

"I LOVE TO TELL THE STORY"

Sermon by Josiah Frusti

My original plan was to preach Memorial Day Weekend, since that would be my last day on staff at St. Mark. As many of you know Pastor can be a very convincing person, in a kind way of course. So, when he asked me to preach this weekend I couldn't say no, however, I am coming off a 12 hour all-night Lock-In with a large group of High Schoolers.

I am tired, even a bit exhausted and I would have it no other way. I recently created a video in promotion of the lock-in we just had. I discussed why I value this type of event so much, and it boils down to this:

For 12 Hours I have the opportunity to share my story with each and every youth that attends that lock-in. I have the chance to share how the gospel has impacted me, what my faith has meant to me, and what my walk with Christ has looked like up to this point.

As a Christian and as a church worker, I am in the business of storytelling. And while I am not the greatest storyteller, I do get to share the greatest story. The story of Christ, who he is, what he did and what he is continuing to do.

Now the unique thing about the gospel is that while the original story does not change, the stories of how it changed us do. That's what a testimony is, your individual experience of how you came to know Christ and your relationship with Him. Testimonies are powerful and one of the most impactful tools in showing the world the reality of God.

Looking at Christ and his ministry, we find a pattern, specifically in his healings. Jesus would command those that had been healed: Go and tell your friends, your family, preach it in the temples how much God has done for you. When God does something incredible in your life, we are not called to keep it to ourselves.

Now you may be thinking "Josiah, I don't have an incredible story to share and I have not witnessed a miracle to tell my friends or family. I don't have anything worth telling." In response I say this: The impact of your testimony is not up to you; you are simply responsible for sharing it. The impact is up to the Holy Spirit.

My time at St. Mark will forever be a part of my testimony. I would like to share three of these testimonies with you:

- Mission Trip story with Logan
 - o Foot washing and Praying for each student
 - o After praying for him, Logan prayed for me

- One of the most powerful prayers I have ever received
- Brookes Post-Partum Depression
 - First birth with Nathaniel was challenging, but Abrams post-birth experience was harder.
 - Feeling of helplessness
 - Meals provided, work supported, “loving your neighbor”
- Luke and Ethan
 - Ethan Lock-in Visit
 - Luke ministering to Ethan
 - My meetings with Ethan and Ethan’s finding his relationship with Christ.
 - Disciples making disciples making disciples
 - Luke’s response:

“Someday I will get spend eternity with my Best friend”

These stories and many more are all a part of my testimony today. I get to share these with you and with people I will encounter in the future. These stories that point to Christ and his Love being shown in different ways. These are the kind of testimonies that a church should be drowning in. What I mean by that is when someone comes to church, when someone comes to St. Mark they should be experiencing the same kind of love, grace, and mercy I saw and received.

Now I ask that you listen to the next part of this message with an open heart, because I would not share my thoughts if I did not care about St. Mark and the church in the world as a whole.

It is not enough for us to try and create the perfect church services with the perfect flow, the best music, the right atmosphere. It is not enough for us to provide the best curriculum, Bible study or VBS. It is not enough to create the best by-laws and policies. It is not enough to write the most powerful sermons or develop the best online presence. The church is not about what we create or what we want.

We have been given incredible freedom through Christ. As Paul writes in Galatians:

“For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Gal 5:13-14

When a church gets more focused on what we do inside a building then reaching our neighbor outside of the building, we end up with friends and family whose testimonies are the opposite of what I shared earlier.

I took the time in the past week to ask some of my own friends and family why they no longer attend church. Some of them are still Christians and have faith, while others simply don't follow that path anymore. This is what their testimonies were full of:

Look down on for their views and opinions, feeling un-welcome, political divisiveness, truth spoken to them out of anger instead of love, moralistic superiority, and a lack of compassion.

Now I am fully aware that the church is made up of sinful people who constantly make mistakes, but this cannot be used as a crutch or an excuse. Because these mistakes as a church can become an active hindrance towards sharing the gospel.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. Eph 2:8-9

Let this passage be a reminder to all of us. Each and every one of us were not deserving of salvation, whether you attend church or not. It is by GRACE ALONE that we are saved through Christ's sacrifice on the cross. This teaching has to be the central message that every church is constantly sharing.

The world around us needs to know and experience the Grace of God now more than ever before. But how can they experience Grace if we are not living it daily. If we do not extend the same Grace extended to us by Christ, then how will they see who Christ is.

The old saying goes: Never judge a book by its cover.

We all have a book full of our life experiences, walks of faith and our relationship with God. So my question to you is: Are you spending time judging someone else's cover and pushing them away, or are you sharing your own stories, your own testimony, to point others to Christ.

The reasons I am here today, preaching to you, is because God placed people in my life to share their personal stories of faith and what Christ did for them. People who barley knew me invited me to serve in ministry without asking how I was living my life or my views on a certain issue.

Throughout this message I am hoping there is one thing I can convince you to do: Defend your faith. 1 Peter 3:15 says this:

"But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,"

In the past when I have read this passage, the idea of defending one's faith made me think solely of apologetics. Defending the reality of God and Christ, speaking up against misinterpretation of scripture or the gospel. This is an important part of the Christian life.

However, I can think of no gentler or more respectful way to defend your faith than to share your testimony of how Christ brought you to where you are today. About the doubts and challenges you faced, your own failings and how you were built back up again, of the tangible reasons you have hope in your heart today that God is who he says He is.

I'd like to finish by telling you one more story.

This story is not my own but it is one of my favorites. It is called the Three Trees.

Once upon a mountain top, three little trees stood and dreamed of what they wanted to become when they grew up.

The first little tree looked up at the stars and said: "I want to hold treasure. I want to be covered with gold and filled with precious stones. I'll be the most beautiful treasure chest in the world!"

The second little tree looked out at the small stream trickling by on its way to the ocean. "I want to be traveling mighty waters and carrying powerful kings. I'll be the strongest ship in the world!"

The third little tree looked down into the valley below where busy men and women worked in a busy town. "I don't want to leave the mountain top at all. I want to grow so tall that when people stop to look at me, they'll raise their eyes to heaven and think of God. I will be the tallest tree in the world."

Years passed. The rain came, the sun shone, and the little trees grew tall. One day three woodcutters climbed the mountain.

The first woodcutter looked at the first tree and said, "This tree is beautiful. It is perfect for me." With a swoop of his shining axe, the first tree fell.

"Now I shall be made into a beautiful chest. I shall hold wonderful treasure!" the first tree said.

The second woodcutter looked at the second tree and said, "This tree is strong. It is perfect for me." With a swoop of his shining axe, the second tree fell.

"Now I shall sail mighty waters!" thought the second tree. "I shall be a strong ship for mighty kings!"

The third tree felt her heart sink when the last woodcutter looked her way. She stood straight and tall and pointed bravely to heaven.

But the woodcutter never even looked up. "Any kind of tree will do for me," he muttered. With a swoop of his shining axe, the third tree fell.

The first tree rejoiced when the woodcutter brought her to a carpenter's shop. But the carpenter fashioned the tree into a feedbox for animals.

The once beautiful tree was not covered with gold, nor with treasure. She was coated with sawdust and filled with hay for hungry farm animals.

The second tree smiled when the woodcutter took her to a shipyard, but no mighty sailing ship was made that day. Instead, the once strong tree was hammered and sawed into a simple fishing boat. She was too small and too weak to sail on an ocean, or even a river; instead, she was taken to a little lake.

The third tree was confused when the woodcutter cut her into strong beams and left her in a lumberyard.

"What happened?" the once tall tree wondered. "All I ever wanted was to stay on the mountain top and point to God..."

Many, many days and night passed. The three trees nearly forgot their dreams.

But one night, golden starlight poured over the first tree as a young woman placed her newborn baby in the feedbox.

"I wish I could make a cradle for him," her husband whispered.

The mother squeezed his hand and smiled as the starlight shone on the smooth and the sturdy wood. "This manger is beautiful," she said.

And suddenly the first tree knew he was holding the greatest treasure in the world.

One evening a tired traveler and his friends crowded into the old fishing boat. The traveler fell asleep as the second tree quietly sailed out into the lake.

Soon a thundering and thrashing storm arose. The little tree shuddered. She knew she did not have the strength to carry so many passengers safely through with the wind and the rain.

The tired man awakened. He stood up, stretched out his hand, and said, "Peace." The storm stopped as quickly as it had begun.

And suddenly the second tree knew he was carrying the king of heaven and earth.

One Friday morning, the third tree was startled when her beams were yanked from the forgotten woodpile. She flinched as she was carried through an angry jeering crowd. She shuddered when soldiers nailed a man's hands to her.

She felt ugly and harsh and cruel.

But on Sunday morning, when the sun rose and the earth tremble with joy beneath her, the third tree knew that God's love had changed everything.

It had made the third tree strong.

And every time people thought of the third tree, they would think of God.

That was better than being the tallest tree in the world.

Next time you doubt the impact your story can have on the people around you, remember that God often uses us in ways that we would never expect. Your testimony is one of the most powerful ways you can use to share the gospel. It does not matter if your story is full of incredible moments or just the mundane activities of life. Your testimony will plant seeds, produce fruit and change lives.