YOU CAN DO IT

5 Things You Can Do To WITNESS CHRIST

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For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. (2 Peter 1:16)

**What does it mean to “witness” or to “be a witness”?** One might witness an accident, witness a marriage, or be a witness for the prosecution or defense. More to the point, one might witness Christ. What does this mean?

**The Apostles Witnessed Jesus**

To call ourselves “witnesses to Jesus” or to say “I witness to Jesus” is to borrow a term at least thirdhand (or fourth-hand, if we count the Lord as the original witness—see John 1:18; 8:14–18; 15:26; 1 John 5:6; Revelation 1:5). From whom are we borrowing this term, and how?

To bear witness to something, of course, you have to first witness the thing. The Greek word usually translated as the noun “witness”—martus, plural martures—originally meant someone who testifies in court, especially referring to what that person has seen or heard. In that sense, it’s used several times in Jesus’ trial, of all the false witnesses brought against Him. Regarding witnesses for Jesus, He tells His apostles just before He ascends into heaven, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgive-
ness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things” (Luke 24:46–48). Here, again, the word for “witnesses” is *martures*. When Judas Iscariot’s vacated seat among the Twelve had to be filled, the qualification was being an eyewitness to Jesus’ ministry, death, and resurrection (Acts 1:21–22). Actually, Peter makes this not only the qualification but also the job description of apostles: being *martures* to His resurrection. The Book of Acts chronicles the apostles’ witness to Christ (Acts 2:32; 3:15; 4:33; 10:41).

So, when I was asked to write a book on “five steps to witness Christ,” I joked that step 1 would be acquiring a time machine and step 2 would be setting it to about AD 30. It would have been a short book but a tall order! We’re not witnesses in that way, as replacements for or additions to the apostles. Nor is that necessary, thanks be to God. Rather, “the word is near you” (Romans 10:8), and through it is our witness to Jesus. The apostles handed down the authoritative witness for us in the apostolic Scriptures, guided by the Holy Spirit, to tell once and for all the facts of who Jesus is and what He did and said (John 14:25–26; 15:26–27; 16:12–15; 21:24).

Our faith—and therefore our witness—latches on, not to our feelings or ideas about God or our experiences, but to the fact that Christ has done these things. It attaches especially to the heart of it, that He died on account of our sins and rose on account of our justification (Romans 4:25), and to the truth that by Word and Sacrament, He applies these
saving facts to us. “Blessed,” Jesus says, “are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29). Blessed are we through what is written for us by these apostolic eyewitnesses and what is preached to us from it, so that we are built on their words (Ephesians 2:19–20). Of their good confession, Jesus says, “On this rock I will build My church” (Matthew 16:18). In the second and third chapters, we will explore further that foundation: their confession and ours.

Once these apostles had followed their Lord on to glory (all but John being killed for their testimony to Jesus), the Early Church began to refer to all those murdered for their confession of the faith, all who added the seal of life to the words they spoke, as martyrs, witnesses (Revelation 12:11; 17:6). Stephen is the first (Acts 22:20) to get the term secondhand from the apostles. If, then, the term witness comes to us, it is thirdhand from them.

Chapter 4 will unfold how we follow also in the footsteps of the firsthand witnesses, witnessing to Jesus with more than words—with also our lives—as living martyrs. Chapter 5 will look at how our witness faces opposition, just as the apostles surely did. No one should take lightly following in the footsteps of the apostles and martyrs! Our witness to Jesus is something to think about seriously; hence this book. Yet the power of God is made perfect in our weakness, and His grace will be sufficient for us, as it was for them (2 Corinthians 12:9).
Jesus Is Not Gone but Is Alive and with Us

For now, I’d like to begin with how in a certain way you are, with the apostles, a direct witness to the living, speaking, acting Jesus—even without a time machine. “He has risen; He is not here” (Mark 16:6) is not the end of His story. The angels said that of His tomb, not of His Church. Of His Church, Christ says, “Where two or three are gathered in My name, there am I among them” (Matthew 18:20), and, “Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

Thus, in addition to passing on the apostles’ witness to who Jesus is and what He has done, we see by faith that He is still speaking and working among us. That’s not simply in a nebulous way, like an imaginary friend, a cozy feeling, or the experience that things seem to be working out better for us with Him than we suspect they would if we were on our own. You hear a lot of God talk like that, but it’s not a full or accurate picture of Jesus, and that is what matters for our witness! “For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up,” our Lord says, “on the last day” (John 6:40).

We have definite promises of ways that Jesus is with us to speak and act. He said first to His apostles and now to pastors, “As the Father has sent Me, even so I am sending you. . . . If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld” (John 20:21, 23); “The one who hears you hears Me” (Luke 10:16);
and even, “Take, eat; this is My body. . . . Drink of it, all of you, for this is My blood” (Matthew 26:26–28).

You are witnesses of these things. Jesus is not done speaking and acting (Acts 1:1–8) but promises still to do so by the Spirit through those He sends. God’s Word spoken by these pastors in His stead and by His command “is just as valid and certain, even in heaven, as if Christ our dear Lord dealt with us Himself” (Small Catechism, Confession). That is truly something to see, or rather hear, and bear witness to!

Therefore, the first step of being a witness to Jesus is being where He has promised to and does speak and act—and being attuned to what He is saying and doing. As Luther says, “We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it” (Small Catechism, Third Commandment). That is our earthly Sabbath rest in Jesus, and we ought not despise it—not only for our sake, but also for the sake of our neighbors, friends, and families. Witnessing to others starts with receiving what Jesus is doing for us in the Divine Service. We, like the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1–42), should want to tell others what He is doing for us so they can come and have Him do it for them. Perhaps, like her townsfolk, the people we tell will then say, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world” (John 4:42). If this is what we want, then we ought to know and be able to explain what it is that He is doing among us!
At the Divine Service, the Lord serves us. That is the motivation of our witness. We are not out to win people to praise God because His ego needs stroking or to augment our dollars with theirs in the offering plate. No, we are witnesses to His powerful working in Word and Sacrament! By these our Lord has ransomed us out of death to real life, and we would share that life. As those reconciled to God, we become reconcilers to God (2 Corinthians 5:14–21), passing on the gift, welcoming the wayward back, and sending abroad the Word that brought us in. We do this because Jesus is the propitiation “not for [our sins] only but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2). We do this because it is the will of our loving God, who has brought us to rejoice and participate in His loving will for “all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4). If not for your own sake, then for the sake of that witness, learn what the Lord is doing for you in the Divine Service, and think about how to explain why you go. Your neighbors (who likely think you go because you have to) might be very surprised!

**Key Points**

- The apostles are *the* witnesses to Jesus in the truest sense. Our witness (that is, our confession) depends entirely on and must be consistent with theirs.

- The Early Church extended the term *witness* or *martyr* to those who died for their confession of the apostolic faith.
• Our attendance and joyful participation in the Divine Service witness to unbelievers and the lapsed that Jesus is speaking and acting there in the Gospel for the forgiveness of sins.

• For the sake of ourselves and those to whom we might witness, we should appreciate the Divine Service as the place where faith receives the gifts of Christ necessary for our witness.

Discussion Questions

1. How does the Bible use the term *witness*? How did the Early Church adapt it? How does this put our “witnessing Christ” in perspective?

2. A good witness distinguishes between fact and opinion or feeling and is careful to tell not merely truths but the whole truth and nothing but the truth. We all have ways of softening truth into opinion, usually to be polite. You might say, “I don’t think that bolt unscrews that direction” instead of “Righty-tighty, lefty-loosey.” What—perhaps unintentional—misunderstanding do we invite when we bear witness to Jesus this way (that is, saying, “As I see it . . .,” “I believe . . .,” or “I think . . .”)? How can we avoid that misunderstanding, while still speaking “with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15)?

3. Evaluating our witness brings us face-to-face with Law and Gospel, critical words of God that shape the
Christian life. What does the Law say? What does the Gospel say? Which one establishes who we are before God, and why is that important?

4. Where and how are Law and Gospel functioning in your week? How could you see to their working more often or more effectively for you and those close to you?

5. How do the lectionary selections of the Church Year prepare you to be a witness? What gets rehearsed every year? What purpose does repetition serve?

6. This chapter expounded on the Amen and the Sanctus. Browsing a hymnal, pick one or two other pieces of the service or a hymn your congregation used last Sunday and mine it for meaning! What are we witnessing by these words? Why are they good to have in our common vocabulary?

7. If you were called as a witness to a car wreck or a bank robbery, you’d be expected to recount in an understandable way the significant things that happened. Suppose a friend asked you Monday morning, “So, what happened at church?” What would be your witness? What would you assume your friend knew or didn’t need to know? What would you definitely make clear?

**Action Items**

1. **Become a fan of the Divine Service:** Read through the order of the Divine Service your congregation is
using. If it is from *Lutheran Service Book*, look up the Bible references for the various parts. Think about what each part means and how it helps to deliver the goods of Jesus, the forgiveness of sins, and God’s promises to you in His Son.

2. Again, thinking on the Divine Service, **consider how you would explain to a guest or family member why we do what we do.** Ask your pastor for insight or resources so you can be prepared. (Maybe he could be persuaded to do a class so everyone could benefit!) Pretend that an unchurched friend or a friend who quit going to church some time ago asked to go with you on a Sunday. How might you prepare them to understand and benefit from the service—and perhaps come back?

3. **Look into how your congregation helps visitors** who attend the Divine Service figure out what is going on and if there is someone knowledgeable to answer their questions if it is unfamiliar. Is your congregation small enough that your pastor can easily do this, or could he use some help from elders or ushers? Do you have information available about the Divine Service and our distinctive Lutheran theology of worship? If not, providing that could improve your congregation’s witness to visitors.

4. **Brush up on the theology of worship with the Book of Hebrews:** Read the following, thinking on what