

2024 05 12 – *Living a Testimony of Love*

Scripture: 1 John 5:9-13

John 17:6-11a, 15-19 (*The Inclusive Bible*)

After reading the scriptures for this week, the word that stood for me was testimony. Today's reading from The First Letter of John uses that word a lot. So I had to ask myself, "What is testimony? What does it mean?" Those of us who love TV shows like "Law and Order" would probably say, "Testimony is something that a witness would give in a courtroom after taking an oath to tell the truth." In the church, testimony usually refers to a public profession of faith. In either case, testimony is about believing and speaking our truth.

Both of today's readings are really about testimony. In the reading from the Gospel of John, Jesus is praying for his disciples. It's the night of his arrest, the day before his crucifixion and Jesus knows he will soon be gone. So he prays saying:

I entrusted to them the message you entrusted to me,

and they received it.

They know that I really came from you;

they believe it was you who sent me.

and it's for them that I pray—

not for the world.

Jesus believes that his disciples now know that he is God's messenger in the world and that they are ready to go and spread the good news. Jesus goes on to say, "As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world."

Jesus' disciples are now ready to spread the good news of God's merciful love, the amazing news of God's reign of peace and justice. The disciples will do this by giving their testimony, their truth as it was revealed to them through the life, the death and the resurrection of Jesus.

We, as modern day disciples of Jesus, are also called to give our own testimony. We are lucky because, even though Jesus lived 2000 years ago, we have the Gospels to tell us about who he was, what he said and how he lived. We have the written testimony of the early Christians in Paul's letters and the Acts of the Apostles. We have the interpretation of modern scholars, the wisdom of the elders in our church and, of course, our own personal experience of the Spirit to guide us in our lives and to shape our own testimony.

In some denominations verbal testimony is a regular part of worship. People get up in front of their congregations and share their faith. They share their own personal experiences of the Divine. In fact, when I went searching on the Internet for a quote to use for today's moment for meditation, most of the quotes that I read came from people in more evangelical churches. The one that I chose was actually from Thomas Monson, an elder in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, also known as the Mormon Church. Some of you may remember reading this quote. It was on the screen just before today's service started. It went like this:

“You can share your testimony in many ways,
by the words you speak, by the example you set,
by the manner in which you live your life.”

I believe that the strongest testimony is not said verbally or even written down; but is rather demonstrated in the way we live our lives. I want to share with you an excerpt from a story that I read online this week. It is a story from the most recent edition of the Broadview magazine. The story was written by Allyson McOuat and it is about her mother. I would encourage you to read the entire article. Here is just a part of what she wrote:

Mom didn't dictate to us or lecture. She was a teacher, so she taught us lessons, but you had to pay attention to pick up on them because they often came by example. Love without fences, help without question. Trust in the inherent goodness of the people around you, and they will be good to you in return. The world can be changed through billions of small acts of support from one person to another and compassion first. And of course, perhaps most importantly, feed your community to make it stronger. Mondays were Meals on Wheels days. Wednesdays she cooked for shut-ins and for grief-stricken families at funerals, and she made free lunch for the members of Alcoholics (not so) Anonymous who had lunch in the church hall weekly. On Saturdays, she managed the community food bank. <https://broadview.org/reflections-on-love-loss-and-motherhood/>

When I read Allyson's description of her mother's testimony I realized that it sounded very familiar. I can name many in this congregation who have given similar testimony through their lives. Our church family is filled with people who give their testimony by example. I just have to look back on the last month to come up with numerous examples and I know this list is not exhaustive:

- The many hours put into the garage sale and boutique here at First United and their willingness to share those items at no cost when needed.
- Church members delivering Meals on Wheels during the month of April
- All the monetary donations and food being prepared for the Summer Meal Program.
- Our Pastoral Care Group visiting members of our congregation in hospital, care homes and seniors residences
- The Refugee Sponsorship Group patiently preparing for the imminent arrival of their next refugee family.
- Our Earthcare Partners group leading worship, planning a garden tour, and getting ready to plant and giveaway vegetables again this year
- Our Affirming Ministry Group's involvement in The Red Dress Day service and in the planning and support of last weekend's events
- The ongoing dedication of our choir and staff who share their gift of music each week

- All the hours of planning, baking and planting that went into yesterday's Plant, Muffin and Bake Sale
- The dedication of those who lead book studies, workshops and Sunday School
- The Building & Property Committee's ongoing maintenance of our church building
- And the often unsung heroes, both staff and volunteers, who provide the administrative backbone of this faith community.

Each of you is living your own testimony and I know that it comes from a place of love and compassion. Yes, verbal testimony can be extremely moving and maybe we do need to offer it a little more often in our worship. But, with Jesus as our example we know that how we live our lives, how we treat those around us, can be an even stronger testimony of our love and our faith. May we all strive to live our own testimony of love.

May it be so. Amen.