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age.” As Rainer says, these are the marching orders of the church.**

**He reminds us that we dare not lose sight of two important issues: “First, it is a commandment, something Jesus explicitly told His disciples to do. Second, it is a commission given to His disciples.” Anyone who calls themselves a follower of Jesus has been given this commandment and commission.**

**Jesus tells disciples how they’ll do it in Acts 1: 8, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witnesses, telling people about me**

**everywhere – in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria and to the ends of the earth.”**

**Jesus doesn't make this an option. You will witness by word and actions. These are the very last words Jesus says to His disciples before He went back into heaven so, in a sense, this is Jesus' last will and testament.**

**Jesus was preparing them for his departure and return. He wanted them to know where He was going. He also wanted them to know how they could join Him. He assures them that there'll be plenty of room for them. If we make**

**millions of disciples, we can be certain, there'll be room for them in heaven.**

**So how are you going to get to heaven? Here's where John 14: 1 - 6 comes in. Jesus assures the disciples that they know where He's going. Thomas says, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"**

**Jesus immediately replies, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." This is the verse that teaches us that there is only one way**

**to salvation. Jesus wants us to understand that He is the only way that you can get to heaven.**

**Our very first week of Bible study someone asked the question, “So what about all those people who die but don’t know Jesus? Are they not going to heaven?” It’s not a question we can answer. Only God decides who is going to heaven. He has been very clear on how you get to heaven. Perhaps a better question to ask is, “What can I do to help more people learn about Jesus so they can go to heaven?”**

**When you watch the video you will hear Tom say that 90% of Christians really are unsure of how to witness to people. There's a whole bunch of us who can learn how to be better witnesses, so that more people will populate heaven. The needs of those who don't know Jesus help us to understand the urgency of Jesus' command.**

**So how do you share Jesus? Start thinking about the things that Jesus has done in your life. Start thinking about experiences you've had, a hurt, a concern and remember how Jesus helped you get through that. For Roxann and I this recent four-month period has created lots of**

**opportunities for us to learn about how to witness to people who are going through medical crises. We know the hurts, the pain and the uncertainty. It will make me a better pastor and a better witness because of that.**

**When I went to Kiwanis after Roxann's surgery, with her permission, I was able to be a better witness to them, people I know. I could talk about how difficult a time it was for us. I could confess that I wanted to give God some direction, like let it be benign or encapsulated, but I could also share that in the end, God had a bigger and better plan. We had prayed that God's will would be done and**

**that whatever happened would bring glory to God. I got to share that God had a better plan than I could ever imagine when we heard the news that there was no cancer.**

**Remember: We are agents of the King of Kings; Jesus says that He will give us the Spirit to help us to witness. We want to remember that we're not on our own. We are not depending on our own knowledge or authority.**

**In additions to the Holy Spirit, there are three major steps to be a better witness. First, you want to work to develop relationships. Sometimes, it includes those who already**

**believe. The most crucial are long-term relationships but even short-term relationships can give you an opportunity to share Jesus' love. Many years ago, a young, Christian couple showed up on a Christmas morning at worship. They were from Canada and didn't want to miss Christmas worship with their little boy.**

**I thought we would never see them again but a few years later Kerri Ellison called and said, "We're moving to Canandaigua and we need a preschool for our daughter." We helped her with that and a few other things. Because we had treated them with care they remembered us. They**

**have become vital parts of our congregation. So even a brief encounter has the potential for a long-term relationship.**

**At some point in a relationship with somebody who doesn't know Jesus, it has to involve a Gospel conversation. You want to be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit and His timing for you to speak. It may start with your own story but, inevitably it has to lead to talking about Jesus, His death on the cross and His resurrection. I believe that God will give us all the opportunities that our obedience will allow.**

**Finally, we cannot overestimate the power of an invitation.**  
Thom Rainer interviewed people who were not active in the church. Among the surprises he found was that nearly 3 out of 4 unchurched persons said they would attend a worship service if they were invited. Think about that. 75% of them said they would be willing to come, if somebody would only invite them.

**I'll go one step further. Don't just invite them, pick them up, walk in with them so that you can begin to introduce them to other people, giving them an ease and a comfort**

**that they don't get when they are walking in alone. Those of us who have been with the church for a long time find that hard to believe that it's scary to walk in, but it is.**

**One of the things you want to be used to empower your witness is prayer. It has lifechanging power, the life-changing power of God. We can never separate evangelism from prayer. Without prayer anything we do will be weaker and less effective.**

**What should you be praying for? Pray for opportunities. You want to ask God to bring people into your path with**

**whom you can share the love of Jesus Christ. When you ask Him to give you opportunities, He'll do it.**

**Pray for people who don't believe. You say you don't know any? Start doing things with people who don't know of the church. Give yourself the opportunity to meet them and get to know them so that you can give them the opportunity to meet Jesus.**

**Pray that people will accept your invitation. That gives you a better chance of exposing them to the Gospel and to**

**connect them to other people at church. People would love to meet them and they might very well love to come back.**

**Pray for your own boldness. Yes, you will face rejection. Jesus warns us of that. On the other hand, you face the possibility of helping someone to know Jesus and making an eternal friend of them.**

**Pray that I, **and all who are part of our congregation, especially our leaders** or all of us, will be witnesses to the blessing we have received by our life of faith. Help those**

**who don't know Jesus to see the joy and celebration we share because of our faith in Jesus.**