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The Stewardship of Testimony

We're accustomed to hearing about the stewardship of our time, talents, and treasure. It makes sense. Everything we have is a gift from God. Using our time, talents and treasure to glorify and serve God overflows from the gratitude we feel for our many blessings and, above all, for what God has done for us in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

But stewardship of our testimony? What does that even mean? We Presbyterians rarely use the word because we think it is a synonym for evangelism. If testimony means publicly sharing the Gospel to convert others to Christianity, most of us don't even want to go there. In legal terms, "testimony is oral or written evidence given by the witness under oath, affidavit, or deposition during a trial or other legal procedure."^[i] That begs the sobering question asked by the late evangelist Dr. Billy Graham: "If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?"

Would there be family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers who could testify to your worshiping regularly? Would anyone be able to cite concrete evidence of the difference your faith has made based on your graciousness, generosity, and good works? Would the people with whom you play golf or pickleball, the people in your book club or who you know from the gym, be able to say without hesitation, "Yes, s/he's a Christian."

For that to be true, we need to speak about and enact our faith in our daily lives through the uplifting words we choose to use and the judgmental words we refuse to use; through the kindness we show to

strangers and the hatefulness of others that we reject; through the forgiveness we give and the bitterness we abandon; through the explanations we offer when asked why we do what we do. In fact, when we're living authentic lives as disciples of Jesus Christ, our lives don't make sense without knowing about our deep faith.

The stewardship of testimony is about being witnesses through our words and deeds to what we believe about God: that we and all people are created in God's image and loved unconditionally; that God is loving and just; that it is through our relationship with God that our lives find purpose and meaning; and that we are meant to live in community, in peace, and in hope.

Tom Long in his book *Testimony: Talking Ourselves into Being Christian*, says, "Jesus is the true and faithful witness, and Christians, as part of God's people, are corroborating witnesses. Our testimony is, in effect, 'What Jesus said and did is the truth about God and about human life, and we ourselves can attest in our own lives to the power of that truth.'" ^[ii]

The core of our Christian faith is that Jesus who was "crucified, dead, and buried" is alive because God raised him from the dead Easter morning. That makes all the difference for us and for our world. He is "the faithful witness" (Revelation 1:5) to God's will to love us, forgive us our sins, save us from eternal death, and give us abundant life.

Long reminds us: "Our words matter. Our words are a main pathway on which our faith goes forth into the world. Others know us by our words, and God gives us words to tell the truth in love and to provide testimony to the world of who we are and what we believe. But our words are gathered up into the true Word, our lives gathered up into the true Life, and our testimony gathered up into the true Witness, Jesus Christ. Therefore, our words and our lives float on a sea of mercy and forgiveness. This grace does not make us careless with our words. It rather calls us at night to prayers of repentance and confession and sends us out the next day to speak as children of forgiveness and hope." ^[iii]

So, my friends, pay attention to the Holy Spirit urging you to be corroborating witness for Jesus. Dare to use the stewardship of your testimony each day. Then say your prayers and sleep well.

~Written by Margie Osborn

^[i] <https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/testimony>

^[ii] *Testimony: Talking Ourselves into Being Christian*, by Thomas G. Long. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004, 30.

^[iii] *Ibid.*, 155.

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