



April 29, 2018

5th Sunday of Easter

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“Bearing the Fruit of Love” *John 15:1-8, 1 John 4:7-21*

— Part of having an effective witness to the risen Lord is showing in our lives how we have done things God wants that prove that we believe in Jesus. The second part is explaining how those works are motivated by God’s deep Agape love for us. The Third and final part is showing how these things that we have done have “born fruit” in the world.

Have you ever seen God? I don’t mean seen God in something beautiful like a sunset over the mountains, I mean seen God in person? How about Jesus? Have you ever seen the risen Lord in person? I haven’t either. That’s frustrating isn’t it? It would be a whole lot easier to believe in Jesus if he would appear to us and say: “Hello Aaron, just so you know, I am real.”

For the past couple of weeks, I have been reading through John’s first letter to the church. John’s letter is all about our witness or testimony to Jesus Christ, the risen Lord. And I’ve been doing some life review. I’ve been looking back into my life to see where God has clearly been involved in my life. You know what?

Unlike Moses, God never spoke to me out of a burning bush. Unlike Ezekiel the prophet, God never appeared to me in a vision. Unlike Paul, I have never been visited directly by Jesus. But there are times in my life that God has reassured me that my faith in Jesus is not misplaced. Because God does not only reach out to us in miraculous ways. God uses human instruments reach us. We read this in John 4:12, “No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.” So when we truly love one another, we see God. I have seen God in the love of others.

In a minute I will share some of these times with you. But first, I want to remind everyone that over the past few weeks, I have been preaching from

John's first letter to the church. As we have been going through the letter, I have been inviting you to participate in a project with me. That project is writing your own funeral speech.

One of the big themes in 1 John is our ongoing witness to the resurrected Lord. A funeral is a unique time in our life when we can make a meaningful witness to Jesus. But it helps if we can leave something behind to explain why we believe in Jesus and how that belief shaped our life choices. It may seem creepy to write your own funeral speech, especially if you don't plan on dying anytime soon, but I urge you to look past that creepiness. This exercise can be VERY helpful for both old and young alike.

My **first goal** for this project are that we all might develop a more believable witness in both word and deed to the risen Lord. **My second goal** is that each of us might see how God has loved us and been faithful to us in all aspects of our life.

We began this exercise by making a list of our life choices that prove we believe in Jesus. I shared some of my list with you last week. **The next thing** we did was make a list of ways that we have felt God's love in our life. That was our homework from two weeks ago. And today, we will look at our second list. Then we are going to put these two lists together into a funeral speech that will make sure everyone who hears it, will hear a believable witness to Jesus Christ.

I'll share with you some of the things I wrote on my list. Again, I'll say, even though I'm preaching from a pedestal, I am in no way trying to put myself above anyone else, God is the only person worth putting on a pedestal.

So here are some things I wrote on my list. I have felt God's love in my life when:

- 1) God reached out to me through my roommate Dan, helped me to see past negative experiences I had in my life with Christians.
- 2) God answered my prayers and introduced me to the perfect wife for me.
- 3) God used several people in my home church congregation to invite me to participate in God's ministry to the world.

- 4) God used many different means to provide financially for my family when we dedicated our lives to serving God. Even my mother-in-law who opened her house to us when we had no place to go.
- 5) People accept me despite my many flaws, while at the same time encouraging me to improve.

Those are some of the times or ways in my life that I have felt God's love in a real way. Your own list will be specific to your own life experiences, but I hope you were able to write down a few.

Now we have to work of combining our two lists into a brief funeral speech that gives a believable witness to Jesus Christ in our lives.

Today's reading from John's Gospel, and John's first letter to the church explain to us where this believable witness begins. We read in 1 John 4:15-16 that, "If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us."

Our witness to Jesus always begins with the assertion that we believe that Jesus was the son of God, that he was God in the flesh so to speak. And the rest of our testimony comes out of the love that God lavishes on us because of our belief. It's like we read in John 15:5, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." To create a believable testimony, our decisions can't only be motivated by our own self-interest. Our motivation must come out of the love that God gives us. The love comes to us from God as if we were branches connected to a life giving tree. Our testimony comes from the fruit that we bear from that love. The fruit is the choices we make in our life motivated by God's love for us. John's gospel really brings this point home in 15:8, "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."

So here is one way to make a believable witness to Jesus in a brief funeral speech. It is a three step process. The **first step** is to make a confession that Jesus is the son of God. **The second step** is to use your list of choices you have made in your life that prove you believe in Jesus. Write those next. **Step three** is to take your list of ways and times that you have experienced God's love, and show how your choices were motivated by God's love.

Sounds simple, right? Three steps? How very Presbyterian! A believable witness to Christ does not have to be poetic or eloquent, but it needs to be true. When I say true, I mean you must believe all the things you write to be true. It must be your truth.

I will share what I came up with for my own funeral speech. Here it goes.

To all of you who are still alive: Greetings. I want you to know that I believe that Jesus, Joseph and Mary's boy was the Messiah, and was God's Son. I was born and raised Jewish, and that part of me remains, but I converted from Judaism to Christianity. Despite a negative view of Christians, God reached out to me through my college roommate, Dan. Dan helped me to see past negative experiences I had in my life with Christians. God also answered my prayers and introduced me to the perfect wife for me. Because I received love I did not deserve from others on Jesus's behalf, I believed that Jesus was the Messiah, just as the scriptures say. God led me to a loving home church where God used several people to invite me to participate in God's ministry to the world. Because I received so much love from God in Jesus and through other believers, I wanted to obey all Jesus taught. Before I was ordained I served on various committees of the church. 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. The more I tried to serve God, the more I felt God's love in my life and realized how much God gave me. I became a generous giver, and after about a decade of struggle, I exceed the minimum Biblical requirement of 10% for financial giving. God used many different means to provide financially for my family when we dedicated our lives to serving God. God even caused my mother-in-law to open her house to my family when we had no place to go. Wherever I go, believers in Jesus love me despite my many flaws, while at the same time encouraging me to improve. Therefore, I try to love and share the good news about Jesus with most people I meet. God loves me very much, and I tried to return that love to God the best I was able.

That's it. In about 350 words, I confessed my belief in Jesus, and I put my two lists together, showing how I experienced God's love and how that love motivated me to make life choices to live for God. It is a real witness, it is not contrived. It is not made up. I hope it is believable to those who have ears to hear.

My three step plan is something I hope helps us to communicate the truth of Jesus Christ that we read in 1 John, "We love because he first loved us. 20 Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. 21 And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister."

If you have followed along and made both a list of life choices you made that proves you believe in Jesus and a list of the ways you have felt God's love, I invite you to try to put the two lists together into a brief funeral speech like I just gave. It doesn't have to be perfect. It doesn't even have to be polished. I hope you will find that you have learned a little more about delivering a believable witness to the risen Lord Jesus. I also hope you will see how deeply and how often God has loved you in practical ways.

Once you finish, I would love to read what you wrote. If you want to send me a letter or an email, I would love to read your witness. I will keep it in strict confidence of course, but it is more encouraging than you know to a pastor to see how God is working in the lives of the congregation. Thanks for considering my request.

Heavenly Father, help us to live our lives out of our belief in your Son, Jesus Christ. Fill us with love so that we can show our faith and share love to others in this world. Make your love complete in us, and help us to explain our faith and witness to others. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.