

“You are my witnesses.” Acts 10:34-43

Peter opened his mouth and said: “Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

Would you like to take a little test today? To test us as the congregation, to see whether we are doing what we are supposed to? It may be challenging. What if the results are not so good?

In fact, if our results are not so good then these are ... rather good news. How come, some may wonder. How can that be a good thing? See, if the results are not so good, that means we have found something that is missing and we can improve.

Imagine that lately you have been feeling so and so health wise and you go to your doctor, and he does the testing and tells you that you have quite a low level of ... some element that is vital for your health.

What do you do next? You take in this missing element and you get better. You can see, it is a good thing, if we can find something that is missing and then hopefully get the level of this missing element up and get better.

So, are you ready for our little test? Yes? No? Not sure? We will do it anyway. How will we do it? We'll examine what we as a congregation have been doing and what our today's reading from Acts instructs us on what we should be doing.

Which activities take up the most of our time as the congregation, what consumes our energy the most? I am sure if everything is accounted for that would be a rather long list. I think this is true in every congregation. There seems to be armies of some invisible people who just get things done. So many things just happen.

And even if we sometimes don't notice everything that is done, and forget to say 'thanks', I am sure that each one of you will have your reward from our gracious God who sees everything that we do, and sees with what motivation we do it.

I am sure that in many, many ways our test results would be good and even excellent. But now, ask yourselves, how high in this list of our activities is witnessing, sharing the Gospel?

How much time do we spend preparing ourselves with the Word of God, trying to find the best ways to witness to people we know, or in conversations with other brothers and sisters in Christ – how can we do our witnessing better?

How much of our time we as a congregation spend praying for opportunities to tell someone about Jesus? How much time do we spend engaging with people to establish relationships so that we could witness them about Jesus?

Our answers will determine our diagnoses. This test may help us to see why recently we have been feeling unwell. And even if this is not pleasant to admit that something may have been missing, it is good to identify 'the missing element'.

It means that God's grace is still with us, that He Himself is reminding us what a great privilege we have – to take part in building His eternal Kingdom, to be His instruments. It means that we can start focusing on how to improve our situation.

But some may object: "Yes, yes, that witnessing... We don't have that much knowledge, we are not all theologians, we don't know how to do this, we can't do this. No one would listen to us anyway."

We may have different scary pictures that come to mind when we hear about witnessing. Some may picture it as knocking at your neighbours' doors. Sure, that is one of options, and it is a scary one, and probably not the best one. Some may picture it as hopeless attempts to talk with your unbelieving and angry relatives ... and it never ends well. That's a scary picture, too.

Let's look at today's reading from Acts, at how the Holy Spirit instructs us, to see what we can learn about witnessing from that event. Let's learn at least **three good tips**. Now, Peter was invited to the house of Cornelius.

Cornelius, a Roman officer, his household and his friends trusted that the apostle Peter may have something important to say. You see, here comes **the first good tip** for us. We can witness only to those who trust us and are ready to listen to us. This is why building relationships with non-Christians is so important.

And only when someone sees that we genuinely care for them, they will trust you and, when God given opportunity comes, they will likely listen to you.

Relationships, trust and only then there could be an opportunity to witness.

Yes, but to talk about Jesus and all that stuff from the Bible, it can be very hard. Sure, it can. Let's see what Peter did. Did he use special theological language? Did he use sophisticated arguments? No, this is what he said.

"You have heard what happened. God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.

The Jews put Him to death by hanging Him on a tree, but God raised Him on the third day and made Him to appear to us. And He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that He is the one appointed by God to be judge of the

living and the dead. Now, everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name. And we are simply God's witnesses."

That's it. What did Peter do? He simply retold what he had witnessed. He wasn't doing anything overly complicated. He was simply testifying about what had happened. About events. **This is our second tip.** Events. Peter even began by saying that you already have heard what happened.

It's true, everyone has heard something... He just said: "I'll tell you more, for I have witnessed it with my own eyes". This is what we are sent to do. Simply to retell what our God has done.

Remember, **the first tip was about trust, the second tip is about - events.** What Peter shared and what we as the Church are sent to share are accounts of events. Accounts of real-world events, witnessed by hundreds and thousands.

We have received them from the first eye-witnesses themselves. From those folk who accompanied Jesus while He was among us. Who walked and ate with Him. We have their testimonies, and we are simply sent to share them.

Just like this... "Have you heard about Jesus? What have you heard? This is quite intriguing and quite challenging. Strange things happened. That Jesus did and said many things that are not easy to fathom.

They don't fit with what we are used to, sure. But... they are so well attested, by hundreds and thousands of eye-witnesses. Jesus had authority over creation, over health and sickness, over life and death, and He was foretelling His own death and resurrection. Even the closest of Jesus' disciples didn't believe it.

Until... It happened. Until the risen Jesus appeared to His disciples and many others, more than five hundred people. Whatever unbelievable it seemed to them, they couldn't reject what they could see, hear and touch. Most of them were still alive when the documents of the New Testament were written.

Then the risen Jesus sent His disciples to tell everyone what they have seen. Why? Because it matters for every individual. For me, for you, for everyone. He sent His disciples to warn everyone that one day He is coming back to judge the entire world. Not according to our standards, but according to God's standards.

To judge the thoughts and desires of our hearts. Who could stand? No one... But, the heart of Jesus' message is forgiveness. Undeserved, unconditional forgiveness. This is His offer – He takes our place on the last day, your place.

He receives what we deserve, and now to everyone who is willing to accept this gift, He offers His forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life with Him forever, in New Heavens and New Earth. And there is more...

And you know what, He cares for every person. He cares for you. What He did, He did also for you. He wants you to receive what He has prepared for you. How do I know? That was Him, who called me and sent me to you. This is His message to you. Turn to Him and receive all the blessings that He has prepared for you!"

See, it is a very simple message. Unbelievable message, but nevertheless – true. God knows you, cares for you, has died for you, and desires to have you with Him in His eternal Kingdom. And... you are His witnesses.

At this point a sceptic within us can say: “Sure, you will care for people, and will tell them about Jesus, and they will become Christians. I am not buying it.” There is where **the third tip** comes in, we need to remember it. What is it?

The power of the Holy Spirit. I agree, we could earn someone’s trust and tell them whatever we want, and that wouldn’t make anyone a Christian. But what can we learn from this story with Peter? Verse 44 tells: “While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word.”

Peter did exactly what we were sent to do. And while he was telling about Jesus, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. Just picture this, whichever way you can! The Holy Spirit falls on people when we tell them about Jesus.

This is the third tip. **Trust, events and the power of the Holy Spirit.** As we read it today, Isaiah prophesied that God will put His Holy Spirit on His Servant. Matthew described how God put His Spirit on Jesus.

Do you know where this Spirit is now? Jesus left His disciples, the Church, to continue His mission. The same Spirit is given to the Church. Meaning, each of you have received the same Spirit. He fell on you as well, when you heard about Jesus.

This is how you became a Christian. This is how Jesus called you. This is how you were made a child of God and an heir of God’s Kingdom. This is why you are here today. By the grace of God and by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit continually falls on you every time when you hear about Jesus. He does it right now. And when you testify about what Jesus has done, the same Holy Spirit falls on your listeners. Have this picture in your mind!

We all have received so much from our dear Lord Jesus Christ. As we rejoice in God’s abundant gifts, we also desire to express our gratitude to Him. And we already do it serving others in so many ways.

But what a wonderful way to give thanks to Jesus by telling others what Jesus has done for them, so that the Holy Spirit can have a chance to fall on them. We all have different gifts; we all don’t have to do it. This is not a chore, it’s a privilege.

I am sure many of you already know, what a joy it is to tell about Jesus, and what a joy it is to see that the Holy Spirit transforms someone from an enemy of God, to His beloved child. I pray today that we all could experience this joy abundantly. Again, and again, and again. For we are Jesus’ witnesses.

And the peace of God, which surpasses our understanding, keeps your minds and hearts in Jesus Christ.

Amen.