



“In the Name of Jesus: Testimony”

8 April 2018; based on Acts 4:32-35 and 1 John 1:1-2:2
Sermons at Central Park United Methodist Church
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There is great turmoil in the world today. There are things going on that you should know and care about; action is required from you in order to set things right. In our democracy, your voice matters. You have as much (or as little) power as you have the time and the will and the daring to assert. You are constitutionally entitled to voice your opinion, and you ought to do so, for that is your right. Your power as a citizen is guaranteed by the laws governing our nation. You are free to speak, and that is a wondrous and sacred right. It must never be taken for granted; it must never be curtailed. All over the world, in nation after nation, peoples' voices are silenced by oppressive and corrupt regimes that stifle free speech and inflict heavy penalties on anyone who dares to suggest that life could be different- life can be better.

In those countries, the name of “Jesus” still strikes fear in the hearts of those who seek absolute power, because they rely on

fear to control the masses, and “perfect love casts out fear.” (1 John 4:18) Jesus is that Perfect Love. **Those who truly follow him are less likely to fear the terror of the night or the arrow that flies by day, for under his wings do we find refuge.** (Psalm 91:5) He who came to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners (Isaiah 61:1) has also inspired millions to speak up against oppression and to fight against injustice- to find their purpose and their voice to lift their brothers and sisters out of whatever bondage might enslave them. There is great power in using one’s voice!

This past Wednesday marked the 50th anniversary of the assassination of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., gunned down on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis Tennessee on April 4, 1968. I have a vivid memory of my five-year-old self sitting on the sidewalk in front of our home while a neighbor boy with a piece of chalk in his hand tried to diagram the moments before and after the shooting. I was too young to comprehend such things, of course, but I did recognize that something big and important had happened in the world. A voice had been silenced. A light had been extinguished. And for a fleeting moment it appeared as though fear and hatred and violence had won the day.

But then, the others came. And they spoke. And they testified to the truth. And the movement for civil rights and equality- a movement that was greater than its greatest leaders- continued on; and continues even unto today. Personal testimony is a powerful tool! Luke writes in Acts chapter 4 that *“With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus,*

and great grace was upon them all.” (Acts 4:33) And thus did the Christian Church begin to take shape, the Jesus movement flourishing as its mighty message of salvation through a Resurrected Savior brought hope to impoverished people throughout the ancient world. People starving for spiritual truth encountered the Living Christ in the testimony of apostles and missionaries who carried out Jesus’ final commandment: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20)

We are gathered here today because of a power greater than ourselves. We have been called by name by a God who gives Light and Life to the world in the person of Jesus Christ; in whom there is no darkness at all. (1 John 1:5) And like our brothers and sisters that have gone before us- like the apostles, the missionaries, the pastors, deacons, and priests; the Sunday school teachers, the grandmas and grandpas, mentors and mothers and fathers of old and of new- we have a responsibility to testify to the truth about Jesus.

We are the living legacy of the founders of our faith, and we walk in the light of our Crucified and Risen Lord. The world needs our testimony today: there is great power in using one’s voice! Think of Mary as she ran from the garden, calling out to Peter and the others: “*I have seen the Lord!*” (John 20:18) Think of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, conversing and breaking bread with the Risen Jesus (though they did not know it at the time); how they “*told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by*

them when he broke the bread.” (Luke 24:35) And think of Thomas, skeptical in his belief until the Risen Christ stood before him. “Put your finger here and see my hands,” Jesus said. “Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” (John 20:27) “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” (John 20:29)

Blessed are you, dear friends, who have come to new life in Jesus Christ because you received with open hearts and open minds the testimony of another. And blessed will all the world become, when your voice is lifted up: the voice of hope for the next generation.