

**Easter III (B) RCL
April 26, 2009**

**St. Margaret's Church
Annapolis, Maryland
The Rev. Lori M. Lowe**

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. *Amen.*

A child in Sunday School was working intently on a drawing. The teacher leaned over and asked, "What are you drawing, dear?" The child answered, "A picture of God." "Oh, no one knows what God looks like, Sweetie." The child shot back, "They will when I'm finished!"

Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.
[Like 23: 4]

This is Luke's version of what we call The Great Commission. Perhaps the better known version is in Matthew: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them... and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you." In the longer ending of Mark it's: "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation." John's gospel has Jesus saying to Peter, "Feed my sheep." These different versions remind us that even the evangelists interpreted Jesus' words.

But back to Luke. In Luke, the disciples are charged to share his story, to tell everyone everywhere that repentance and forgiveness are offered to all... and to do this because they have been his witnesses.

The dictionary defines "witness" as attestation of a fact or event; one that gives evidence, who testifies; one who has personal knowledge of something; serving as evidence or proof.

Clearly the disciples to whom Jesus is speaking are witnesses to his ministry and his resurrection. It was they who were to tell the story. And they did! They trekked across the Middle East, through North Africa into India, across Europe, possibly as far as Spain.

And of course, the message has been shared across time, from one generation to the next. And with each generation, the charge to be witnesses was handed down.

Zeal for this task motivated the Crusades (*not* one of Christendom's finest hours); but it did lead to the exploration of the so-called New World. And wherever explorers went seeking fortune and glory, the church went along to proclaim the gospel to those who had not yet heard it.

With hindsight, we can recognize the damage that missionary fervor often caused. But it was intended to save souls... all driven by this Great Commission: GO AND TELL.

And now the task falls to us. I've tried, but I can't see any way around it. I mean, doesn't everyone already pretty much know this story? And to be perfectly honest, some of the people who see it as their mission to keep telling it – well, they can be downright obnoxious! And after all – we're Episcopalians! We don't go around doing that sort of... witnessing!

The trouble is, I don't think there's any way around it: we – all of us -- are now entrusted with this task. We are today's witnesses. It may not be a job for which we volunteered, but I think we've been drafted. It just goes with the salvation package: you know -- God does all this... this whole incarnation thing, goes through crucifixion and resurrection... all in order to bail us out, and we in turn are expected to pass along that good news. Seems reasonable enough.

But *how* to be a witness; that's the issue. How to attest to the fact of Jesus; how to serve as evidence or proof.

It seems to me that there are a couple of basic things we can say about being a witness. First and foremost among them is the simple imperative to have as much personal knowledge (as Webster's put it) as possible before we can attest to anything or be any kind of evidence at all.

That would naturally involve being as well informed and as experienced as possible. That would mean being *on the road* to a deep knowledge and understanding of scripture, a well developed prayer life, and an openness to the power of God to transform our lives.

All of that is to say: we have to nurture our personal knowledge and experience. We have to know something about that to which we are witnesses, and then our lives – and this is where the rubber hits the road – our lives themselves must be the evidence we offer. Because we weren't there to witness the person of Jesus... we weren't there to attest to his resurrection... the only evidence we have to offer is the transformation of our lives; that is, how God has made a difference in the way we live, the way we relate to each other and the creation, even the way we use our money.

So we prepare ourselves with knowledge, and then we offer our lives as evidence.

But wait! Some of us are cringing inside, thinking "no way!" First, some might be thinking, 'I don't have time for all that knowledge stuff, for bible

study and Sunday School, let alone things like EFM. It's all I can do to get myself here for church on Sunday morning.' And furthermore, (some of us might be thinking to ourselves) 'that doesn't even take into account that my life is a mess; that I'm tired and discouraged, that I've got my hands full just getting through the day. No way is my life a witness to anything but survival, and sometimes not even that. All that witness stuff is easy for her to say – it's her job!'

But let me remind you about some – just a few -- of God's favorites:

- Let's start off with Noah – who was a drunk.
- Then there was Moses, who murdered an Egyptian and ran away, and then made the excuse that he stuttered and tried to pass off the job of challenging Pharaoh to his brother.
- How about Jonah, who took off in the other direction when God gave him a message to deliver.
- And let's not even get started on King David! The name "David" even means "beloved," and yet King David made a royal mess of things.
- The disciples were thick-headed, and Peter lied about even knowing Jesus when the going got rough.
- And Paul – well, even after his conversion he was stubborn and pigheaded.

And yet, these were among God's favorites, and were certainly God's witnesses. Who then are we to deny that we are called to this task, this charge, this ministry?

Is it easy to be a witness for the love of God in Christ Jesus? No. Nobody ever said it was. Being prepared doesn't happen overnight. There is little or no instant gratification in this process. It takes commitment, patience, and a steady diet of spiritual nourishment in the form of worship, prayer, and study.

But here's the payoff: no matter the condition of your life, no matter where you are in your journey, no matter what obstacles lie in your path... God *will* transform your life... so that you, too, will be a witness of the love and power of God.

Of course, if you already have all this down pat, this doesn't apply to you. But if not, then we have a choice: we can keep on keeping on the way things are. Or we can ask God to help us do whatever we need to do to be the witness we were born and baptized to be. Which will it be?

Amen.

lml+