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Scripture: John 5: 31-47

Sermon Title: The Testimony of Jesus

John 5:31-47

New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

31 “If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true. 32 There is another who testifies on my behalf, and I know that his testimony to me is true. 33 You sent messengers to John, and he testified to the truth. 34 Not that I accept such human testimony, but I say these things so that you may be saved. 35 He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. 36 But I have a testimony greater than John’s. The works that the Father has given me to complete, the very works that I am doing, testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me. 37 And the Father who sent me has himself testified on my behalf. You have never heard his voice or seen his form, 38 and you do not have his word abiding in you, because you do not believe him whom he has sent.

39 “You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life, and it is they that testify on my behalf. 40 Yet you refuse to come to me to have life. 41 I do not accept glory from humans. 42 But I know that you do not have the love of God in[a] you. 43 I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not accept me; if another comes in his own name, you will accept him. 44 How can you believe when you accept glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the one who alone is God?[b] 45 Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; your accuser is Moses, on whom you have set your hope. 46 If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. 47 But if you do not believe what he wrote, how will you believe what I say?” (This is the Word of the Lord)

Prayer...

Introduction:

In our Scripture this morning, we are continuing to explore Jesus' own words about himself. He is making the case again for his divinity. He is sharing that there is a testimony about himself that can be trusted. Jesus reflects on John the Baptist's testimony about him and that for a while people enjoyed the light and burning lamp that was John the Baptist's life and message. Jesus ultimately suggests that the testimony that is most important is from the Father himself and from the work that Jesus has done. Jesus says, "the very works I am doing testify that the Father has sent me." I imagine Jesus is referring to his miracles and acts of compassion as the works that show he is truly to be trusted as God's son.

When I think of the testimony of Jesus, I remember times when I have been in churches or in other circles among Christians and we take turns sharing how Jesus is shaping our lives. I recently was watching a fellow pastor named Nadia Bolz Weber talk about faith and she shared that faith is a team sport. In other words, our faith is strengthened by having a community of Christians who can help us grow in faith through sharing testimonies about Jesus.

My favorite description of evangelism is the process of sharing the story of our relationship with Jesus with others. It does not have to be fancy and not everyone has a radical story of salvation. Many of us have simple stories of growing up in the faith and somehow naturally accepting Jesus as our Savior, Lord, and friend.

My story is one of those simple ones. I grew up with Christian parents and grandparents. I started going to church before I could walk. My first memory of Sunday School was making a Bible out of soap. Let me explain...Somehow in this Sunday school class we took probably ivory soap and glue felt or something around it and made it into a cute little Bible. I thought that was

pretty cool. Eventually my mom gave me her own small black leather Bible and later I got a Picture Bible that I really enjoyed. Another memory of my Sunday School was when I was six years old and our Sunday School teacher was teaching on God feeding the Israelites with manna in the wilderness. To help her make the point of God's provision, she had us close our eyes. Then after about one minute, she had us open our eyes and on the table was a bunch of white wonder bread in little squares. She told us we could eat it. That wonder bread tasted so good and I never forgot the story of the Israelites and God's provision of manna.

Well after elementary school, I joined the church and got baptized at thirteen. From there I participated in youth group and young life followed by growing my faith through Christian camps and Christian college. Eventually, I became a pastor. My story is unique I guess because I landed in professional ministry and most Christians don't necessarily choose that route, but in many ways it is a very simple story of faith. Others of you have more dramatic stories of encountering Christ, where your path might have felt quite rough due to personal trauma or some other struggle. Maybe, you did not have the opportunity to explore faith until you were older. Maybe a significant experience of suffering opened you to needing God. Those also are deeply meaningful testimonies. Whether our testimony is dramatic or fairly simple and traditional, we all have the same outcome. We all are blessed to know Jesus.

Do you ever wonder why you consider yourself a follower of Jesus? I mean we might assume we had little choice if we were raised in Christian religion, but really knowing Jesus requires more than intellectual consent. Knowing Jesus as some point relates to an experience of God where we somehow know that God is real and Jesus is his Son. We somehow like Saint Peter can come to the point where Jesus asks "who am I?" and we respond "you are the Son of God the Messiah." At this point in my faith if someone asks me why I believe Jesus is real, part of me want to say, "I am not sure but I just know". Since I was a child and first learned about Jesus, something inside of me has just known that Jesus is real. I think it must be the work of the Holy Spirit. And like Jesus

speaks about in our passage, the works about Jesus that I read in Scripture did point to Jesus as the Son of God. I learned as a kid to trust those stories in the Bible and with faith in Scripture, I also opened myself to believe in God.

I actually think faith in God is normally a more natural perspective for children to embrace. Something about the innocence of children in my perspective often makes them more open to God than adults. We as a church are responsible to help both learn from our kids and by helping them grow in faith. Sometimes we can teach our kids even with Wonder Bread- although I don't know if they still make that bread.

Do you notice in Jesus' message about himself that he challenges his listeners that they should believe in him because of Moses' testimony about him. Jesus understands that the prophets spoke about the coming of the Messiah and Jesus knew his coming was the fulfillment of prophesy. Jesus warns the religious leaders that they may read Scripture but not necessarily understand the truth about him. In other parts of Scripture Jesus is depicted as similar to Moses. Jesus in many ways is like another Moses come to bring salvation to Israel and other nations and yet many do not trust his testimony.

Dale Bruner in his commentary on John's Gospel reminds us that sometimes we miss the purpose of our Bible Studies. The purpose of studying Scripture is ultimately to help us hear the Gospel of Jesus and to follow him more closely.

When I went to Whitworth College, I led a Bible study for the Men's dorm called Mac Hall. I was the resident chaplain for that dorm my senior year. Thankfully, I just heard that Whitworth has made it through the difficulty of the fires and now students, staff, and faculty are able to return to campus. When I was leading a Bible study for one of the first times, I decided to have us focus on the Gospel of John. People generally enjoyed the Bible study. It went okay, but I noticed the temptation for me and probably all of us to not engage the Bible with more appreciation and yet the Bible was offering the good news that we desperately needed to hear. For me looking back it is good to remember that John's Gospel has really been a companion for me most of my life and this very Gospel is partly how Jesus has revealed himself to me.

Now you may say, Pastor Chris it is good to hear your testimony, but actually my faith is pretty dry right now. What does Jesus have to say to me? I think Jesus would say thanks for showing up today. Thanks for hearing my testimony revealed in John's Gospel. Jesus would say, I love you and remember faith is a team sport. He might want to remind us that we will go through times when our faith feels stretched, when we like the religious leaders in his own time, might lose sight of the truth of God's love. When we do feel lost and confused, Jesus gently want us to seek his face and then to share our sorrows, anger, and confusion. When we humble ourselves in this way and engage Jesus with sincere hearts, in my experience Christ usually has way to make himself known to us.

So if you are feeling like you need some testimonies of Jesus' goodness and love, we will take some time to highlight those as a church community in just a few minutes during our praise and prayer time. Remember just showing up today is a sign of faith and God loves you and treasures your presence here in this community. I hope our lunch today will be another time for us to connect together and find encouragement as we share our stories as well.

And friends let us remember people who are not here today who might struggle to have faith. Maybe there is someone who comes to your mind, a family member, friend, co-worker, or someone else who you know struggles to believe in Jesus. Maybe they struggle because the church has wounded them or because other worldviews that mock Christianity have influenced them. Let us pray for those folks we know who feel lost and alone without community or faith. Maybe the Holy Spirit will nudge us to reach out to them in a loving way. Maybe we can find a way to testify about Jesus that is natural to our own story. Let us pray...