What if these walls could talk? Have you ever thought about that? Look around this sanctuary for a moment. Since the early 1950’s these walls have heard thousands of sermons, some great and inspiring and others, well, you know. These walls have heard the cries of families mourning, the joy a baby’s cries at baptism, the funny comments made by the kids during the children’s message, and the countless prayer requests shared among those in the pews and the clergy up front. If only these walls could talk, we would hear some stories. You and I know they can’t. What about me and you? What if God’s people could tell those stories?

We are in our fifth Sunday in the season of Lent. Next Sunday is Palm Sunday and the next Sunday is Easter and the next Sunday is Serve Indy, time keeps moving! We have considered during this season what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ using the study book “The Disciple’s Path” that actually uses the membership vows that we take when we become members. We promise to faithfully participate in the ministries of the church by our prayers, our presence both in worship and the community, our gifts financial and spiritual gifts, our service and our witness. We promise to be a witness of our faith everywhere we go. It might be difficult at times to know how to share our faith, how to be witnesses, but it is biblical.

In fact, before Jesus ascended at the beginning of Acts 1, before the celebration of Pentecost, Jesus’ last words to his beloved disciples were “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you (again this is Pentecost), and you will be my witnesses.” Jesus didn’t ask them to be his worshippers, but be witnesses. “Witness to the resurrection life you see in me. Witness to the new life you have in me,” Jesus tells them. I think we are in agreement here. It’s in our study book for Lent, it’s in our vows for membership, and it’s even in Scripture. It is clear, we are to be witnesses. Great! How do we do that?

Last November, Candace and I were walking into the Allen County Coliseum in Fort Wayne to watch the Indiana Hoosiers face off against IPFW. I know, I know, IP, what? It’s Indiana Purdue Fort Wayne. I wore IPFW blue and cheered against IU for the first time in my life. What was shocking to me though was not all the cream and crimson at this IPFW home game; it was who greeted us as we walked toward the Coliseum gates. There was a man standing on a box of some sort with a bull horn yelling things about Jesus and heaven and hell. Some of it I could hear, some of it I didn’t, which was probably ok. He had his children passing out Bible tracks and he kept talking about how bad our world is and how bad everyone is. Is this being a good witness?

Now I don’t doubt the conviction and passion of this man, but I do question his style of witnessing. I wondered what good is this man doing? Most people laughed at him, which isn’t appropriate, while others became angry as they walked by. Again, I wondered, how are we to be witnesses in a world that only seems to scream and yell at each other?

A witness simply tells what they have seen and experienced and heard in their own lives. We are called to simply share what we know to be true in our own lives. We begin by witnessing at home with our families, in our churches, moving out into the city, nation and the ends of the earth. That’s what Jesus was trying to tell us, “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem,” in your home, your own town, “and in all Judea” the state and region, even in “Samaria” the place you really don’t want to go, “and to the ends of the earth.”

United Methodist pastor in North Carolina, Pastor Tim McConnell, wrote, “A witness simply states clearly and without embellishment, “Here’s what happened to me.” Maybe we need to get back to the simplistic approach that we find in the healing of the blind man by Jesus in John 9. After being healed, the man was asked how it had happened, and he simply said, “I once was blind, but now I see.” That was his story, that was his witness.”
What's your story? How did you finally receive the gift of faith? When we witness, we simply share what we know to be true for us. We are not forcing someone into seeing things exactly how we see them. We can simply begin by saying, “This is how it is for me. This is what I have experienced.” It is a humble, grace filled, gentle, loving act to share your story with someone else. It doesn’t have to be yelling on the mountain top or on the steps of the Coliseum, instead it could simply be sharing with someone at work who is going through hard time how prayer or worship or this church community helped through that same thing. It could be sharing your story of beating an addition with someone who needs that encouragement. Maybe you could simply show your children or family through your volunteering and service how much helping others means to you. And just as we give to others expecting nothing in return, we share our witness expecting nothing back either.

The disciples had clear expectations for what Jesus, the Messiah would do. That’s why they asked him “Are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel” away from Rome or other worldly empires? The disciples still struggled with what they desired, their own expectations. Our only expectation in witnessing should be to love. We don’t have to recruit for the church every time we talk with someone. Certainly I hope you invite family and friends to join you for worship, especially if what we do here together is meaningful to you, but that shouldn’t be our only motivation. Our expectation is to love. If we love and others see that, then they’ll want to know how we have learned to love and that’s when we can share why this community of faith of Meridian Street is important to you. Let me say one thing about invitation. One of the main reasons people don’t attend worship is because they aren’t invited. While it’s not our main intention in being a witness, it’s still something we should do. We have Palm Sunday and Easter coming up, invite someone to church. If they say no, that’s fine, let it go, but what if they said yes? You would be introducing them to something that is important to you and may become essential for them as well. Invite someone to worship this week.

We are called to witness both in words and in deed. We continue the story of God’s mission in the world. That’s why it’s the co-mission. It’s God’s mission and our mission. We will always need to act out, live out our faith in deeds. There will be times we will need to use words as well. All we can do is simply share how Jesus is important to us.

There will be other times when words are not necessary. There is a quote attributed to Saint Francis, “Preach the Gospel at all times and if necessary use words.” When we serve, we hope that we’re preaching and sharing the Gospel, even without words. We might offer a welcome and hospitality and others will see Jesus through those acts. In fact, last Sunday, as we welcomed a wonderful interfaith gathering with Muslim, Jewish, and Christian neighbors all to welcome refugee families, it reminded me of a time when I welcomed a Muslim group to the church I served in rural northwest Indiana. I had invited them to come and share about their faith, so we could better understand Islam. During another week in the series we had a Jewish group and the last week a Buddhist group. We welcomed these groups as a way to honor the 10th Anniversary of Sept 11th in 2011 and to promote peace and understanding.

When the Muslim group arrived at our church it was nearing their time of prayer, which they take way more seriously than we do. They reluctantly and nervously asked if they could have a private and quiet room to pray in. Without hesitation, I showed them a quiet space and invited them to take as long as they wanted. After the event and interfaith conversation was over, one of the Muslim presenters came up to me and shared that they could really see the faith of Jesus in me and the church in the welcome and kindness we offered.

I heard the same from the Syrian American community and the Jewish community from the Indianapolis Hebrew Congregation last week that we were so welcoming and hospitable to everyone who came.
I received many thank yous from the Syrian community, Imam Shakir and from Rabbi Scott. They could see our faith in the welcome and hospitality we provided and we didn’t have to say a word, expect, “Welcome, glad you're here.”

There will be other times when we will need to share our stories verbally of how God has changed our lives, how God and the community of faith have impacted our lives. I would really recommend that we share gently, lovingly, respectfully, as long as we're open to listening to the stories of those we are talking with. And unlike bullhorn guy outside of the Coliseum, we should really share with someone we already have a relationship and friendship with as long as they’re open to hearing and receiving a part of our story. We need to tell our stories and live them out. Much of the Old Testament is a call to God’s
people to share our stories, as we read in Deuteronomy, “Love God with your heart, soul, and strength. Impress them (commandments) on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.” Tell your story! If the church won’t speak, who will?

Recall what God has done in your life. Consider how God has changed you. Remember to share your story in word and deed with others. Because remember, these walls can’t talk. They have some great stories to tell, but the stories this building bears will never be heard unless we share them with others. Jesus is asking you and me today and every day of our lives, “Can I get a witness?”

Let’s pray: Teach us, O Lord, to share our witness with others with our words and deeds. You continue to write the story of our lives. Give us a discerning heart to know when to speak and when to let our actions speak. Give us a loving heart to witness with love and kindness and gentleness. Give us open hearts to receive the stories of others. As we prepare to come to the table of grace, prepare our hearts to receive you once again in the breaking of the bread and the taking of the cup. We offer this prayer and our witness in the name of Jesus the Christ our Lord. Amen.