

We are Witnesses: Through Our Words

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Acts 5:27-32

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As we were walking away from the group,

- Debra looked at me and said

- “So John,

- what seminary are you planning to attend?”

- I sort of laughed and assured Debra

- that I wasn’t going to attend seminary

- I was planning on going to law school - -

- shows you what a college freshman knows about the future-

- but in that brief moment

- Debra’s words

- opened up a possibility for me

- that I had never fully considered

- and even though I had grown up as a pastor’s child, - -

- I had grown up in the church,

- I had never seriously, considered becoming a pastor.

- But Debra saw in me

- gifts for ministry

- and a heart for ministry

- that I didn’t really see in myself

- and she acted, -
 - she spoke up,
 - and through those nine little words,
 - she helped me to discover
 - how God was calling me to use my gifts and talents
 - in ministry in the world.
- What Debra chose to say that day
 - helped me to see God's presence in my life in a new way. - - -
 - And while you may never have said to someone, like Debra did,
 - "What seminary are you planning to attend?"
 - The words you use each and every day
 - can have a tremendous impact on people's lives
 - and can be a powerful witness
 - to the good news
 - that Jesus has risen from the dead!
- As I've said before,
 - what you say matters.
 - The words you chose,
 - the tone you take with people,
 - the things you chose to say and not to say,
 - speak volumes about who you are and what you believe
- I mean,
 - I would hazard to guess

- that none of us have ever met Don Imus in person
 - but if you have watched the news this week
 - you have probably formed an opinion of him
 - based on a few reprehensible words
 - that he chose to use on his radio program
 - and the words others have spoken
 - about him since that day.
- What you say matters,
 - so chose your words carefully.
 - Don't just follow along with the crowds,
 - but be intentional about
 - using words and sharing ideas
 - that reflect - - both what you believe about God
 - and who you are as a child of God.
- I know that choosing to use a language of faith is not always easy to do.
 - In the same way that you have to practice to learn
 - a language like French or Spanish
 - the more that you intentionally practice
 - using a language of faith with the Spirit=s help
 - the easier it is
 - for what you believe to become a part of what you say
 - read books about faith
 - try talking about what you believe with someone you trust

- listen for phrases in the language of others that express what you believe
 - and try to incorporate that language of faith into your life
- again, I realize that using a language of faith is difficult at times
 - and I also realize that sometimes it also takes courage as well
- that's what we see with the apostles
 - in our reading today from Acts, - -
 - the disciples have been arrested
 - and taken before this council of religious leaders
- who say
 - "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,
 - yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching" (*Acts 5: 28, NRSV*)
- In other words
 - we told you to stop talking about this Jesus guy.
 - He's dead and gone.
 - You need to forget about him.
 - You need to let it go
 - and stop stirring up trouble
 - by telling his story
 - and talking about the miracles he did
 - and this supposed resurrection.
- This council was serious
 - that had the power to arrest
 - they had the power to orchestrate Jesus' death on the cross

- they were important,
 - powerful people
 - and there was no reason to think
 - they couldn't have the apostles killed
 - if they didn't stop talking about Jesus, - -
- but listen to what Peter says -
 - the same Peter who out of fear
 - denied Jesus in the courtyard
 - rather than speak up for what he believed
- listen to Peter's words
 - “We must obey God rather than any human authority.
 - The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus,
 - whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree.
 - God exalted him at his right hand as leader and Savior
 - that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness to sins.
 - And we are witnesses to these things,
 - and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.”

(Acts 29-32, NRSV)

- The council says - - Stop talking about Jesus
 - and Peter says
 - We can't obey you
 - when what you says runs counter to what God has done and is doing.
 - We are witnesses to who Jesus was

- and to what Jesus did
 - and with the Spirit's help
 - we must tell his story.
- Peter could have easily chosen the safe words
 - even if he didn't believe them
- and said
 - "OK, we won't talk about him any more,
 - if you'll let us go"
 - but he wouldn't deny what he believed
 - not this time
 - he wouldn't deny Jesus again
 - and so he chose faithful words
 - even at the risk of his life
- and although Peter's words enraged the council
 - another man's words, Gamaliel,
 - convinced the council not to kill the apostles. - -
 - so they were beaten and released
 - with the command not to say anything else about Jesus
- a command,
 - which of course they ignored
 - and went back to talking about him.
- You have to admire the apostles' courage and faithfulness
 - You have to admire Gamaliel's courage and faithfulness.

- It's not easy to speak up for what you believe
 - when the powers of the world are against you.
 - It's not easy to speak up for what you believe
 - when you are a lone voice in a very loud room.
- It's not easy to speak a language of faith
 - when those around you don't always understand what you are saying
 - or why you are saying it,
- but speaking a language of faith is exactly what God calls us to do as followers of Jesus
 - for like Peter and the apostles -
 - We are witnesses to the love and forgiveness that God showed us
 - through Jesus.
 - We are witnesses to the teachings and wisdom
 - that Jesus shared.
 - We are witnesses to the hope and promise
 - of the resurrection
 - and with the Spirit's help
 - we can and do share this story with the world
 - through our words, - -
 - through our language of faithfulness
- Now please understand,
 - you don't have to have a pulpit to preach from
 - or a radio show
 - or a newspaper column

- for your words to impact people
 - and proclaim Jesus to the world.
- Whether you realize it or not,
 - the words you use each and every day
 - with the people around you
 - your family, your friends
 - your co-workers and even strangers
 - proclaim something about who you are
 - and what you believe
 - so you have the opportunity to proclaim the good news of Jesus
 - to literally thousands and thousands of people over the course of your lifetime.
 - **You are** witnesses to the power of God's presence in your life.
 - **You are** witnesses to the good news of the risen Lord.

- **You are** witnesses to the hope of eternal life with God.
- and the words you use - -
 - whether they are bold
 - like the disciples in front of the council
 - or probing
 - like Debra=s question to me
 - or simple
 - like the words you might share over a meal
- your words
 - reflect God=s presence in your life
 - and witness to the good news
 - that Jesus has risen
 - that all might know the forgiveness of sin
 - and the promise of eternal life with God.