

Witness Where You Are

Have you ever dreamed of being a missionary? Maybe you read about the exploratory trips our Synod did decades ago, where bold preachers went into new territories - Africa, Japan, the Apache Reservation down in Arizona. You've heard presentations from missionaries working across cultures, trying to get the Word of God to these hearts that desperately need their Savior. You can participate in the Lutheran Women's Missionary Society and support these men and women going around the world. You can attend the Taste of Missions celebration at our Seminary where they send off our new home and world missionaries. But that's all you can ever get - just a taste of missions. It's nice to dream, but it seems too good for me.

The LORD summons you today. The LORD says, "Step into my courts. Listen to what I say. People from both near and far, come and make your testimony. Who is the true God? I, even I, am the LORD, and apart from me there is no savior." Well, absolutely! We know that our God is the one true God, the savior of the world. We have seen and heard that this is true. So what else does God say? "You are my witnesses." So often we think that mission work is only "over there." Today, hear God calling you to witness where you are.

The prophet Isaiah lays out for us a divine counsel. Picture a king in his courts, and he gathers people around him to give a testimony. Say something wise and true, you people gathered here. Who does the LORD call together? First, those who have eyes but are blind, who have ears but are deaf. Just a chapter before this, Isaiah called Israel, God's own people, blind and deaf. They weren't a nation of people who physically couldn't see or hear, but they were spiritually lacking. In fact, they had *physically* seen mighty wonders from God, and they heard the LORD proclaim prophecy after prophecy - and they'd always known their God to keep his Word. What great things they had heard and seen!

But Israel became deaf, blind, and dumb like the nations around them. God's people chose to reject and ignore the truth of God and turn to foreign idols. So, God called these gentile nations into his courts as well. Let the peoples assemble, and see what they have to say. Have any of their gods foretold events like God has? Can they speak about the former things that have happened with any authority? The LORD gave them the opportunity to present their case; bring in witnesses. Let them give a testimony as to what is right and true. If their gods really can prophesy, speak up! Show how your idols have driven human history, how they've controlled the world, how they can help and save you. But these unbelieving nations fell silent. They have no proof.

So the LORD turned again to Israel, his people who know him and believe in him. He said, "*They* have no witnesses to testify that their gods are right and true. *You* are *my* witnesses, my chosen servant. I hand selected you to know and believe and understand that I am he, the one true God." The Israelites had experienced the LORD's goodness for generations. They saw his wonders of deliverance in the past, so they could know firsthand who the LORD is. They could trust in their God because he proved faithful to his words; his predictions always came true. Israel had an understanding, a confident conviction that he is the LORD, and there's no other god. None before him, none after him - only the LORD.

How many ways does Isaiah have to say it? In this dialogue from God, he uses first person pronouns 17 times - and the Hebrew even includes first person verbs to emphasize the LORD's action. "I - I am the LORD. There's no other savior. I have revealed. I have saved. I have proclaimed. I! It's me! Not some stranger among you. You are witnesses that I am God!" From the beginning to its completion, God has been the one driving salvation. He sent prophets to foretell how he would deliver his people. After centuries of waiting, the LORD himself took on flesh and saved the world through our Lord Jesus Christ - he's the Savior! And now, he proclaims. He announces life and salvation again and again, working through his people to tell the good news.

Do you feel like you're a capable witness, up to this task? What does a witness do? Think of someone in a court called to the witness stand. To give a worthwhile testimony, it helps to have confidently seen and heard the facts. Do we have eyes that have seen and ears that have heard about God's goodness? Or are we spiritually blind and deaf, turning our backs on the truth of God? Do we forsake him for greener pastures, "truer" gods? Do we blindly rely on only the truths of science to predict what's coming next, to the point that we reject God's power? Do we look to the success and advancement of humanity to guarantee our future? If people keep improving, that will save the world. What kind of a witness would we be if we were posing such ideas as right? Would anyone listen to us and say, "It is true"?

But through God's Word, we *have* seen and heard, we *have* tasted that the LORD is good. We have the reliable testimony of firsthand eyewitnesses who walked and talked with Jesus. We have generations of Israelites who saw the faithful God fulfilling his promises to deliver and restore. We've heard the accounts of gentiles being brought into God's family as the gospel went out to all nations. These readings aren't words concocted or imagined by men, but it's the Word of God breathed into them by the Holy Spirit. This truth poured into them and passed along to us allows God to say to his people, "You are my witnesses that I am the LORD." We can take the stand and speak what is right and reliable: He is the LORD; there's no other.

Who are these witnesses for the LORD? Who does God call to give a testimony? You are God's witnesses. Reaching out with God's saving Word isn't just the work of so-called church leaders. Pastor and Bob and maybe the outreach elder - they can take care of sharing the truth. You are his witnesses. You might say, "Well, how can I go? I'm 85 years old, and my days of traveling across the country are over." For one, I know one of these 85-year-old ladies who was regularly going overseas maybe only a decade ago. Don't let anyone look down on you for being old. Two, you can witness where you are. Whether you live in a cozy culdesac, in a nursing home, or with your children who are now caring for you, you can give a bold testament to your trust in the LORD. Show them how valuable and real your Savior is.

I've heard several say, "I don't have the words to be a witness." You have THE Word. The LORD has revealed and proclaimed. When there are so many voices fighting against the truth, clamoring to be heard, videos on replay pushing their way to be seen, God repeats himself again and again - "I am the LORD! I am he! There's no one else." As you witness, use the LORD's own testimony about himself. Use the Scriptures that were written so we may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. The Spirit will give you the words to say. You are his witnesses.

Think about all the people in your circle that need this saving truth. We've been talking in Bible Study about one way to discover your mission field called the FRAN network. Make a list of your friends, relatives, acquaintances, and neighbors. Now, if you're like me, many within your bubble are already practicing Christians. But perhaps you weren't raised in a pastor's family to become a pastor yourself.

So, you've crossed paths with unbelievers through schooling and work in the public sector; you're a witness there. You go to the hospital; you're a witness there. You stop by Rob's to pick up groceries; you're a witness there. You're out cutting the grass or walking your dog; you're a witness there. Your son moved away for college and stopped going to church, but he still invites you for holidays; you're a witness there. Your mother dies, and family and friends come together. You make sure there's a Christian funeral with the LORD's love proclaimed through song and word; you're a witness there.

Each of us has our list of lives that we touch. Whether it's in passing or we have an extended relationship with them, God has given us each a mission field. So we can rejoice with those who go overseas to spread God's Word to every corner of the earth; God be praised that his saving truth reaches all nations! But we don't have to dream of faraway places to be a missionary. You are God's witnesses. You have heard and seen, you know and believe and understand that he is God. You testify to the truth. You get up each day to proclaim what the LORD has done for you - he has revealed, he has saved, he has proclaimed. Through you, he continues to proclaim what is right and good. Right here, right now, you are his witnesses that he is the Savior. As you go out, witness where you are. Amen.