

# A Witness to the Ends of the Earth

Presented By Pastor Scott Walters on 05/24/20  
At Crossroads Untied Methodist Church  
Waunakee, WI

“I don’t consider myself religious, but I am very spiritual,” the speaker proclaimed. When asked to say more just what he meant by “spiritual,” he said, “Well, I’m talking about God, or whatever you consider that higher power to be. Religious rituals and institutions are just not that important to me. I think the important thing is just to be in tune with whoever or whatever you conceive God to be. Whatever works for you.”

This is the modern conception of religion: a vague but deep feeling that arises in you that’s sometimes helpful for you. In other words, religion is something that comes out of you, something you create for yourself. “Whatever works for you.”

Today’s scripture, is from the Acts of the Apostles. Jesus was raised from the dead; now he has reconvened his scattered, fearful, disillusioned disciples.

Jesus had earlier told his disciples to “love one another,” and to “Go! Make disciples!” Now in Acts, “You will be my witnesses, in Jerusalem (that is, close to home), Judea (that is, the whole countryside), Samaria (out in the hinterland beyond Judea), to the very ends of earth. You will be my witnesses, says the risen Christ.

A couple of years ago, I was pumping gas at the new Kwik Trip. Out of the blue comes the screeching car slamming on the brakes, trying to stop before it hit my car and the gas pumps next to it.

He came at a right angle to my front bumper. Fortunately, he just nudged it. Then, as fast as he came, he squealed out of Kwik Trip. A couple of witnesses were there, urged me to contact the police. At the very least, it was a hit-and-run incident, they said.

I, as a “witness,” observe an event, say, an accident. I go to police. “Sir, would you tell me what happened. And then, after I told him what happened, he said, “Now I need you to write down on this incident report form exactly what happened.”

When I was describing the incident, I wanted to tell the officer the utter disregard the driver had for everyone’s safety.

But I knew the officer would tell me, “Sir, let’s just stick to the event itself. Just tell me what happened at the pump. I don’t need to hear about your feelings of the matter. Just what you saw. To the best of your recollection, what did you experience?”

Some of you are old enough to remember the old TV show “Dragnet” and how Officer Joe Friday would say to some chatty witness, “Just the facts, Ma’am.” A witness witnesses to the facts of what has been seen and what has been heard. And the risen Christ, after Easter, calls us witnesses.

Jesus Christ was not and is not a figment of anyone’s imagination. He is not a feeling. He is a distinct personality who makes some distinctive claims, and some specific promises.

“What are you looking for in a church?” someone asks a visitor.

“I’m just trying to find a faith that works for me.”

Better to say, “I’m looking for a church that loves me enough to stand against me, a church that is more than simply an expression of all my preconceptions and prejudices.”

When we worship, and it is time for me to offer the message, I have sensed that your question is not, “Preacher, how are you feeling these days? What’s on your mind?” No!

We open up an ancient book. You say to me, in effect, “Here! Read this! Work from this! We want you to share something more significant than your personal feelings. We want you to share a gospel that

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is bigger, better than that which is merely inside of us.”

Get this straight: The Christian faith is not something we came up with. It’s something that came to us. Happened to us. Of this, we are witnesses.

Today’s scripture from the Acts of the Apostles tells a story that holds us. Jesus Christ is not the sum total of our cherished fantasies about the divine; he is the God who came to us, who came back to us, a God so different from our ideas of God we couldn’t have thought him up ourselves.

Your faith rests on a fact that is more factual than any of your feelings about that fact. Also, you don’t have to be a perfect person, a great speaker; you just have to be a witness -- just share what you have seen and heard.

The great preacher Barbara Brown Taylor puts the same idea in terms of ‘vocation.’ She says, “Vocation is simply what you do, when you know who you are and who you are working for, when you are sent out to proclaim the kingdom and to act it out with no money, no shoes, not even a walking stick. Because when it comes down to being a provider of God’s love, there is really only one provider, who sends us out with nothing at all and with everything we need: healing, forgiveness, restoration, resurrection. Those are the only things we really have to share with the world, which is just as well, since they are the only things the world really needs.”

This is how Christians are made – one ordinary person telling another what’s happened. And Christ calls you to witness. Your testimonial of what you have seen and what you have heard is powerful.

Friends, we are living witnesses to what Jesus promised, “You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

May God bless you this day.