Testimony is…Electrifying ` Memory Verse: 1 Peter 3:15

Nov. 26th, 2023 Scripture Reading: Psalm 19

SLIDE 1: TITLE

 This last month we have been talking about testimony and trying to describe that it is. We have taken a pretty broad view, but I have been trying to highlight some of the benefits or effects of testimony. We began by saying that testimony is terrifying. It is a risky thing to talk about your beliefs. Culturally, we prefer that type of thing to remain personal. Yet, there is a God-given thrill that comes from living on the edge and taking the risk. Testimony is identifying. As we share our story, it quickly becomes clear that it is actually God’s story told through us. So our testimony not only defines who we are, it also brings definition to who God is. Then we said testimony is edifying. It is instructive, it builds up others. Our testimony pokes and prods others to pursue their faith and to continue doing good works. Finally, today, we are going to see how testimony is electrifying.

**SLIDE 2: testimony is electrifying.**

 Now that might seem a little dramatic, but let’s think about it for a moment. In our world, electricity is synonymous with another concept: power. If some device or appliance is not working, our first reaction is to check to see if it is plugged in. We know that the things we use need power in order to operate. And power is derived from a little plug that goes into a little outlet and, viola, the thing in question works. It has power.

 And what is electricity? What is this thing that humans have learned to wield and direct and use for our own purposes? If you have taken eighth grade science, this seems like a silly question. Electricity is a current of specifically charged particles. A “Popular Science” article puts it this way: “subatomic particles that make up the cosmos can have either a positive or negative charge… The electricity we have on earth is mostly from the movement of negatively charged electrons.” We could take the time to break all that down and learn what all that means, but eventually we are going to get into more questions. Another article put it this way, “What exactly is electricity? There really is not a definitive answer, only abstract representations of how electricity interacts with our surroundings” In other words, we don’t know what electricity is. We can’t explain it as a thing in and of itself. We know about it based on its effects on other things. We have invented ways of harnessing it and directing it, but electricity is something mankind has discovered, it is not something we came up with. Electricity; power, is fundamental to all of creation. And it’s unexplainably has always been here. I have personally been affected by this mysterious reality. Once in a while my heart begins to beat off its normal rhythm. They call it atrial fibrillation. It is not painful, but it causes me to breathe a little heavier and experience a higher degree of fatigue. And it’s all caused by an interruption in the normal cycle of electrical impulses that then signal the heart to contract and pump. You and I are powered creatures! We function on electricity! Our very lives are designed to depend on it. Long before we ever knew anything about electricity, it was a power that kept our physical bodies operating correctly.

 The point here is that literal power is not derived from us. We get it from the world around us. So too, spiritual power is not something found within us. Spiritual power is not something that can be invented by the intelligence of the human mind. It is found outside of ourselves. Spiritual power is a gift of God, bestowed unto us by means of the Holy Spirit, the very presence of God living within us. What does that mean? And what is spiritual power? I think I will be spending the rest of my life trying to come up with a good answer to that question. It’s like electricity…it’s tough to specifically define, but you know it what you see it. You can tell when something is plugged in and operating. You experience the effects of power.

Have you ever observed a lightning storm? Even if you scientifically know what is happening in the sky during a lightning storm, you cannot help but be moved by the display of incredible power, a display that you and I had nothing to do with. Psalm 19 rings true: “The heaven’s declare the glory of God.” The skies declare his power.

**SLIDE 3: The heaven’s declare the glory of God.” Psalm 19**

So we know power when we see it, but there are some means available to us for harnessing

the power of the Holy Spirit. Just like lightning, this power, when unbridled, is dangerous. It has to be directed. Just like electrical wires contain a conductor that allows electrons to flow through, we find that Jesus serves as our conductor, it is through him that we are able to receive the power of the Holy Spirit in us. He is our direct line. He gives us access.

Paul’s letter to the Ephesians helps us see how this works. Paul also gives us some idea of what this power entails as well as what testimony has to do with any of this. Let’s look at chapter 2. In this section, Paul is talking about the unity that Jesus brings between Jews and Gentiles. There is no longer any separation between these two groups. Christ becomes the foundation on which both parties stand. So Paul talks about how there is no longer a wall that separates, that both groups have been reconciled into one body. Verse 17, “He came,” that is Jesus, “and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near, so that through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.”

**SLIDE 4: “He came,” that is Jesus, “and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near, so that through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.” Ephesians 2:17**

So we see all three roles of the Trinity represented here. God the Father, who once was distant and difficult to properly reach. We had to go through the whole system of sacrifices and rituals but that God has now become available. But it is not as though God changed his mind about his accessibility. God is still holy, sin and impurity, our dirt, is still not allowed into his presence, but Jesus, our conductor, cleanses us by his blood and bestows upon us the Holy Spirit, who in his power unifies us and makes us one in the presence of the Father. It’s impossible it truly understand, but thankfully, like electricity, we simply plug in and we get to experience the miracle, we get to experience the power that is beyond us. What an amazing grace! We don’t have to understand how it all works in order to benefit from the miracle!

 But how did this whole process begin? Look at verse 17, “When Jesus came, he announced the good news…” In other words, he testified to the truth of the gospel of God. His testimony is electrifying. Because of it, we become powered.

 So to what purpose are we powered? Why did God bother to plug us in? Paul talks, in chapter 3 verse 10, about the role of the church in this world: “God’s purpose is to show the rulers and powers in the heavens the many different varieties of his wisdom through the church.”

**SLIDE 5: “God’s purpose is to show the rulers and powers in the heavens the many different varieties of his wisdom through the church.” Ephesians 3:10**

We, as the church, are to express and explain and instruct the “rulers and powers in the heavens” which is a theme for Paul, especially in this letter to the Ephesians. These rulers and authorities are any power that might oppose Christ or God’s will in the world. Paul is clear that Jesus has been placed above all such alleged powers as he says back in chapter one, and, in chapter six, he makes clear that these powers are our true enemies, not flesh and blood, not other people, but rulers and spiritual powers. So God’s plan is to use the church to testify to these so called rulers about the true nature of God’s wisdom. Paul says this wisdom has many different varieties. Some translations say the manifold wisdom of God, and the Greek word brings in the notion of color, that God’s wisdom contains many various colors. I think Paul is pointing out that we cannot testify well to these spiritual authorities on our own. The power of the church is best demonstrated when we testify together. I have my story, and you have your story and she has hers story and he has his and the cumulative affect of these many stories is what truly empowers the church and gives us a voice that can speak to the spiritual realities of this world. Paul goes on in verse 11: “This was consistent with the plan he had from the beginning of time that he accomplished through Christ Jesus our Lord.” So this whole Sprit-filled, powerfully testifying church was God’s plan all along. “In Christ we have bold and confident access to God through faith in him.” Again, Jesus is our connection point, the conductor. He provides our access to God’s power.

 But I don’t want to miss one other aspect of the electrifying nature of testimony…VIDEO CLIP…It is contagious.

**SLIDE 6: Video**

Paul shows us the testimony of Christ powers the church and the testimony of the church goes out into all the world. Just like when one person touches an electric fence, those they are in contact with are affected by the current of power that flows through them, so too does the next person and the next person. Our testimonies are electrifying. They are contagious. When shared, they affect others. When we speak about the word of God in our lives, we power the next person and they speak and power the next person and on and on. And experience that don’t we? When we hear these testimonies, we are engaged and nodding our heads along and applying their story to our own life. It is powerful.

**SLIDE 7: It is powerful.**

 The ancient church leader Tertullian, who died in 220 AD wrote some very memorable words about the power of Christian testimony. In the face of wide-spread persecution and the reality that one may lose their life because of one’s faith, Tertullian wrote, “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.” Tertullian knows that even in death at the hands of enemies, what seems like defeat becomes a powerful Christian testimony. The harder the powers of this world try to stomp out Christ’s church, the more the church grows in number and vitality. That testimony empowers the Church and declares loud and clear to the powers that be the many-colored wisdom of God. The blood spilled for the name of Jesus only strengthens the Church and it is because of the story that is told. When we are willing to give our lives for the sale of Christ, we speak a testimony that empowers the rest of the Church. Tertullian’s message to the Roman Empire was one of warning: “We are not a new philosophy but a divine revelation.” In us and through us God makes himself known. We have a story to tell, a message to proclaim a testimony to share It is powerful and it is electrifying.

**SLIDE 8: It is powerful and it is electrifying.**

 I want to thank those in our church who were so willing to share their testimony with us. And now I want to put that responsibility on all of us. Would you be willing to share your story, or rather the story God is telling in and through you. I know it can be terrifying…but it is also identifying, edifying and electrifying! I think we as a congregation and the world at large are starving to hear your testimony. We need to know what God is up to! We need to have him revealed to us in your testimony. I want to see us able to have testimonies to share regularly in church as we meet. And some might be more dramatic than others and some might involve just small things or maybe a single moment, but big or small, we want to hear what God is doing in your life! We need to hear it! So please take some time this week, instead of watching TV for an evening, take the time to write out your testimony; commit it to paper in some way. Maybe it is the story of your conversion, when you first met Jesus, maybe it is a miracle he performed in your life, maybe it is something new he is teaching you in his word. Whatever it might be, take the time to write it or type it out. Do the work of organizing your thoughts and laying out your story in a clear way. And then, be willing to share it, speak it out, testify to who God is and what he has done. In 1 Peter 3:15 we are told, “Whenever anyone asks you to speak of your hope, be ready to defend it.” So let us be ready with our testimony…I might very well be the one asking for it. Amen? Amen.