



**Series Theme:** Living Your Faith

**Title:** “It’s Tough to Witness”

**Date delivered:** May 26, 2019

**Preacher:** Rev. Joyce Donigian

**Synopsis:** Talking about one’s faith can be difficult. What to say. How to say it. How to be comfortable in sharing how God has worked on one’s life. Reliance on the Holy Spirit makes this witnessing easier. The Holy Spirit can guide a person to say the things that those who listen need to hear. We must be sensitive to our listener’s needs and we must be patient. And we must always be ready to tell others of God’s Good News.

**THE FIRST SCRIPTURE LESSON:** Matthew 28:18-19 (NLT)

**THE SECOND SCRIPTURE LESSON:** 2 Timothy 1:3-14 (NLT)

**MEMORY VERSE:** “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses telling people about me everywhere.” Acts 1:8

**Grace to you and peace from the One who is and who was and who is to come.**

Have you ever been called to be a witness? I have, just once in a court proceeding. It was the first time I had ever been in a courtroom. A suit was brought by the parents of a student at the middle school where I worked. She had been injured during a gym class and so the family was suing the school board, the vice principal, and the gym teacher. I was there to tell what I saw since I was in the gym when the incident happened.

I was a bit nervous about being a witness, in fact, during the lunch break the lawyer took me into the court room and had me sit in the witness chair so I would be calmer when I was called to give my account. All I had to do was to tell what I saw, but I also knew that I needed to say just what I saw, add no opinion, no unnecessary details, nothing extra. As it turned out the parents lost the case, and I was able to go home feeling that I had done my part, being honest in what I had witnessed.

Witnessing in general, especially when it comes to our faith, does carry with it some anxiety. Certainly in court cases, but also in other situations – one can be asked by police or others in authority – what did you see happening, who did you see doing whatever, when did you see this thing happening. It’s hard to be precise and tell exactly what happened as you saw it.

And interestingly, those in authority – lawyers, police, school administrators, and others, do not depend heavily on eyewitnesses. They say that such testimony is flawed – that people tell what they remember, but those memories can, and often are, faulty.

In less stressful environments, we all witness informally. Have you ever given someone your opinion of a restaurant you recently visited? Or a movie you just saw? These may not sound to you like witnessing, but that is exactly what you are doing – giving someone your account of a happening.

An example, last Wednesday Lisa Jorgensen’s daughter and son-in-law brought their infant daughter to the church for a visit. Evelyn Heidi is less than a month old and adorable. Grandmother Lisa held her and it was clear that she was already head over heels in love with this little girl.

What I told you was my witness of the visit. You didn’t need to have the specific details – just how was Lisa holding the baby? Was she asleep or awake? How old is she? Just how did Lisa look that made me feel she loved baby Evelyn? Those details aren’t important. Anyone who knows Lisa knows how important her family is to her and how much she loves her children and grandchildren.

So when it comes to witnessing for our faith, what kind of witness must we make? One that is exactly right in all details or one that communicates the love relationship we have with God? Which approach would be more successful? How do we prepare ourselves to witness our faith? No matter how we look at witnessing, I think all of us, me included, are more timid than bold when it comes to sharing our faith.

In the second scripture lesson, Paul reminds Timothy of how important the Holy Spirit is in his faith. Paul tells Timothy that the Holy Spirit came from God when Paul laid his hands on Timothy to begin his ministry. He is reminding Timothy that God did not expect him to be timid in his witness, but instead to be bold. We continue to value this laying on of hands. We do this when we ordain our deacons and elders and Pastor Doug and I had other pastors lay hands on us at our ordination into ministry. This is a meaningful ritual, but we also know that when anybody accepts salvation through Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit comes and dwells in them.

This points up something that I had not thought about before. The Holy Spirit is not given once and for all time, never changing. Yes, the Holy Spirit is always with us, but this gift is an ongoing gift that grows along with us and our faith. Paul places a great deal of importance on the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, as well he should. The Holy Spirit is that part of God that is with us in a specific way – our helper, the one who is always beside us, our constant companion. This relationship with the Holy Spirit gives us help in sharing the gospel in three important ways.

First, the Holy Spirit gives us love not only for God but also for the ministries God has called each of us to. This gives us flexibility in how we witness, especially when others reject our presentation of the gospel. It’s even hard to know where or how we can find opportunities to witness.

Here’s a story that might help:

The biggest hindrance for a lot of us in sharing Christ is that we don’t see a natural and gracious opportunity to do that. A man found that the best place to do a lot of evangelism was at Einstein’s Bagels, where he goes for coffee.

He met a woman there who told him that, though she was Jewish by birth, she was very interested in Christianity. “I guess you could say I’m a seeker,” she said. He prayed for her regularly, and one day they started talking about the gospel. She was fascinated and curious. He discovered that the friend she was eating with was a strong Christian, and she had heard the gospel several times. She agreed with things that he said but was

noncommittal. He said: “You know someday you’re going to have to make a choice. You can’t be neutral about Christ forever.” To his shock, she suddenly became very agitated and teary, even angry. She grabbed her things and ran out. After playing that tape back in his mind a few times to see if he had been out of line, he decided he had just seen the “offense of the gospel” at work.

Another morning he struck up a conversation with a young man who always wore black pants and a white shirt and carried a backpack full of self-help books, some in a foreign language. One day he said to him, “I see you like to read.” He found the young man was eager to talk. His name, he eventually learned, was Dimitri, and he was a waiter at a nearby restaurant. The second time they talked, he asked if he could visit this man’s church. The very next Sunday, he and his girlfriend were in church, and a guest speaker shared the gospel. Dimitri accepted Christ that morning.

This shows that we need to be both sensitive to the needs of the person we’re talking with and we also need to be patient. Perhaps the first lady would not have been put off if the approach was more gentle and understanding of her situation.

We have the power given us by the Holy Spirit, power to further God’s kingdom, power to know that we are doing what God commands us to do. This kind of power is power to serve, not power to impress or boast. That power isn’t the only gift from the Holy Spirit; the second is the ability to love others with the kind of love Christ showed to all. I have another story to share with you, this time written by a youth pastor.

As a youth pastor, Mike just entered a convenience store with Jeff to pay for the gas he had just put in the church van. It was apparent that the woman behind the counter had been crying. Mike looked at her and said, “Has anybody told you that Jesus really loves you?” Jeff freaked out, took off, and dove into the van.

Mike talked to the woman for the next few minutes. After she asked Christ to come into her heart, her whole face changed.

When I got into the van, Jeff said, “Don’t ever do that again!”

“Don’t do what?” Mike asked.

“Witness to people like that,” he replied. “Did you see how embarrassed that lady got?”

Mike responded, “Jeff, you got more embarrassed than she did. I prayed with her, and she received Christ.”

Mike took Jeff back into the store to meet the woman, now radiant with the love of God — a complete contradiction of what she had been just a few minutes before.

Talk about the power of love and the power to share that love. Those both come from the Holy Spirit. The final gift of the Holy Spirit is sound-minded self-control. This means being able to keep focused on the goal, not getting distracted or brought into unnecessary topics. Lovingly staying on track, always with the well-being of the other person in mind. I have a story that illustrates this as well:

Every day, at exactly the same time, Margaret would go to the bathroom cabinet, open it, and take out a huge bottle of castor oil. Then she would head to the kitchen to get a tablespoon. At the sound of the drawer opening and the silverware rattling, Patches, her Yorkshire terrier, would run and hide — sometimes under the bed, at other times in the bathtub or behind Margaret’s recliner.

Someone had convinced Margaret that Patches would have strong teeth, a beautiful coat, and a long life if she gave him a spoonful of castor oil every day. So, as an act of love every twenty-four hours, she cornered Patches, pinned him down, pried open his mouth, and poured a tablespoon of castor oil down his little doggie throat. Neither Patches nor Margaret enjoyed their daily wrestling match.

Then one day, in the middle of their battle royal, with one sideways kick, Patches sent the dreaded bottle of castor oil flying across the kitchen floor. It was a momentary victory for the canine, as Margaret let him go so she could run to the pantry and grab a towel to clean up the mess.

When Margaret got back, she was utterly shocked. There was Patches licking up the spilled castor oil with a look of satisfaction only a dog can make. Margaret began to laugh uncontrollably. In one moment, it all made sense. Patches liked castor oil. He just hated being pinned down and having it poured down his throat.

These three Holy Spirit gifts don’t come one by one – they are a package deal and we know the package as grace. You may be wondering just how you can witness. Maybe you don’t know where to start. Maybe you feel you can excuse yourself because you don’t like to speak in public or don’t know what you can possibly say that might influence anyone else to live a more godly life. Well folks, there are a whole variety of things you can do. Underline DO, not say, not preach, DO. You have probably heard the adage – Preach the Gospel at all times. If necessary, use words. Let me share with you a final story. This one I witnessed at a community dinner recently. I often sit at the entrance to the fellowship hall to greet people coming to the community dinner. I was sitting so that I was facing the 4<sup>th</sup> Street entrance. I saw one of our members, a lady of retirement age or older ready to come through the door. I also saw a man, not a member, a regular attender of our community dinner also coming to the door. The man was younger and the assumption would have been that the younger man would open the door for the older woman. But the

rest of the story is that the man has several medical problems leading to his having difficulty walking, especially up steps. Our member waited the few seconds it took for the man to reach the door and she opened the door for him.

That probably doesn’t sound like much, but what a wonderful way to be welcomed into a community dinner. That was witness of God’s love and grace to this man. And the woman thought nothing of it. That was just how Christian folks act. That’s what we all are called to do and if we have the knowledge that the Holy Spirit has empowered us to witness and minister in Christ’s name, it’s not so tough. Let us pray.