

Who, me—a witness for Jesus Christ?!

Message for Sunday, March 5, 2017
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: 1 Peter 3:15-16

Children's Message:

I like it when I have good news to share with someone. It just feels good. If I say to someone, "I got 100% on my spelling test!" that doesn't mean I'm bragging. It just means that I'm excited, and I want to share my good news with someone else.

If you see someone come running and jumping out of the hospital, laughing and shouting, "It's a girl, and they're both healthy!!" that doesn't mean that person has gone crazy. What do you think that person is talking about? ("*My wife just gave birth!*") Right! And they are so excited, they want to share the good news with someone else.

Do you have any good news you'd like to share with me and the others?

One more thing: I've got some *really* good news! God loves you!

John 3:16, New Living Translation:
God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

Message "Who, me—a witness for Jesus Christ?!"

1) Be a fool for Christ

A fisherman named Larry Shaw was trying out a new outboard motor on a lake in Ohio in the United States a few years ago. There in a cove, he saw a gigantic muskie fish lurking near the surface. Larry steered toward it, and cast his line toward it unsuccessfully several times before the fish disappeared.

A half hour later Shaw returned to the cove where he first spotted the big muskie. It was back! Shaw slowly moved the boat towards the monster. At the same time, the muskie suddenly started swimming toward his boat.

Larry quickly put on leather gloves and plunged his arms into the water, grabbing the fish behind the gills. The fish started thrashing and twisting. Shaw

was having trouble lifting the huge muskie into the boat. Fortunately, a nearby angler came over to help, and they were able to wrestle the monster into Shaw's boat.

The muskie weighed over 53 pounds. If he had used a rod and reel, it would have broken the record for the biggest muskie ever caught in Ohio. When asked about his fish, Shaw said, "I was at the right place at the right time, and I was fool enough to grab it."

That may be a good approach to evangelism, sharing your faith with other people. You are at the right place at the right time, and you are fool enough to share the good news of what Jesus Christ has meant in your life.

Today we're looking at the 3rd part of our mission statement, especially the second half, which I've underlined:

St. Paul's Mission Statement, part 3
We endeavour to seek the Spirit of Christ in our lives daily, and with love encourage others to do likewise.

I want to encourage you to be ready to encourage someone to trust Jesus, to receive the good news of God's love.

2) A witness points to Jesus Christ, not to her/himself

From time to time I have encouraged you to take the risk of sharing your faith with someone else. Maybe you have been fool enough to do it. Sometimes that's just how it feels when telling someone else about Jesus Christ: "What do they think of me?" "I must look like a religious nut."

That's what happens when you put the focus on yourself. But your goal isn't to impress people about yourself. Change the focus, to tell how wonderful Jesus is.

Today I want to talk about the need for us to be ready to be a witness for Jesus Christ. When someone asks you, "Why did you do that?", be ready to answer, "Because my life is modelled on Jesus Christ, and I believe that's what he wants me to do."

When you are going through a difficult time in your life and someone asks you how you manage to keep a joyful spirit in spite of it all, be prepared to tell how Jesus Christ can help even the darkest moments.

3) A witness models honesty and vulnerability

BUT: before I begin to talk about that, I want to mention another possibility.

Imagine someone really does say to you, “How do you manage to keep a joyful spirit in spite of it all?”

Perhaps the truth is that you’re *not* doing so well, but you try to hide it, and pretend that everything is OK. “Jesus loves me, and that’s more important than all that other stuff.” With most people, their B.S. meter is going to go into the red zone.

Much better is to stop playing the game, take off the mask. Let someone know how you really feel. You’ll be loved just as you are. Once you discover that you can be honest and vulnerable with others, and they still accept you, it can be a tremendous relief.

NOW: Back to the main theme: be prepared to tell about how Jesus helps you. When you are have the opportunity to talk with someone about your faith, the apostle Peter reminds of us some common sense things to keep in mind.

4) A witness has a reason to believe

1 Peter 3:15, New International Version:
Be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope you have.

One of the things we were taught in seminary is that if you cannot put your beliefs into plain, simple language, then either you do not understand them, or you don’t really believe them at all.

So be prepared to tell about your faith. But it doesn’t have to be profound; you don’t have to amaze people with your insights.

Karl Barth was regarded as the greatest theologian and Bible scholar of the 20th century. He lived in Switzerland, but was a guest lecturer around the

world. In 1962 he was on a tour of the United States. In the question and answer period after one lecture, someone asked him how he would summarize his theology. Barth smiled and replied, “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.”

5) A witness is gentle and respectful

1 Peter 3:15, New International Version:
But do this with gentleness and respect.

There are no arguments in the world as bitter as arguments over religion. Nothing has split apart families and nations with such violence as disagreements over doctrine.

When talking about spiritual things, the first thing to do is to listen with respect. Suppose you have a friend who believes in some kind of God, but thinks that churches are relics from the dinosaur age. Ask your friend to tell you what she *does* believe. Try to really understand her: How does that faith affect her daily life, say the way she spends her money? How does she cope with trouble and tragedy? What is her purpose in life? Genuinely seek to understand the other person.

Only after you have listened to her story, will she be interested in hearing your story. You must earn the right to be heard.

When you speak, do it with gentleness. The case for Jesus Christ must be presented with love and concern. You will never bully someone into believing in Christ, but you may win them with love.

6) A witness speaks volumes by his/her way of life

1 Peter 3:16, New International Version:
Keep a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

The most compelling case for Christianity is living the Christian life. Now when I say “living the Christian life,” I don’t mean trudging through day after day following a set of rules, mostly “Do not!” rules. I mean having a joy and a peace that shows in your face. I mean having a genuine love

for people that shows in how you treat others. I mean having a confidence in God's promises that shows in how you handle your business affairs.

I think of Frank Pye, a friend we knew in Labrador, who was the dean of the community college, similar to Loyalist College. A bunch of us spent a spring day at the local church camp cleaning it up, getting ready for the summer camping season. Frank volunteered to do the refrigerator.

Some people had broken into the camp after it had closed in the fall, and made themselves at home for a few days. They cooked a few meals over the wood stove, and even put the leftovers in a paper bag in the refrigerator. Why they did that, I'll never know, because the electricity to the camp had been shut off, so the refrigerator was at room temperature. I will leave it to your imagination to see and smell what it was like when we arrived at the end of May, eight months later. In order to clean to the very back, Frank had to put his head right inside the refrigerator, where the stench was the strongest.

He finished just as we broke for lunch. While we talking about the morning's work, Frank said, "You couldn't pay me enough to do that job, but I did it for free." The love of God was visible in his life.

My friends, I encourage you this week to be foolish enough to be a witness for Jesus Christ. Encourage others to seek the Spirit of Christ for themselves. Put away your pride of self. Instead, be proud of whom you serve.

Next Steps:

- Peter says "Be prepared to give an answer." In your own words, how does knowing Jesus make a difference in your life?
- But first, *listen!* "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."
- Pray for an opportunity to share your faith; pray for courage to do it when the time comes.

Story to illustrate that last step:

A lady took a course in first aid. At the end of the course, there was a graduation ceremony. During

the ceremony, each student gave a highlight of what they had learned and how it had already been useful.

So this lady stood up and said, "I want to give a testimony. The other day I was sitting on the front porch of my house, and right in front of me there was an automobile accident. An old man driving his car lost control, went over the curb, and hit an oak tree head-on. He was thrown out into the street. His skull was fractured, he had compound fractures in his limbs, and his life's blood was pumping out onto the asphalt." She said, "It was horrible, but I remembered my first aid. I remembered if I would put my head between my knees I wouldn't faint."

Knowing Jesus, his love, his forgiveness, the strength he gives—this makes all the difference in life. We have good news to give to others. So don't be afraid to do it.