Witness ALL SAINTS DAY and COMMUNION November 1, 2026

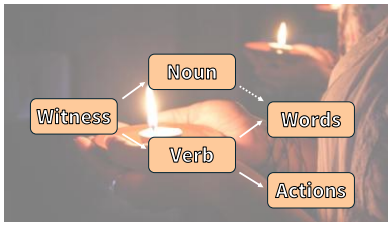
1st Thessalonians 2:9-13

9 Don't you remember, dear brothers and sisters, how hard we worked among you? Night and day we toiled to earn a living so that we would not be a burden to any of you as we preached God's Good News to you. 10 You yourselves are our witnesses — and so is God — that we were devout and honest and faultless toward all of you believers. 11 And you know that we treated each of you as a father treats his own children. 12 We pleaded with you, encouraged you, and urged you to live your lives in a way that God would consider worthy. For he called you to share in his Kingdom and glory. 13 Therefore, we never stop thanking God that when you received his message from us, you didn't think of our words as mere human ideas. You accepted what we said as the very word of God — which, of course, it is. And this word continues to work in you who believe.

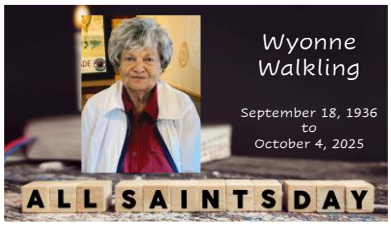


First, we are loved by God. Knowing we are loved and hearing the call of God upon our lives, we sense that we are chosen. When we make the decision to step into our chosenness, we witness to our faith and its transformative power in our lives. As Paul speaks of witnessing in our passage today, he isn't talking about standing up front, delivering a sermon or message. Yes, that can be part of witnessing, but that is not what Paul is talking about today. Paul is talking about a more holistic witness - the words we speak and the life of service to God and to one another. Last Sunday, I spoke of life lived together, of our lives intertwined with one another's.

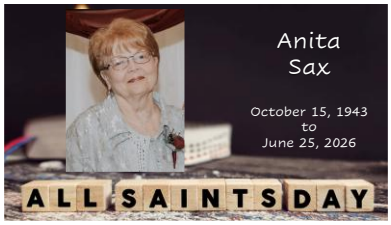
During the Passing of the Peace time, I asked you to share your thoughts on the word "witness." We talked about this word on Monday at Lectionary Study and here is what we came up with:



Witness can be a noun. It can be a role that we play. We see a crime happen, for example, and we are called as a witness in a court case. We can be a witness at a wedding ceremony. As a noun we usually use our words, in spoken or written form, to share or validate what we observed, what we can testify to. Witness can also be a verb. We witness to our faith, for example, by telling the stories of the Bible or by telling our own faith story. Our witness can also be revealed in the actions that we take – feeding the hungry, visiting the sick, and so on.



Today, earlier in worship, we recognized the saints that have gone on to glory. I would like to invite Prairey and Julie to come forward for just a moment to share about the saints that they lifted up for today's remembrance… Thank you for sharing.





This day of remembering reminds us that we are all a part of the great cloud of witness. We are bound together by Christ, across all times and places, because God's word and grace remain present and active always everywhere. This religious day was one of John Wesley's favorite Christian days. I believe that was because All Saints' Day lifts up the community of faith, past and present, and it connects us all together in faith.

As we remembered the saints today and as we remember in our hearts those who have gone on before this past year, we honor those who helped shape us into who we are and those who sustained and supported the church universal. Even though they are no longer physically present, we worship in the space that many occupied, bearing witness to their ongoing influence on our lives and church.

In today's passage, Paul calls us to witness in many ways. He invites us to exercise both parts of witnessing: noticing and proclaiming *and* paying attention and sharing the story. As we prepare to turn to today's scripture, let us pray…

> *Gracious God, you led your people out of slavery, and they crossed the Red Sea. You led them into your Promised Land, and they crossed the Jordan River. Help us to cross over all the barriers that keep us from witnessing to our faith, that prevent us from proclaiming your love and establishing your justice in the world. Open our hearts to receive your grace so that we grow in our faith. As the scriptures are read and your good news proclaimed, bless us that we may hear with joy what you are saying to us today. And now, O God, I ask that you would bless the words of my mouth and that the meditation of all of our hearts would be pleasing in your sight. You are our rock and our redeemer, our Christ and our king. Amen.*

We who are yet alive continue to bear witness to the faith. It is both what we do and who we are. In the general sense, for Paul there are two aspects to being a witness. First, there is a willingness to see. There must be a willingness or a commitment to see because it is easy to avert our eyes or to not see the world as it is. It is easy to look away quickly from the suffering of our neighbors or an injustice negatively affecting the marginalized. It is also easy to not see the glory and power of God at work when witnessing to the faith is happening in surprising places or through surprising or unexpected people.

Even though it can be easy to avert or ignore or dismiss, we are called to look into the eyes of the hurting, neglected, and broken. We are called to see those who might be different from us, those who require more work to truly see. Instead of assuming or presuming that we know already, we are charged with seeing and then investigating, listening and learning so that we can understand what we are truly seeing. That's hard.

It challenges us to hear other's stories and to feel what they have experienced. It can be heartbreaking. When we take the time to do what Jesus did – to be present to the other – then we are living out the good news, bearing witness to the world as it currently is *and* holding onto hope and a vision of what the world could be, a vision of the world as God intends it to be.

For Paul, the second aspect of bearing witness is telling what we have seen and experienced. Earlier we heard stories of saints who have influenced and shaped lives. At times we also share our own stories of faith. These too are means to bring hope and encouragement to others. In this week's reading from Psalm 107, in verses 1 and 2 we read, *"Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good! His faithful love endures forever. Has the Lord redeemed you? Then speak out!"* We have all experienced the goodness of God. We have all known God's faithful love. We have all been redeemed by the Lord our God, again and again and again. We all have stories that we can speak out, helping others to know that God can redeem them and their lives too.



In our 1st Thessalonians 2 passage, Paul does just this. He begins by sharing his story. This is a continuation of what we have been reading about in chapter 1 two weeks ago and in the first part of chapter 2 last Sunday. In verse 9 Paul reminds them, saying, *"Don't you remember, dear brothers and sisters, how hard we worked among you? Night and day we toiled to earn a living so that we would not be a burden to any of you as we preached God's Good News to you."* Paul came to town and found work in his vocation as a tent maker. Yes, the apostle Paul was bi-vocational. He worked – no, he *"toiled day and night"* – working a side job so that he could support himself, so that he would not be a burden to these new believers. Paul sought to contribute to this new church, not to take from it. This simple act was a profound witness.

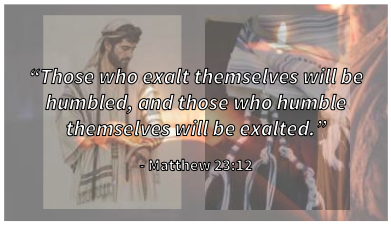
Turning for a moment to our gospel reading for this week, to Matthew 23:1-12, we begin with Jesus offering an example of how *NOT* to witness to the faith. Jesus begins by reminding his audience that they should listen to the teaching of the religious leaders and the Pharisees – they are *"the official interpreters of the law of Moses."* But then he issues a stern warning: obey what they teach but *DO NOT* follow their example. The religious leaders do not practice what they preach. And they place *"unbearable religious demands"* on the people, without lifting even a small finger to help them. But oh, how they want to be seen and recognized.



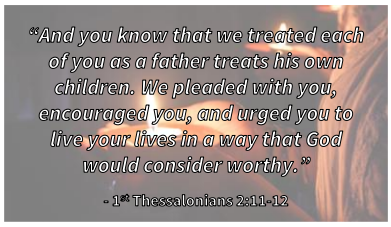
Jesus notes the extra-large phylacteries that they wear – wooden boxes strapped to the forehead and/or forearm containing verses of scripture. He notes the extra-long tassels that they wear on their robes or prayer shawls – symbolizing their extraordinary faith. The original intent of the tassels on the four corners of the garment was to remind the Israelites of God's commandments to them. Each of the tassels contained eight threads and five knots, making a total that corresponded to the number of commands contained in the Torah. By making their tassels longer, the Pharisees were elevating themselves above everyone else. They so wanted to *appear* devout. Actually *being* devout, well that was another story.

This concept is something that we are familiar with in our world. Most noticeable are the mega-church pastors that fall from grace. A scandal or shifting agenda is bent towards gaining more followers, more popularity, more wealth – until it brings down the powerful. We see this in the world too. Those titles and the power that comes with them can become intoxicating – to the point where lines are crossed and authority is abused. Those values that used to matter, those relationships that built the church or company, well, they just *appear* to be important. These values and relationships actually become *secondary* to the growing focus on self and on one's desires and need to be in control.

Our gospel lesson closed with a reminder to us all. It is not just to the religious leaders and Pharisees who like to sit at the place of honor and to be recognized in the marketplaces. When Jesus warns, *"Those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted,"* he is talking to all of us. When our concern becomes exalting ourselves, then we have begun to walk in the ways of the world and not in the ways of God. When we are no longer humble, others matter very little to us and our decisions.

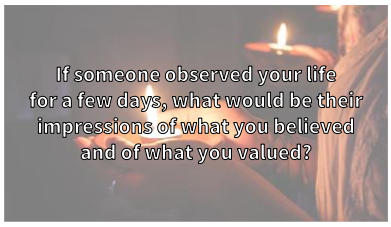


As a way to contrast elevating self over others, in our Epistle reading, Paul asks the Thessalonians to remember their shared ministry. Just as they lived life together, so too did they share together in ministry. Paul reminds them that he and his co-workers were *"devout and honest and faultless"* as they ministered to and with the members of this new and growing church. Paul reminds them of the close family-like relationships and of the care and encouragement they gave. In verses 11 and 12 Paul puts it this way: *"And you know that we treated each of you as a father treats his own children. We pleaded with you, encouraged you, and urged you to live your lives in a way that God would consider worthy."* With these words, Paul is connecting back to last week's words of caring for them as a mother caring for her children but adding a different dimension in this week's passage.



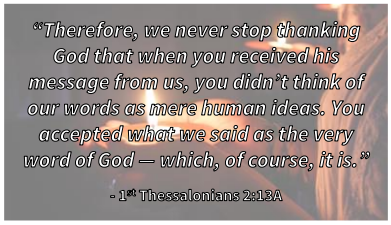
As a father in that time and culture, the role was different than the one played by the mother. It was the father who led, who shaped, who encouraged, who pleaded with and urged the children to live a life of faith. Both parents modeled what it looked like to live a life of faith, but it was the father who held the authority and power in the family at that time. Today, in our modern world, both the mother and the father play an equal role in teaching their children to live a life worthy of Jesus Christ. We also strive to do this as a community of faith.

We seek to encourage and support and model and shape those new to the faith, those who we baptize into the faith, those in our children's and youth programs, and those new to our church. We do these things so that they too can come to understand what it means to live a life worthy of our call in Jesus Christ.



With this seeking and striving in mind, I revisit a frequent thought from these past few weeks by asking this question: If someone observed your life for a few days, what would be their impressions of what you believed and of what you valued? Would an observer say that you were living a life that God would consider worthy of the call of Christ? Would an observer notice that your faith was the thing that you clearly valued more than anything else?

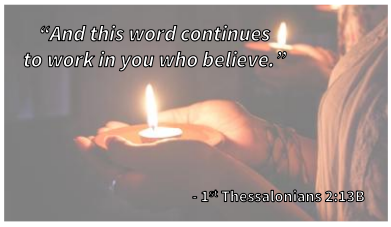
Turning to verse 13 in 1st Thessalonians 2, Paul makes an interesting shift. In the first part of verse 13, Paul writes, *"Therefore, we never stop thanking God that when you received his message from us, you didn't think of our words as mere human ideas. You accepted what we said as the very word of God — which, of course, it is."* The words that Paul and his fellow ministers of the gospel spoke were not simply sermons or teachings or illustrations. The words were not just *"human ideas"* but through God's power, they became *"the very word of God."* As the mere words that Paul and others spoke were empowered by God's Holy Spirit, these words gained the power to transform and change lives.



This same thing can happen to us. Whether we are reading our Bibles at home or participating in a small group or worshipping together on a Sunday morning, words read or spoken can suddenly take on new life or hit home in a new and profound way. When the Spirit stirs, we gain new insights and those words gain the power to change our lives.

Just as we have experienced on our journeys of faith, the Thessalonians came to know and understand that God was at work in the words that Paul and others spoke. This power and presence of God motivated and empowered these new believers to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in their community and beyond. Because of this witness, the gospel did not just change their lives but the lives of all they engaged, encountered, and walked with.

My friends, my brothers and sisters in Christ, do you understand that the witness you give and the words of faith that you speak to others carry this same power? When you give witness to your faith and to what God is doing in your life, you provide opportunity for the Holy Spirit to enter the conversation, to make your words or your story come alive in the heart of the one you are witnessing to. When we are faithful to the call to witness to our faith, then we are living into our faith, and we are partnering with God. When we do so, the last part of verse 13 becomes true in our lives: *"And this word continues to work in you who believe."* The active, living, life-changing word of God continues to work in us as we witness to our faith, as we tell others the story of what Jesus has done and is doing in our lives.



We are loved and chosen by God. Our faith begins here. As we live out our faith, we will be tested. It is tested because our faith is counter-cultural. The way of Jesus is not the way of the world. As we lean into the power and presence of God's Holy Spirit, we grow and our faith is refined and strengthened in the testing. This process empowers us to witness to our faith, sharing the good news of Jesus Christ and our own stories of faith with others – stories that bring light into the darkness just as a small lamp, held in the hand, brings light to the world. As followers of Jesus Christ, may we witness always, bringing Christ to the world. May it be so for you and for me. Alleluia and amen.



GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

1) *Grow.* This week, take some time to develop your "two-minute elevator speech" that tells your faith story. What God moments would you want to share with others?
2) *Pray.* Where do you sense God calling you to shine your light into the darkness? It could be loneliness, poverty, homelessness, brokenness… Pray for guidance.
3) *Study.* Read 1st Thessalonians 3. How does this chapter reveal Paul's love for the believers in Thessalonica? What else does it reveal about their faithful witness?