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Grace Evangelical Church
Sunday, July 6, 2008 - Communion Sunday
"Why Witness?"
Acts 1:1-11

Leighton Ford is the brother-in-law of Billy Graham. God has used Leighton Ford as an evangelist through out the world, although at this time in his life, I understand he is doing more one on one mentoring.

He tells the time when he was ministering in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

I was speaking at an open-air crusade in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Billy Graham was to speak the next night and had arrived a day early. He came incognito and sat on the grass at the rear of the crowd. Because he was wearing a hat and dark glasses, no one recognized him.

Directly in front of him sat an elderly gentleman who seemed to be listening intently to my presentation. When I invited people to come forward as an open sign of commitment, Billy decided to do a little personal evangelism. He tapped the man on the shoulder and asked, "Would you like to accept Christ? I'll be glad to walk down with you if you want to." The old man looked him up and down, thought it over for a moment, and then said, "Naw, I think I'll just wait till the big gun comes tomorrow night." Billy and I have had several good chuckles over that incident. Unfortunately, it underlines how, in the minds of many people, evangelism is the task of the "Big Guns," not the "little shots."

There has been an attitude afloat that evangelism, any kind of sharing one's faith, is more for those who are paid to do it.

But Jesus in our text today in Acts 1:8, seems to indicate, although speaking directly to those who were with Him, his disciples and others, that being a witness for Him is for everyone who knows Him. "You shall be MY witnesses," were His words in this verse.

So this is the question today, as we continue on with considering some basics in our growing in and with the Lord, "Why Witness?" "Why be Christ's Witness?" Let's consider some answers to that question.

1. We witness because of who Jesus is (Acts 1:3).

Dr. Luke tells us that Jesus "presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God."

As Luke pens this history of Jesus' activity, continuing on from his Gospel which bears his name, the gospel of Luke, he tells us in this verse that Jesus Christ suffered, which not only means Christ suffered before His crucifixion, but that He also died and was buried. But in addition to that, Dr. Luke tells us that Jesus Christ rose from the dead bodily. Christ presented Himself to His disciples alive for forty days before His ascension into heaven.

Dr. Luke is telling us that there is no doubt, note the words, "convincing proofs – clear proofs" that Christ died on the cross, was buried and that He rose from the grave bodily.

Dr. Luke is saying that I have searched out the evidence regarding the person of Jesus Christ, and there is no doubt that He is the God-man, that Jesus Christ is truly God in the flesh. In the text, evidently Dr. Luke is presenting this evidence to Theophilus, who may have been a Roman official. Dr. Luke also wrote to this individual regarding his gospel.

But Dr. Luke's writing here is for all of us to know that in his research there is no doubt that Jesus Christ is the God-man. Jesus Christ is unique from all other individuals that have lived on planet earth.

Of course in the days of the New Testament, there were the Greeks who denied that Jesus was God. The Jews did not accept Jesus as God or their Messiah. That is why they said He must be crucified because He made Himself out to be the Son of God. There was direct opposition in Jesus' day to Jesus being the God-man.

Today is no different. The cults, New Age thinking, and various religions deny that Jesus Christ is truly the God-man, set apart from all other individuals who have lived on planet earth. Yes, Jesus was a good teacher and a moral man, but God? Not possible.

Regardless, Dr. Luke is telling us that in his searching out the historical evident, there is no doubt that Jesus Christ is truly God in human flesh.

The other gospel writers concur as well as other Scriptures. In fact Jesus' very words in John 10:30, I and my Father are One, tell us that Jesus and His Father are of the same substance, God.

Why Witness? Because of who Jesus is. He is the unique God-man, the Son of God. There is no other person like Jesus Christ.

2. We witness because of what Jesus has done (Acts 1:3)

Dr. Luke tells us that Christ suffered, yes, as we mentioned that means that He suffered in His death as he hung on the cross. There, as Paul tells us in II Corinthians 5:21, that He was made sin for all of us. He became our sin bearer, our substitute, before the holy God. But Jesus was also buried. He died. The wages of sin is death. But Jesus also conquered the grave bodily. Why? To demonstrate that God's judgment of sin was now satisfied, and now He would be justified in declaring individuals righteous who believed in Christ

Dr. Luke just gives us one verse about what Christ did, but in that verse is included the eternal work of Christ for humanity.

Sin's penalty has been paid – by being our substitute for sin's penalty which is death – redemption
 God's justice and wrath have been satisfied – propitiation
 Man's need to be changed from an enemy of God to a friend of God – reconciliation.

Jesus Christ the God-man has come to do for us what we can't do for ourselves. As God, Jesus could represent God, the Father. As man, Jesus could represent us so that He could be our substitute to pay the penalty for our sin against the holy God.

What we have in Acts 1:3 is the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ.

What's the gospel? Paul tells us in I Corinthians 15:3-5:

“That Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures and that He appeared to Cephas and then to the twelve.”

Christ suffered on the cross being our sin bearer, He died, was buried, and rose again the third day to provided forgiveness of sin and eternal life to everyone who believes in Him.

Jesus' forgiveness of sin and eternal life is available to everyone.

3. We witness because of what Jesus tells us (Acts 1:8).

Jesus tells us that "You shall be My witnesses."

(1) What does the word, witness, mean?

It means to give evidence to, to bear testimony to. It has also been used in a judicial sense – to give testimony. It means to share what one has seen and experienced. It is also the word from which we get martyr.

(2) Whose witness are we to be?

Obviously. We are to be Christ's witness. "You shall be MY witnesses." The believer is to be a witness for Jesus Christ.

4. We witness because of what Jesus has done for us.

We are, then, in the meaning of the word, witness, to give by life and word the evidence of who Christ is and what He has done for us. We are to give witness to Christ as the God-man and the Savior who can provide forgiveness of sin and eternal life.

(1) To whom are we to be a witness?

Jesus here assumes that those listening to Him have accepted Him as Savior. They know the Savior personally. Those who know the Savior personally are to witness to those needing the forgiveness and eternal life that Jesus Christ has won for them.

Who needs to be witnessed to? Any who have not accepted Jesus Christ as personal Savior. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).

(2) Where are we to witness for Christ?

Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the remotest part of the earth. Our family, friends, neighbors, neighborhoods, in our state, our nation, and the entire world.

In Matthew 28:19, Jesus tells us to go and make disciples of all the nations.

God so loved the world that He gave His one and unique Son.

We are to be a witness for Christ wherever He puts us by life and by word as He gives us the opportunity.

(3) How are we to witness for Christ?

Is there some kind of a mold into which we fit to be a witness for Christ? Do we all have to share in the same way? Obviously the unbelieving world is made up of a variety of people: young, old, rich, poor, educated, uneducated, urban, rural, with different race, personalities, values, politics, and religious backgrounds. It's going to take more than one style of witnessing to reach such a diverse population! So what is your style?

- **Confrontational?** (Acts 2) Peter in Acts 2 on the Day of Pentecost preached the gospel of Jesus Christ that people should change their minds about who Jesus Christ was and accept Him as personal Savior. They were to repent and be baptized, save yourselves from this corrupt generation.
- **Intellectual?** (Acts 17) Paul debated with the philosophers on Mars Hill to convince them. He started with God as the Creator of all but He doesn't dwell in temples made with men's hands. He has made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth determining their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation that they would seek God . . . and then as he ended his words he told the philosophers that God is now declaring all men to repent and turn to the one who will judge the world who has been raised from the dead.

- **Testimonial?** (John 9) One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see! The man healed of his blindness by the Lord gave a witness of what Christ has done for Him. We can share what Christ has done for us as He gives us opportunity.
- **Relational?** (Mark 5) Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you. The man that Christ healed of demon possession was told by the Lord to go to his family and share what Christ had done for him and how He had mercy on him.
- **Invitational?** (John 4) The Samaritan woman at the well begged the people of the city to come and hear Jesus for themselves. After the Samaritan woman discovered who Jesus was, she went into the city and invited others to come and see Jesus. Many believed in Jesus because of following through on her invite. Having a 5-Day Club in one's home this summer can be an excellent way to be involved in invitational witnessing.
- **Serving?** (Acts 9) Dorcas (also called Tabitha) impacted her city by her good deeds. Acts 9:36 tells us that she was a woman abounding with deeds of kindness and charity which she did continually. Servant evangelism is a great way to witness for it opens up people's lives without trying to convince them of their need first of all. I would like you to pray with me about how Grace can be involved in servant evangelism. It's not a program but looking around our communities to see what needs there might be that we can meet by serving others.

We shouldn't ever think that we are second class Christians because we may not proclaim Christ like Peter or Paul, or a present day Billy Graham or Franklin Graham. Each of us needs to discover one's own method or witnessing, one's own comfort zone in being a witness for Jesus Christ. Then we need to get out of our chair and be a witness for the Glory of God.

(4) Do we witness for Christ in our own strength?

What did Jesus teach in Acts 1:8, "But you shall receive power after the Holy Spirit is come upon you, and you shall be MY witnesses."

There is a stark contrast between Acts 1:6-7 & 1:8. Since Jesus was not raised from the dead, the disciples were interested in when Jesus was going to set up the Old Testament kingdom promised to Israel so that they could be relieved of Roman oppression and enjoy the benefits of ruling in the kingdom with Christ their Savior and King.

Christ did not say that there wouldn't be a future earthly kingdom for Israel, which tells me that the nation of Israel still has a future today, but rather, Jesus told them that the timing of Israel's kingdom to come was not for them to know, but (strong contrast), they would receive power after the Holy Spirit would come on them and they would be Christ's witnesses starting in Jerusalem to the entire world.

In other words, at this time, Christ's program for followers of His would be to be witness for Jesus Christ, which witnessing led to the establishment of the church of Jesus Christ at the Holy Spirit's coming at Pentecost with eventually both Jew and Gentile being included in the church, the body of Jesus Christ, which church is still being built by Jesus Christ, and the family of Grace is part of that world-wide body of Jesus Christ.

But in whose strength would followers of Christ be a witness? The power of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. As we read the book of Acts and the courage of Peter and John, and then the conversion of Saul, and his witness for Christ as Paul, it is obvious that what happened was not of man but of God. These men and others were empowered by the Holy Spirit of God to be a witness for Jesus Christ.

The top reason, I understand, that we don't witness for Christ is fear. Statements like this have been made.

- "I am afraid I might do more harm than good."
- "I don't know what to say."
- "I may not be able to give snappy answers to tricky questions."
- "I may seem bigoted."
- "I may invade someone's privacy."
- "I am afraid I might fail."
- "I am afraid I might be a hypocrite."

Perhaps the most common fear, however, is that of being rejected. A survey was given to those attending training sessions for the Billy Graham crusade in Detroit some time ago. One question asked, "What is your greatest hindrance to witnessing?"

- Nine percent said they were too busy to remember to do it.
- Twenty-eight percent felt the lack of real information to share.
- None said they didn't really care.
- Twelve percent said their own lives were not speaking as they should.

But by far the largest group were the 51 percent whose biggest problem was the fear of how the other person would react! None of us likes to be rejected, ridiculed, or regarded as an oddball.

But God's perfect love for us should cast out fear and in the power of the Holy Spirit we just need to be a witness for Christ as He gives us opportunity. As we obey the Savior, He will bless.

5. Summary remarks.

- **See people like Christ does (Matthew 9:36).**

Seeing the people, Jesus was moved with compassion (moved from His inner being with the need of the people – He saw their need, and did something about it), because they were distressed & dispirited, like sheep without a shepherd.

Distressed – troubled, in a sorry plight.

Dispirited – scattered – not knowing where they are going

What a picture of our day. All we like sheep have gone astray and we have turned each one to his own way, the way of unrighteousness.

- **Let Christ's compassion – His passion become a part of our lives.**
Do we feel a sense of the need of others outside the Savior? Or do we just not think about it, or we have other things to do, which we do, but what about those about us who need the Savior, and may not even be aware of it?
- **Pray for people you know who need to know Christ personally.**
Paul's prayer for Israel is that they might come to know Christ personally. "My heart's desire and my prayer to God for them (for Israel – his brethren in the flesh) is for their salvation." (Romans 10:1).
- **Pray that we would get a greater vision for being a witness for Christ.**
Christ said to beseech Him for laborers, or pray for labors for the harvest. Remember you are the answer to your prayers.
- **Not to feel guilty about not sharing your faith, but ask God for an opportunity each day to be a witness for Him.**
Relax in Christ and be available to be a witness by life and by word, and if God so blesses you with the privilege to say a word in season for Him give Him the glory!

A Plea for Fishing

Now it came to pass that a group existed who called themselves fishermen. And lo, there were many fish in the waters all around. In fact, the whole area was surrounded by streams and lakes filled with fish. And the fish were hungry.

Week after week, month after month, and year after year, these who called themselves fishermen met in meetings and talked about their call to fish, the abundance of fish, and how they might go about fishing. Year after year they carefully defined what fishing means, defended fishing as an occupation, and declared that fishing is always to be a primary task of fishermen.

Continually, they searched for new and better methods of fishing and for new and better definitions of fishing. Further they said, 'the fishing industry exists by fishing as fire exists by burning.' They loved slogans such as "Fishing is the task of every fisherman." They sponsored special meetings called "Fishermen's Campaigns" and "the Month for Fishermen to Fish." They sponsored costly nationwide and world-wide congresses to discuss fishing and to promote fishing and hear about all the ways of fishing such as the new fishing equipment, fish calls, and whether any new bait had been discovered.

These fishermen built large, beautiful buildings called "Fishing Headquarters." The plea was that everyone should be a fisherman and every fisherman should fish. One thing they didn't do, however: They didn't fish.

In addition to meeting regularly, they organized a board to send out fishermen to other places where there were many fish. The board hired staffs and appointed committees and held many meetings to define fishing, to defend fishing, and to decide what new streams should be thought about. But the staff and committee members did not fish.

Large, elaborate, and expensive training centers were built whose original and primary purpose was to teach fishermen how to fish. Over the years courses were offered on the needs of fish, the nature of fish, where to find fish, the psychological reactions of fish, and how to approach and feed fish. Those who taught had doctorates in fishology, but the teachers did not fish. They only taught fishing. Year after year, after tedious training, many were graduated and were given fishing licenses. They were sent to do full-time fishing, some to distant waters which were filled with fish.

Many who felt the call to be fishermen responded. They were commissioned and sent to fish. But like the fishermen back home, they never fished. Like the fishermen back home, they engaged in all kinds of other occupations. They built power plants to pump water for fish and tractors to plow new waterways. They made all kinds of equipment to travel here and there to look at fish hatcheries. Some also said that they wanted to be part of the fishing party, but they felt called to furnish fishing equipment. Others felt their job was to relate to the fish in a good way so the fish would know the difference between good and bad fishermen. Others felt that simply letting the fish know they were nice, land-loving neighbors and how loving and kind they were was enough.

After one stirring meeting on "the Necessity for Fishing," one young fellow left the meeting and went fishing. The next day he reported that he had caught two outstanding fish. He was honored for his excellent catch and scheduled to visit all the big meetings possible to tell how he did it. So he quit his fishing in order to have time to tell about the experience to the other fishermen. He was also placed on the Fishermen's General Board as a person having considerable experience.

Now it's true that many of the fishermen sacrificed and put up with all kinds of difficulties. Some lived near the water and bore the smell of dead fish every day. They received the ridicule of some who made fun of their fishermen's clubs and the fact that they claimed to be fishermen yet never fished. They wondered about those who felt it was of little use to attend the weekly meetings to talk about fishing. After all, were they not following the Master who said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men"

Imagine how hurt some were when one day a person suggested that those who don't catch fish were really not fishermen, no matter how much they claimed to be. Yet it did sound correct. Is a person a fisherman if, year after year, he never catches a fish? Is one following if he isn't fishing?

(Darrell W. Robinson, *People Sharing Jesus*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), pp. 21-23

Let's enjoy being a witness for Jesus Christ, doing some fishing for Him this week, as He gives us the opportunity!

And in that process, thank the Lord that we still have the freedom in this country to be a witness for Christ.