

You Are My Witness

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Our Mission Guatemala team has had a wonderful time serving this week. They are in the air this morning headed back to Indiana. They helped to construct a building for the teachers of the San Andreas school district. They were wiring rebar, mixing concrete, and laying cinder blocks. I might add they were doing this in 70 degree weather with sunshine. At least Indiana finally had spring show up this week. I'm so glad that our team had a wonderful experience, as I knew they would. I have served in Guatemala twice. The last time I was there in 2015, we were working on a kitchen addition to a local school in a plains region between volcanoes. It is a beautiful place! My task was to work on building these large brick ovens. I would take brick and mortar and build the oven as our Guatemala workers would show us. As I finished, I would ask Juan, our helper, who knew little to no English, and I knew no Spanish, and I would ask, "Is this good?" I would show thumbs up or thumbs down to indicate my readiness for inspection. Juan looked at it with thumbs up and a smile said, "Perfecto Matteau," then proceeded to fix the oven for me.

Guatemala is a special place for me. The mission does amazing work as well. During my first trip, we were introduced to several families who received assistance from the mission following a major hurricane several years ago. The mother, who was being translated from the Mayan language of Quiche, shared that she had prayed and prayed that Jesus would come to help her family. After waiting and waiting, she said Jesus came to help her. Someone had to ask, "Jesus came?" She told us that these people from Methodist Churches in Indiana came to help her, but for her Jesus came. Without knowing a single word of the Mayan language Quiche or little to no Spanish, she still saw Jesus in those missionaries, who were bringing new hope and new life to Guatemala.

Jesus said, "You are witnesses of these things." The 24th Chapter of the Gospel of Luke is full of resurrection stories. It begins with the story of Jesus' resurrection. Next is the story of the risen Lord visiting two friends on the road to Emmaus. Finally, we end the three resurrection stories with Jesus appearing to the disciples. This chapter is 53 verses long and the first 49 verses are all about the risen Lord with three resurrection stories. Luke is trying to remind us of the importance of the resurrection in this chapter. He is being absolutely clear that Jesus has risen from the dead, even though we begin this passage where we left off with Thomas last week.

Jesus came and stood among the disciples and said, "Peace be with you," which is a direct response to their fear. He then showed them his hands and feet and refers to his body to show that he's not a ghost. He shows them the resurrection. It sounds a lot like the resurrection story in the Gospel of John, doesn't it? And to show the disciples and the readers of Luke that Jesus is not just a ghost, we read what I find to be a most interesting and kind of funny passage of Scripture. The risen Lord was hungry and asked for something to eat. They gave him a piece of fish and he ate it. In the Emmaus story earlier in this same chapter of Luke, Jesus sat at the table with the two disciples and shared bread with them. That's when they recognized Jesus. There's something about sitting down and eating with another person.

This is why, as the clergy and lay leaders of congregations in the Butler Tarkington Neighborhood began talking about having conversations on race and reconciliation, we decided to have a meal with the program. I joked with those who attended our first month's session in February that while all of our churches have differences, what we have in common is eating. Christians like to eat. There's just something about sitting down and enjoying a meal, breaking bread, and eating fish with another. "You are witnesses of these things," Jesus told the disciples. Perhaps the simple act of sitting with another at a table can be an act of witnessing.

Jesus doesn't stop just with a meal of broiled fish. He goes on to repeat to the disciples and every reader of Luke since, that since the beginning of creation, God's plan has been in motion, it's been clear. Jesus is the plan. Everything written in the Law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms points to Jesus. He adds that every part of Jesus' life; his birth, teachings, miracles, healings, his suffering, crucifixion, death, rising from the dead on the third day, and the preaching of repentance for the forgiveness of sins leads us to proclaiming the good news of Jesus. The good news of new life that comes from repentance or turning from the old way of sin and selfishness is to be shared in Jesus' name to all the nations. Jesus' words here are a call to action, a charge for their lives and ours: "You are witness of these things." You are witnesses to new life.

By showing up again, the risen Lord is not just giving proof of the resurrection. Jesus is inviting us into a new life; he is inviting us to live the resurrection. The disciples finally realized who Jesus really was. God was revealed to them in a new way. The disciples also experienced resurrection, new life in Christ. They finally realized that God's redeeming work was happening in all of creation through Jesus, but they began to see that they played a part in God's redeeming work bringing and creating new and abundant life into the world just as Jesus did. They were to be witnesses to these things. They were now tasked with showing the world what they knew to be true in and through Jesus. Jesus said, "You are witnesses of these things."

I wonder about that though. How are we to become witnesses? You might notice with a closer reading of Jesus' words that he didn't say "Go do witnessing," he said, "You are witnesses." We often feel like we have to find somebody to witness to, but maybe we're already in the places where God wants us to be witnesses. It can often feel like an overwhelming task to become a so called "witness" of the Gospel, but I really feel like it comes to down to sharing and living God's story of redemption when we live new life and we create new life. If we follow Jesus, then we live into God's redemptive work through all of creation in Christ. We co-create the Kingdom with God as we love others, as we serve others, as we listen to and speak with others, as we share the story. To tell a story sometimes means that we verbally tell a story of how new life happened in us and or another, but our lives also speak. How we live our lives will tell a story as well. So, how well are we witnesses of the Gospel? I reflect on this often from two perspectives, witnesses as Meridian Street church and as individual Christians.

As a congregation, how are we witnesses of resurrection life? I see at Meridian Street a congregation trying our best to speak and bring new and abundant life into places where darkness and challenge exist. We live this out through our common desire to reach out into our neighborhood and city with love and in our collective witness of service. From our mission team in Guatemala this week to our 3rd annual all church service day Serve Indy, we are united in our

desire to serve others and to make our neighborhood, city, and world a better place, a place where God's Kingdom is experienced on earth as it is in heaven, a place where resurrection life exists. That is a part of our witness. It's not just telling the story; it's living the story of resurrection life, but we shouldn't be afraid to be personal in telling our stories and experiences of resurrection.

The disciples after Pentecost took the story and experience of new life to the corners of the world. We shouldn't shy away from sharing the good news of how God helped us receive new life in prayer or opened our eyes to a reading Scripture a new way or the way new life was breathed into our career when we stopped focusing on ourselves and more on others or how new life came into a marriage or broken relationship or how we found new life and joy in serving others. Resurrected life happens all around us and within us, we just have to be open to recognizing it and creating it in our world and in our lives.

Pastor Jo Anne Taylor of Minnesota wrote, "God is not asking you to add more things to your To Do list. God is asking you to make a new *To Be* list. Not that you need more items to check off, but that each item on your *To Be* list makes you more like Jesus. Instead of doing more for Christ, we are to be more like Christ. And that is our witness." Maybe the journey that we are on can be our witness. Maybe simply being a follower of our risen Lord, simply being can be our witness.

In 2013 I went to Guatemala for the first time to witness to my faith in Christ. I went to serve and through serving the poor, I went to witness, but truth be told, I was witnessed to. I used this quote last week, but it bears repeating. The great spiritual writer Henri Nouwen wrote, "The beautiful smiles on the faces of the poor of Bolivia and Guatemala, and all over the planet, offer glimpses of the reality of the resurrection. These smiles come from the depth of hearts that know of a love that is real and everlasting. The words 'He has risen' were not shouted from the rooftops or carried around the city on big placards. They were whispered from ear to ear as an intimate message." I experienced and I saw the resurrection in the people of Guatemala, in their hope, kindness, love, joy, and in their smiles. This experience of the resurrection really forced me to think about my life. Am I a witness to the faith I have in the risen Lord? Do people see Jesus in me, risen and live in me? Continuing in Henri Nouwen's thoughts, he wrote, "To be a witness for God is to be a living sign of God's presence in the world. What we live is more important than what we say, because the right way of living always leads to the right way of speaking. When we forgive our neighbors from our hearts, our hearts will speak forgiving words. When we are grateful, we will speak grateful words, and when we are hopeful and joyful, we will speak hopeful and joyful words. May our lives give us the right words and may our words lead us to the right life."

Whatever it is that we do during the day, whether we teach, work in the business world, work in construction, serve food, or enjoy retirement with friends, we have opportunities every day to witness to the resurrection by bringing new hope into someone's life when there's despair, by offering love when someone feels like the outcast, and by bringing new life into situations of darkness. May we know this week that we are called to be witnesses of the resurrection and to live it and speak its truth. May it be our hope that we are able to whisper the hope of the Gospel of love to every person we encounter in word and deed. Do others see the risen Christ in each

of us? Every single day, really every single moment of our lives, Jesus is asking us, "Can I get a witness?"

Let us pray: *Risen Christ, who is looking for us, before we are looking for you. Inspire us, challenge us, and move us to BE witnesses for you this week. In all that we do and say, may we live into your story and may we whisper your hope and love with every person we meet this week. Help us to love those we see, to become what we receive in you, and to know you more, as the One who lives among us every single day and every single moment. May we blossom in your glory, love with your compassion, witness with your hope, and move with the power of your Holy Spirit. Amen.*