

## The Spirit Testifies Through You

John 15:26-27 • 2024-05-19 • Pentecost Sunday



There is an investment service company which takes an interesting approach to getting its message out. You might have seen one of their commercials which they have aired during the super bowl for many years. The basic approach to their commercial is that they have a baby as their spokesperson. The babies they use are old enough to sit up and grab a computer mouse, but obviously not old enough to speak their first words. Nonetheless they carry on a conversation about financial options. The message is clear enough for comical purposes: "Hey, maybe I could do some online trading and grow my financial portfolio. The baby said so! If he can figure it out, I'm sure I can too!" Yet we know that there is a multi-million-dollar company that put thought, design, and production into the short clip. Behind the voice of the baby is their high-paid script writer and an adult voice who is a professional speaker. If we were to just take the baby's advice on his own, we'd probably steer clear of a company that uses a babbling baby to sell its financial service.

Of course, our God is infinitely wiser than any financial service public relations director. And his message is beyond comparison with anything this world offers. How does he choose to make himself known? This Pentecost we will consider how and why God uses the spokespersons he does. He uses you as his witness. Listen to God's plan for testifying about Jesus and his gospel: *"When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning."*

In his wisdom God has employed many ways of getting his message out to the world. He has used things from a burning bush and gentle whisper to an awesome display of angles filling the night sky. He himself appeared in blinding light to a terrified traveler at noon. But most often those are only temporary methods. He used the burning bush to send out the man Moses, who stuttered in reluctance. He gave his word in a gentle whisper to his prophet Elijah who trembled in fear of his enemies. The angels spoke to the lowly shepherds so they would spread the news. And the risen Lord himself appeared to the apostle Paul because he had chosen him to be his missionary.

Was it any different with the twelve disciples? In one respect they did have more than all the rest who came before them. They had the Lord himself veiled in lowly human flesh. For three years Jesus walked with them and taught them. And they came to know and believe that Jesus was not just a man, but the Lord, the God of Israel in the flesh. But in the end, it wasn't going to be all that very different for the disciples. Jesus wasn't going to stay with them. He was going to suffer, die, and rise. Then after forty days he would ascend back to heaven. He would disappear from their sight right before their eyes. That's why as he was preparing to leave them, he told them flat out, *"You must testify about me."*

Perhaps these twelve were better men than all the rest. Perhaps God chose the cream of the crop of all humanity to carry on his message. We might be tempted to think that about them at first. But as we read John's gospel and the accounts of the other evangelist we would have to say otherwise. These men were not public speakers. They were fishermen, they included an outcast tax collector, a political zealot, and they all were generally labeled as unlearned men. And their resolve and bravery weren't particularly outstanding. When it came to the hard times they turned aside. They often lost sight of who they had as their teacher. They sank when they should have stood high in faith. Had their three-year time spent with Jesus cured them of their limitations and failings? As we continue past this Maundy Thursday night recorded in John 15, we see further failure. From among this same group of men we find those who fall asleep at the most important of times, we find one betrays Jesus for riches, we find others all run away in fear, and one denies he even knows Jesus. Testify about him? Some witnesses! If these men are to be the spokesmen for the message of Jesus, we'd probably all steer clear of a God who uses babbling fools and selfish cowards to share his message.

But the risen Jesus told them, *"You will be my witnesses."* And he speaks not just to those twelve, but to all his disciples. Yes, the twelve would serve as special eye-witness apostles directly sent by Jesus. But all believers bear the title witness and priest of God's kingdom in Christ.

How do you feel about being a witness to Jesus? What qualifications could you and I list for being his spokesperson? *"I don't consider myself wise, persuasive, or good with words."* That's what the apostle Paul would say as well as many before him and many after him, including me. What about you?

And you have to look at what we are up against as those who testify about Jesus! If we were to read the surrounding verses, we'd be reminded what it means to be a witness for Jesus. It means you will have the opposition of the world and spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. To be a witness of Jesus is to speak up when every natural inclination of our reason will say, *"That's not going to be easy."* As his witnesses we speak of him each week right here. In the friendly surroundings of fellow believers, we give witness to his Word. But how do we measure up? In the friendliest of settings do we sometimes soften our speaking and singing his Word? Who of us here likes to stand out in public? I don't. The regularly filled back rows speak for many of us here. Who likes to stand out? Now what happens when we step outside this sanctuary? Do our prayers and hymns get louder or softer? Does our confession of faith get more pronounced? Even within the home we might be tempted to think, *"I can't really speak divine truths to my children! I'm not wise enough."*

It wasn't that the twelve apostles were better men than all the others before them. Nor was it that they were better men than any who would come after them. This much is consistent and clear: God uses various people to get his Word out to the world. And all the sins, shortcomings, limitations, faults of the people he uses each serve to emphasize the need for his Spirit in carrying out his task.

Moses was reluctant, Elijah was fearful, and Paul was even once an enemy of Christ. But by his power and by his Spirit these men all became spokesman for God! Now Jesus doesn't say to these fishermen and the rest, this Galilean band that they "could be" his witnesses. He doesn't say that "they have the potential to be his witnesses." They will testify about him. And they won't testify about him unwillingly or in weakness and fear. They wouldn't testify because they had enough schooling or enough personal charisma. Notice the single qualification that Jesus lists as he gives them this special calling as his apostles "You have been with me from the beginning." What was their qualification list? It was really quite simple. 1) Jesus called them to testify about him 2) they had been with Jesus.

But they are not left alone in the task. This is the awesome part about it. First Jesus says that the Spirit will come. He has promised this many times. From the preaching of John, the Baptist up until the night before Jesus died the disciples were reminded that God would carry out his promise of old to pour out his Spirit on his people. The Spirit has always been at work and has always been what God used to inspire the prophets and to bring people to faith in him. But now he was promising a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit with his gifts. The title for the Holy Spirit here is "Counselor" which can also be translated as "Helper." He equips and comes to the aid of those he calls to faith. The fears and the shortcomings of the disciples would be met with the Spirit's comforting and the Spirit's empowerment. The Spirit is described as coming from the Father and the Son. He is one with the Father and Son. He was there active at Creation. And he is always there as one of the three persons of the Triune God. Jesus describes the work of the Spirit, "*He will testify about me.*" The Spirit brings truth to the world as he brings people to faith in Jesus.

Jesus' promise was fulfilled. God sent the Spirit with his gifts. On the day of Pentecost these and many others were gathered in Jerusalem for the festival that marked a celebration for the birth of the Old Testament church at Sinai. A new celebration of a new birth was about to commence. The Holy Spirit's work was carried out as he gave gifts to his church that Pentecost Day. The uneducated Galileans were gifted with the ability to speak in the languages of the many who had traveled to Jerusalem for the festival of Pentecost. They spoke as witnesses to what Jesus had done. They boldly proclaimed Jesus as the fulfillment of what the Spirit had prophesied long ago. They pointed to Jesus as the Son of God who died for the sins of the world. They pointed to Jesus who had risen and appeared to them. They pointed to Jesus who had ascended to glory in heaven and will come again to judge the world. The Spirit worked through their testimony. By sharing the gospel and by baptizing the crowds, 3000 were added to the church that day. You see the work of the Spirit was to equip the disciples so they could testify about Jesus, and the work of the Spirit is to change hearts through Word and Sacrament.

God in his grace has worked through the gospel in your lives. He may not have called you to be an apostle, but he has called you to be his own and share in being his witness. He has removed all your sins and given you the gift of eternal life. He called you to faith. And he hasn't left you without his Spirit. You are redeemed and you are his witness to the world. After all, you all meet the criteria: you have been with his Word. You have the Spirit. The Spirit now testifies through you!

Some of you might begin to think, "He testifies through me? No, he doesn't. I'm rather quiet, I keep to myself. I don't go door to door trying to share Jesus." But your fears, your weaknesses, your limitations don't change the fact that you too are a witness. Jesus died for you too. Jesus lives for you too. Jesus gives you the Holy Spirit too. You are here today for starters. Your very presence and participation in worship testifies to the Spirit's work and the truth you share. Parents who instruct their children, bring them to church are witnesses. Children who sing of him give public testimony. And when you pray before meals you witness your family and friends. When you give offerings, the Spirit has moved you to respond to the gospel with fruits of thanksgiving to spread the gospel to others. When you bring your child to youth discipleship classes you testify to the truth and the importance of Jesus. When you work with your child at home on Bible memory work you testify with the Spirit through the Word. When you share an invitation to a service or event at worship you testify as a witness of Jesus. When you take that conversation about life, death, or anything in between, and throw Jesus into the conversation, you are a witness. When you take your child to the waters of baptism, the Spirit works through water and the Word because you are a witness to Jesus. When you stay for Bible study at church or open your Bible at home, you open the Word of life so that it can flow out of your life as you live as his witness.

God, of course, is no comparison with a financial institution. His wisdom and power are above all. He doesn't need an advertising campaign to grow. Rather he freely shares his gifts to all. He offers us riches beyond what we could ever comprehend. And he does it all for us. Yet what he uses to get his message out shows his infinite wisdom alongside his gracious love for you and me. We are his spokespersons. Not to sell an investment option, but to share the riches of Christ. And behind the weak, foolish ramblings of our mouths, is the powerful testimony about Jesus and the working of his Spirit.