

A while back, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod came out with a mission emphasis. The Church exists for witness, mercy, and life together. In Greek it has a nice ring to it: <L>martyria, diakonia, koinonia</L>, they all end in an “I-A.” The church exists to witness to the truth of the Gospel: both to those who already know Christ, and to those who do not yet know Christ. Witness, <L> martyria</L>.

The Church is called to care for those in need, mercy <L>diakonia</L>. The Church is called to gather together, breaking bread as we have fellowship events, but breaking bread in the holiest sense, gathering together under one altar as we partake of Christ’s very body and blood under bread and wine, life together <L> koinonia</L>.

As we examine the epistle lesson for today, 1 John 5:9–15, this “witness” emphasis is all over the text. Look at the text. It’s all over it! You don’t see it? Well, that’s because instead of the word witness, the translators translate it as testimony. But it’s still the same word, <L> martyria</L>.

John writes in verse 9: **“If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne concerning his Son.”** John helps us understand what it truly means give a testimony. It starts with what God has done in history, and it ends in what God is doing in me and you. **BECAUSE THE FATHER HAS GIVEN US HIS TESTIMONY IN HIS SON, WE TESTIFY TO THE LIFE WE HAVE IN CHRIST BY THE SPIRIT.**

First, **I. The Father has given us his testimony in his Son.** Again, we read in verse 9, **“If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater...”** We need to understand that as we give testimony to Christianity, the truth or falsehood of the claims of Christianity does not lie in our ability to present the story of salvation. It’s God’s testimony, not mankind’s.

When I was in college at a state university, I got involved in a Christian student organization that had a strong emphasis on evangelism. God bless them, in spite of their theological errors, we can be thankful for their zeal in reaching many lost students on campuses throughout the world.

I remember going on a retreat with this organization, and they gave a workshop on how to give a good testimony. You see, this organization had a strong emphasis on Christians sharing their personal story of conversion as a way to open the door to evangelism. In fact, often at their weekly meetings, a student would share his or her testimony with the whole gathering of students.

That’s all well and good, and I believe that God can use our stories to relate to those whom Holy Spirit places in our lives. But the workshop leader made the point that since it’s your story, the person to whom you were witnessing couldn’t question whether it was genuine.

Really? People lie all the time! Am I supposed to trust you more if you were once a drug addict and an alcoholic? Who’s to say you totally kicked the habit?

Despite their good intentions, organizations like these rely too heavily on the testimony of men, which John said is good, but the testimony of God is better.

What is that testimony of God? If we circle back to last week’s reading, we see that Jesus came by the Spirit, the water, and the blood (v 8). This refers to Jesus’ birth, life, suffering, death, and resurrection. This refers to the Holy Spirit who constantly shines the light on Jesus and the truth of his word. This refers to the waters of baptism which wash away our sins, and the bread and wine of communion which feeds us as we await the heavenly banquet for those who believe the testimony of God.

All of these are objective truths set forth by the Father himself. We could change these as easily as we could make the sun stop shining. This is God’s witness, not yours. This is God’s testimony, not the testimony of men.

When it comes to sharing our faith, that’s somewhat of a misnomer. It’s not simply *our* faith. It’s just the facts, ma’am. We simply tell the story of what Jesus Christ has done for sinners like you and me: living the perfect life that we could not, taking on all our sins to the cross, and leaving those sins buried and forgiven as he burst from the tomb. It’s God’s testimony, not ours, so we kid ourselves if we think we can do any better than what God has given us in his Word.

And this II. This testimony gives us life. And John continues, “**And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life**” (vv 11–12).

Diets, an exercise regiment, a twelve step program, all of these testimonies of men claim to deliver life, and many of them can provide true help and assistance. However, all of these pale in comparison to the testimony of God.

This testimony of God is no idle thing. Our modern world would make us believe the difference between Mohammed and Jesus is not unlike the difference between Pepsi or Coke. However, the difference between Mohammed and Jesus—or any other religion for that matter—is the difference between death and life.

After all, “**Jesus said to [Thomas], “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”**” Jesus Himself is life. Not only is this eternal life in the life of the world to come, but this eternal life begins today.

Life in Christ means you have true peace, true hope, and true love even here and now. Life in Christ means you have heaven, even in the midst of a medical, financial, or natural disaster. Life in Christ means you have forgiveness for all your sins, and freedom from your past.

When we talk about witness, mercy, and life together, the first person who is the recipient of that testimony, that <L> martyria</L>, that witness, is you yourself. The Gospel reassures you that you have the Son, and because you have

the Son, you have life. That eternal life in Christ means that nothing, no nothing, can shake you from God's strong hands.

And III. We testify to this new life in Christ by the Spirit. Circling back to 1 John 5:10, we have a curious phrase, "**Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself.**" What does it mean to have this testimony in yourself?

What it means is that as you get a hold of God's testimony that is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, it starts to get a hold of you. The Word preached in a Sunday sermon, read in personal devotions, and taught in Bible class changes you for the better.

When I was in high school, I was always impressed with my pastor's ability to know the Bible by the chapter. He casually said something like, "As you know, Jesus says in Matthew 11 that his yoke is easy and his burden is light." I used to think that pastors must know the entire Bible by heart!

With a few years of ministry under my belt, I realize it isn't magic. You don't need to be a pastor. As you read, mark, and inwardly digest God's Word, that testimony becomes part of you. As the Holy Spirit brings to remembrance those words you hear and read in the Bible, you can gladly and willingly testify to your friends, neighbors, and relatives.

On this Mother's Day, we testify to the faith of Timothy, a pastor in the early church. "**I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well.... Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God,**" For many of us, the first person who witnessed to us was our mothers who took us to church and taught us about Jesus. In the same vein, we are thankful for the mothers here today who have taught their children the testimony about our Lord.

"Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself." Dear Christian friend, you believe Jesus. And because you believe Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit, you never go alone. Jesus is joining you as you go forth day by day to be your constant companion on your way.

Witness, mercy, and life together, <L>martyria, diakonia, koinonia</L>. Never be afraid to testify to the God who created you, redeemed you, and calls you by name because it's never your testimony but His. This can happen as you go door to door with other Christians from this congregation. This can happen as you do visitor follow-up. This can happen as you engage friends and family in conversation.

Know that it's not your testimony but God's testimony that he testifies regarding his Son. You can't do better than what God has already done in Christ Jesus.