



247 Broad Street | Red Bank NJ 0770
(732) 747-0446 | www.umcredbank.org

October 29, 2017

Put Your Whole Self In - Witness

1 John 1:1-3

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us— we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

John 1:35-42

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!"

The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter).

This morning we wrap up our stewardship worship series, through which we've been exploring the various ways we put our whole selves into our faith and spiritual growth, not only deepening our relationship with God, but also supporting God's work through the local church. We've explored our prayer life, our presence within the faith community, the spiritual gifts and talents we bring with us, and the financial resources we offer for God's work. We've reflected together on the ways God might be calling us to grow in these areas in the coming year, and gathered word clouds representing our hopes and dreams for the future. After we print our final word cloud this coming week, we'll be hanging these images in Fellowship Hall, so that we are reminded that it is only together, when we all put our whole selves in through

our prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness that we can accomplish the amazing work we do as the Body of Christ here at UMCRB!

And so we turn to our focus for today – how we support the work of the church through our witness. Whether we realize it or not, our lives bear witness – tell stories, and sing the praises of the different things we value and prioritize. How many of you talk up your favorite restaurant with your friends, or share with others how great a movie you just saw was, or raved about a book you just read? We give reviews and recommendations, suggestions and invitations for things in our lives all the time... but one of the things we struggle to talk about, with our friends, colleagues, and acquaintances alike, is our faith and our church.

Many years ago, when the iPhone was just gaining popularity, I was starting my ministry as a youth director... Now, I'm going to be honest... managing my calendar, my contacts, my emails... none of this was a strong point for me... in fact, growing up, my family used to get so frustrated by my memory, which is pretty terrible, because I wouldn't write anything down, and people would ask me to do something, and I hadn't written it down, so I would forget. Well, when I got my first iPhone, it did everything, really easily, all in one little device! I was in heaven! I loved that I could keep my calendar, phone, contacts, email, and everything else in one convenient place... my pocket! They were with me everywhere I went, and I started making notes and keeping a calendar and before you know it, I was actually pretty organized. My life was transformed by this little device... and I talked it up! I told everyone I could think of how amazing the iPhone was and how they needed to try it for themselves. I was convinced that everyone's lives would benefit like mine had from this technology. ☺ I became a walking advertisement for Apple... a witness... a "smartphone evangelist."

How many of you have had similar experiences, whether about technology or a restaurant or a vacation site or a sports team... we get FIRED UP about things in our lives all the time and we SHARE that passion and enthusiasm with others because we can't contain our excitement, and we want others to know the joy and transformation that we've experienced. THAT my friends is what evangelism is all about. This dreaded E-word that has gotten such a bad rap from tele-evangelists and bullhorn wielders on street corners and subways, at its heart is about sharing joy, something uncontainable because you believe the lives of others will benefit from this amazing thing the same way yours has. It's about sharing good news – because really, who wants to keep good news to themselves?

But there's something about churchy good news that makes us hesitate to talk about it in the public sphere. We live in a society where going to church is not always seen as the "cool" thing to do. We're so afraid of offending someone by talking about our faith that we just keep it to ourselves... or maybe we don't even know what we would say if we did start talking about our faith or our church... we haven't thought through what the "good news" is for us. Brian McLaren - pastor, author, and activist - said this, "Good evangelists... are people who engage others in good conversation about important and profound topics.... They live with a sense of mission that their God-given calling in life is not just to live selfishly, or even just to live well, but to live unselfishly and well and to help others live unselfishly and well too.... They want to change the world." Brian McLaren

Just last weekend, I saw Pew Research statistics broken out by age group, indicating what brought people to the church and what keeps them engaged. For the younger generations, one of the most important factors to whether they would get involved in a new church was personal reviews from friends, colleagues, or church members. A conversation, recommendation and invitation from someone they knew and trusted was what brought them to the church. Sharing our faith, particularly our passion about our church, makes a difference. What we say about our church in the public sphere translates to living YELP reviews. How many of you check out the reviews of a restaurant before you try it for the first time, or a recipe you found online? We seek the feedback of others when WE are trying new things, why wouldn't we expect the same for people looking for a new church.

Many churches operate under an "attractional" model – the type that says, "if you build it, they will come!" – as if, now that we've updated our FH and launched The Village, people will miraculously flock in our doors to come see what's happening here. While that might have worked in the past when the attending church was the "norm"... it doesn't work that way today... people are not necessarily going out of their way to learn more about church... people might never know what amazing ministries we do unless we share it, and invite them to come join us on the journey!

In our gospel reading this morning, we heard Jesus invite some of his disciples to follow him... First John the Baptist points Jesus out, saying, "look, check out that guy, he's the Lamb of God." Then when Jesus realizes these two men are following him, he says, "Um, can I help you? What are you looking for?" And then he invites them to join him... When they ask where he's staying, he doesn't just tell them with words or directions, but say, "come and see." He invites them to come along for ride. Church today functions on this same "missional" model – one that recognizes that we have something special going on here and we want to share it with the world, not just by work, but by action and invitation. And you know, it's not just about filling the pews or about increasing our numbers, but about making disciples, helping people experience the love of God and be transformed from the inside out, and sending them out to help transform the world around them!

When was the last time you got fired up for God or this church and shared that passion with someone? That's what we're called to do... to tell others about this great thing we have here within this community of faith... how we help each other be better people, live more faithfully, and love more fully! And when you share with passion and conviction the gifts that your church and your faith brings to your life, you might just help someone else realize what it is that has been missing from their lives. Bearing witness to our faith is part of our task and our commitment to the church – it's one of the ways we support God's work and bring about transformation in the world... so now I'm going to ask each of us to reflect on how it's going... what are the ways you share your witness now, and how might God be calling you to grow or try something new next year?

May God bless us through the ways we grow into loving service and faithful living.
Amen.