

April 6, 2022 St. Peter Lutheran Church, Doss, TX *How Do We witness our Faith?*
Lessons from Mal.4:1-2a and Luke 21: 5-19

Text: Matthew 22:15-22 15 Then the Pharisees met together to think of a way to trap Jesus into saying something for which they could accuse him. 16 They decided to send some of their disciples, along with the supporters of Herod, to ask him this question: "Teacher, we know how honest you are. You teach about the way of God regardless of the consequences. You are impartial and don't play favorites. 17 Now tell us what you think about this: Is it right to pay taxes to the Roman government or not?" 18 But Jesus knew their evil motives. "You hypocrites!" he said. "Whom are you trying to fool with your trick questions? 19 Here, show me the Roman coin used for the tax." When they handed him the coin, 20 he asked, "Whose picture and title are stamped on it?" 21 "Caesar's," they replied. "Well, then," he said, "give to Caesar what belongs to him. But everything that belongs to God must be given to God." 22 His reply amazed them, and they went away.

We are so easily caught between what we want and what God wants of us. The scriptures are clear. If we modify them or ignore them or find an obscure translation of them, we may be able to rationalize what God calls us to away. But God is not fooled. Look at our first lesson, at the warning that is given by Him: *Mal.4:1 "Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire," says the LORD Almighty. "Not a root or a branch will be left to them. 2 But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings.*

Paul warns us about idleness and how the lack of being in mission is turning in on oneself. He speaks of not eating if one doesn't work. The question comes: how do you use your time, talents and financial resources to serve God actively. The Gospel reminds us that we are Christ's witnesses and that it will take courage but that He will help us. We have stories we can share of how God has helped us in the past. It would almost be an advantage to write some of them down so they are fresh in your mind. What kind of witnesses are we? To visitors? To one another? Confessing the Creed and communing at the table are the most active ways we show what we are doing matters, not to mention coming to worship. What about our children and grandchildren? What kind of witnesses are we to them? Jesus commanded us to go therefore and disciple. How do you do that? Well, it's important to invite our visitors back, and then think about who is unchurched in Doss. Is there an opportunity invite them to worship with us?

When it comes to showing mercy, our 6th mark of discipleship reminds us of our need to give and even tithe of our financial resources. We show we mean what we say by supporting others in need. If you are like me, you may support worthy ministries with special gifts that are in addition to your tithe or offering. It may our NALC Seminary or American Bible Society. I appreciate the work of the ACLJ in legally representing Christians before an increasingly hostile world so I support them.

My wife, son and I served on a mission trip with Lutheran Association of Missionary Pilots. We flew to a remote Cree village in northern Saskatchewan. So, I continue to support that

ministry. With Ukraine in an uproar and many refugees, I have supported Samaritan Purse which already has a field hospital set up treating refugees. These are not in place of a tithe to our church, but in addition. That is a mark of discipleship and also a witness.

How we treat our neighbors and one another, co-workers and family members also make up our witness. Witness is easy at times and takes courage at other times. Just listen to what Jesus says in Luke 21: *There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven. "But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. This will result in your being witnesses to them. But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict. You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. All men will hate you because of me. But not a hair of your head will perish. By standing firm you will gain life.*

That's his ultimate challenge to us: standing firm in our faith. He desires His saints to grow in discipleship. Different phases of our lives bring difficult challenges as well as opportunities with them like getting through school, getting a first job, finding and marrying a spouse, parenting a first child, pointing our growing children to Jesus, facing illness along the way, a last child leaving home, job promotions and changes, retirement, illness or death of a spouse or siblings or even worse, children.

All these crises lay in wait for us along life's way and how we meet them defines our discipleship. We are forced to draw on our beliefs to deal with life's crises. But we are forced to draw on our beliefs not only reacting to what is on our plate but pro-actively, reaching out, trying to make a difference, sacrificing things of varying importance - all so that God's people are built up and His Name praised. We have the marks of discipleship which are a discipline. Choose the one you have the most trouble with and work with it, pray about it.

To discipline ourselves in the Word, prayer, worship, offering, encouraging and serving is our challenge tonight. Jesus couldn't have said it any plainer than in the Scriptures: *By standing firm, you will gain life. (Luke 21:19)*

A trainer at a health club gives you a personal program so that what you need to strengthen will be strengthened. So, the question is: Are you willing to put yourself in training for Jesus? We witness our faith through our giving in offering, time and care for others. Witnessing never presumes a person is perfect since God can use us more powerfully with others in our brokenness. If we look for the opportunities that God places before us, we can listen to others, and share our stories especially in what Jesus has done for us. God bless you in this effort to share God's Word and love within and beyond St. Peter. Amen