



April 15, 2018

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## “Share the Love” *1 John 3:1-7, Luke 24:36b-48*

— Part of an effective witness to the risen Lord is not only a changed life living for Jesus, but also an ability to feel and communicate the great Love that God has shown you in your life.

I have some difficult news to tell you this morning. I don't know if anyone has told you this, but, you are all adopted. It is true because I read it in the Bible. I am also adopted, apparently! I didn't think so, but it is true. Because Jesus died and rose again, God adopts everyone who trusts in Jesus. God doesn't even get a chance to turn us down.

But the other side of that coin, is that even if God did have the opportunity to turn us down, God wouldn't do it. Because God loves us too much. God is happy to accept us. That's the whole reason he sent his only begotten son Jesus to atone for our bad choices! So that we would all be worthy of being adopted. God's love is too big to keep within the Holy Trinity!

In our passage from John's first letter to the church this morning, John reminds us that God lavished Love on us. I think that word is great: lavished. It brings to mind an overflowing abundance. God loves us as perfect parents ought to love us! God's love for us is over the top.

But there is a problem with this reality that we know to be true. That problem is that some people don't know that is waiting for them to come to the adoption! That is why God needs us to tell others about this reality! Jesus is ascended to Heaven until he returns at the end of the age. So until then, by the power of the Holy Spirit, you and I are the hands and feet of Jesus. In Paul's first

letter to the Corinthian church he writes in verse 12:27, “27 All of you together are Christ’s body, and each of you is a part of it.”

This is all part of God’s grand design. God wants us, God’s beloved children to witness to others that God is ready to adopt them into God’s eternal family! I suppose God could do this God’s own self, but God includes human instruments in the mission because it lets his beloved Children have a meaningful and glorious place in eternity. We are included, but we are not totally on our own, thank goodness. God gives us the Holy Spirit, scriptures, and the church to help us pass along the witness.

It is both easy and difficult to witness to the great love God gave us in Jesus Christ. It is easy to **talk** about God’s love, that much is true. Much of the preaching that I have heard in my life has some root in God’s great love for you and I. The difficulty is that we say we believe that all who trust in Jesus are children of God, but we often do not show with our actions that we actually believe what we are saying.

Today’s scripture passages from the Gospel of Luke and John’s first letter to the church both affirm how important our witness to the resurrected Lord Jesus is, and how much our witness must be composed both words and deeds. The Luke passage ends with Jesus speaking the words, “you are witnesses of these things.” That is as much a command as it is a statement. And the 1 John passage ends with John writing: “Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. The one who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.” Jesus explains that one who is a believer in Christ has ethical and moral expectations put on their life because of God’s Love. And we are back to the great love that God has for us. That needs to be the basis of our witness.

Last week, we began looking at John’s first letter to the church and I spoke about the witness to the resurrected Lord Jesus that has been transmitted through scripture and the church down to us. We are charged to pass along the same witness.

Having just come from my grandmother’s funeral, I suggested that the funeral service is a last chance for us right after we die, to testify to the Risen Lord. I suggested that our own witness to Jesus might be made more convincing if we all went through the practice of writing our own funeral speech. I have two goals for

this exercise. **The first goal** is to inspire us at whatever stage of life we are in to be a more believable witness in both word and deed to the risen Lord. **The second goal** is to help us see how God has loved us, and been faithful to us in all aspects of our life.

I suggested and invited you last week to join me and sit down and try to come up with a list of things that you did in your life that might prove to others that you were a believer in Jesus Christ. I thought this might be a good place to start.

So I actually did my homework, and I will share some of my list with you. Not to try to put myself on a pedestal, but to glorify God, and model how this exercise could work for any of us.

One thing I will leave off the list is becoming a preacher, because you don't need to be a preacher to live your life as a witness to Jesus.

Here are some of the items on my list:

- I converted from Judaism to Christianity.
- I have been a generous giver, and after about a decade of struggle, I exceed the minimum Biblical requirements for giving (10%)
- I have sold my house and given up careers to follow God and serve the world.
- I have moved far away from friends and family to pursue God's call on my life.
- I have spent countless volunteer hours with youth and adults teaching and learning about Jesus
- I have spent countless volunteer hours in the community doing mission projects.
- Before I was ordained I served on various committees of the churches I attended.
- I share the good news about Jesus with most people I meet.

These are some that I came up with. So, brothers and sisters, somehow, at my funeral, I would like someone to explain that I made these life choices because of my belief in the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

But that is not all brothers and sisters. I don't want someone to simply say, Aaron did these things because he believed in Jesus. That alone won't do it for me. These choices might prove that I believe in the risen Lord, but In order to have a convincing witness to others I need them to know WHY I believe in the risen Lord. And that is because of the love that God has lavished on me in my life! That love freely given to me is the source of my faith.

I suspect that if you are participating, and you want to have your funeral speech be a convincing witness to Jesus, you might want to include your motivations as well. That's because some people don't care what you believe or how much. But I do think many people will respond to love. Even hardened atheists crave love.

This is where our passage from the letter of 1 John is helpful to us. It gives us some answers to the question, "Why bother to work hard in life to follow the risen Lord?" The short answer is: because God lavished love up us in a way that is beyond our wildest dreams! God sent Jesus Christ to make sure we were made members of God's own family! This transformation begins from the first moment you accept Jesus to the day that Jesus returns. As we read in 1 John, "we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure."

Because of Jesus, God loves us enough to perfect us and we have hope to live forever in Heaven with God the Father, and all the saints as perfected people! All who have this hope purify themselves, just as Jesus is pure.

That is a powerful motivation! It is the Love that motivates the obedience and the life choices that prove we believe in Jesus. If people think that we are trying to earn God's love by our good deeds, our witness to the risen Lord won't be very strong. People might think it is too hard to earn God's love and despair and give up hope.

If people think that the only reason we chose to be pure and not sin is because we are terrified of God squashing us like bugs if we get out of line, I don't think our witness to the risen lord will be strong. People might be turned off by a

God who rules by fear and coercion, or think that we were simple folk who didn't know any better but to be afraid of God

When we present out lives as a witness to the risen Lord, we must explain that our desire to be righteous and to live for Jesus comes from the deep love that God has for us.

Sometimes it can be hard for us to explain the deep love that God has had for us in ways that might make sense to others who don't know it yet. It can be difficult to describe and pinpoint exactly how we have received God's love in our life in a powerful way. To get us thinking, let me give some example of how some people experience the love of God that motivates their belief and behavior.

God's love can be an warm feeling. God may have made you feel significant or important because he chose you to be his special creation. Perhaps you have had a less than idea family situation and your mother and father did not make you feel loved. God's love for you may have turned you around by causing you to feel loved like you always hoped your friends and family would make your feel loved. Perhaps you felt this love and acceptance from your brothers and sisters in Christ.

God's love can also be an overwhelming feeling. Sometimes it is hard to take in the magnitude of the sacrifice that God has made to be with us. God's great and awesome deeds in your life might inspire your deeds. This is also a form of love, although it may seem to be less emotional it isn't. You appreciate what God has done for you! And you are not going to just let that kind of loving action end with you, you are going to pay it forward!

These are just two ways you might experience God's love. However you experience God's love, the things you do for Jesus' sake are motivated by the fact that God first loved you. Trust me on this one. Even if you don't feel it at the moment, if you explore the may ways God has loved you in your life, I believe you will begin to see that God's love is a very real driving force in your life. If not, uncovering all the ways that God has loved you might begin to give you the feeling and motivation to make hard choices for Christ in your life.

When we present out lives as a witness to the risen Lord, we must explain that our desire to be righteous and to live for Jesus comes from the deep love that God has for us. So the second part of creating our own funeral speech that leaves a believable witness is to make another list. This time, the list is going to be a list of

the ways that God has loved you in your life. I invite you to sit down for a few minutes and make this list over the next week. I am going to do it as well

Next week, the Gideon's will be here to testify to you how people's lives are changed by the Love of God they find in the witness left in the bible. But the week after that, I am going to talk about how we can take our two lists, and turn them into a brief funeral speech that provides a believable witness to the resurrected Lord for all who might hear it. At that time, I'm going to read to you my own funeral speech as an example.

By going through these exercises together, I hope that we can increase our witness to Jesus Christ in our life, and also learn ways to pass it on to others. Remember the words of Jesus from our gospel passage today, "You are witnesses of these things." Amen.