

# Lent: A Time For Renewal of Witness

## Matthew 10:32-33

March 7,2012

Lent 3

If you are walking along in a big city, in an airport, or on a college campus, all of a sudden you may see something very odd: several young man fall to the ground or the floor, face down on a rug. You might think, “Did they faint? Are they sick? What’s wrong?” None of these are right. The men are MUSLIMS and they are *praying*. This ISLAM requires people to pray five times a day and they must bow down to the holy city of Mecca. These men are following their religion and are not ashamed.

Are we Christians the same? Would you be willing to bow down and pray on the street or in the airport or would you feel embarrassed? When you go to a restaurant, do you pray and give thanks for your food or do you feel embarrassed to do that because people might see you doing that? Now I am not saying that you have to bow down on the street, nor am I saying that you *must* pray before you eat. But do you feel embarrassed because you are a Christian? No, of course not, we would say – here in church. I am sure that all of us here would say that we are not embarrassed here *in church*. We confess our faith in Jesus here. We sing our praises and pray. But what happens when you leave the church? Do you change? Do you stop talking about Jesus? Does your life show that you follow Jesus? Or, deep down inside, are you afraid to admit that we believe in Jesus?

Jesus’ disciple Peter was. Peter was a very strong disciple. He believed strongly in Jesus and loved Him very much. But, on the night before Jesus died, Jesus told his 12 disciples, “Tonight, all of you will leave me.” Peter boasted, “I will never leave you. I am willing to die with you.” Jesus looked at him sadly and said, “Peter, tonight you will deny me three times before the rooster crows twice.”

Peter was hurt. He would never deny Jesus. Later, when Jesus was finished praying in the garden, the soldiers came to arrest Jesus and Peter drew his sword and fought hard to protect Jesus. When soldiers arrested Jesus and took Him to the High Priest, Peter was brave and followed to see what would happen.

When Jesus went into the Jewish court, Peter stayed outside with other people. A servant girl came up to him and said, "You were with Jesus, weren't you." Here was an opportunity for Peter to show his love for Jesus and proudly say, "Yes, I was with Jesus!" But Peter didn't do that. Peter denied it, "I don't know what you mean." Peter left the area and went near the gate. A little later, the servant girl saw Peter near the door and she said to the people around, "Surely this man is one of Jesus' followers!" Peter had a second chance to admit to his love for Jesus, but *again* Peter denied Jesus. Later, some of the people said to Peter, "Surely you are one of Jesus' followers because you are from up north in GALILEE and Jesus is from there, too." Peter again had a chance to confess faith in Jesus, but, instead, he began to curse and swear and say, "I don't know that man, Jesus. I never met Him before in my life." Then he heard the rooster crow and he remembered Jesus' words: "You will deny me three times before the rooster crows." Peter broke down and wept.

Peter was not a good WITNESS. A WITNESS is a person who sees or hears something and tells about it. A witness for a car accident sees the accident and then goes to court and tells the story. Jesus called Peter to be His witness. Peter had seen Jesus do miracles. Peter listened to Jesus' teaching. Peter believed that Jesus was the Son of God and the Savior of the world. Yet when Peter had the opportunity to witness - to tell the story about Jesus - he failed. And even worse, Peter denied even knowing Jesus.

Jesus has called us to be His witnesses, too. God has revealed to us that He loves us; that we have sinned against Him and deserve eternal punishment in hell; but that Jesus died to take away our sins and became alive so that we can live forever. We come to church and "see"/hear that wonderful story again and again.

Then we have opportunities to tell the story to our friends, family, and other people. But do we tell them that story about God's love and their Savior Jesus? When a friend or family member is sad or depressed about this life, do you try to tell them about a God who loves them and cares for them or did you say nothing? When our friends are feeling guilty or despondent because they have done wrong, do we tell them that Jesus died to take away those sins and guilt and that God accepts them

because of that or do we merely say, “Don’t feel that way!”? When a friend or family member is approaching death and is afraid, do we tell them that Jesus overcame death and that they, too, can overcome death and live forever through faith in Him or do we say, “Don’t worry; everything will be all right.”? Do we witness to our faith by the way we chat in every day life? If a friend has a difficult test at school, do we say, “God bless you and help you!” or do we say, “Good luck!”? When someone is going away on a trip, do we say, “God be with you!” or do we say, “Have a nice trip!”?

We have many opportunities to be witnesses for Jesus and speak to other people about Him. But we often fail, too, don’t we? We are afraid to speak. We are embarrassed to speak. We don’t want people to think we are religious or “holier-than-thou”. We may even be like Peter – joining in with the crowd to curse, swear or do other bad behavior so that people don’t know we follow Jesus. We deny Jesus either by saying bad things or doing bad things or by refusing to speak for Jesus or live like He wants us to live.

In our text, Jesus has some very harsh words for people like us. Jesus says, “any person who says he doesn’t know me; doesn’t belong to me- I will say to my Father - I don’t know him; he doesn’t belong to me.” Imagine arriving in heaven and Jesus saying He doesn’t know you and you don’t belong to Him. But Jesus says, “Any person confessing me - him will I confess to my Father in heaven.” How can we do a better job of confessing Jesus? Lent is a time to consider how we can renew our witness for Jesus Christ.

First of all, we cannot hide our poor witness for Christ. We can’t make up excuses for not witnessing for Jesus. We cannot confess Jesus Christ to the world until we confess our sin to Him. Jesus died to forgive all our sins. He forgives all our sins. He forgives us for being lousy witnesses. He even forgives us if we deny him. Peter denied Jesus three times. After Jesus rose from the dead, He came to Peter and forgave him three times.

Second of all, we begin witnessing for Him again when we leave this church tonight. You may be a good witness or you may be a bad witness, but you ARE a witness. You may feel awkward in witnessing - not knowing the right words to say. You may feel that you are not good enough to talk to

others about sin and forgiveness because you have plenty of sins. You may be afraid of what other people say.

Jesus frees us from fear and He gives us the power to witness to people by what we say and do. This doesn't mean you have to go knocking on doors like the Jehovah's Witnesses or Mormons. It doesn't mean you have to "preach" to people. It doesn't mean you have to put on a show. Be natural. You can do it. Why? Because you belong to God. You have been baptized and forgiven. You have His Holy Spirit within you. The Holy Spirit guides you. The Holy Spirit gives you situations for witnessing. And the Holy Spirit helps you to talk about Jesus Christ in a natural way with your friends, family, and other people.

Will you still feel afraid or awkward? Maybe. But the Holy Spirit will give you courage. Will you have eloquent words and answer all people's questions? Probably not, but the Holy Spirit will give you just the right words and He will use those words to change people. The Bible says, "When people arrest you, don't worry about what you will say or how you will say it. The Holy Spirit will give you the words to speak." (Mt. 10:19)

Will you succeed? Will people believe in Jesus Christ because of your witness? Maybe. Maybe not. But if they DO believe, it is not because of your witness, but because of the Gospel you speak. The Bible says, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel because it is (has) the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes." (Romans 1:16)

And people may believe you more than they believe me. People may think I'm talking about Jesus because it is my job and responsibility, but people hearing you talk about Jesus will know it is important to you. A man wrote a book entitled *Why People Join the Church* and he made a list of reasons why people join the church. Some of them were: family influence, looking for friends, a problem in life, because of the pastor, and so on. But the biggest reason people joined the church is because a friend or relative talked to them about Jesus.

The world out there desperately needs good news. We have the best story to tell: the Good News about Jesus. This Good News gives us joy, comfort, and hope as we live here on this earth.

This Good News gives us the promise of life forever with God in heaven. God gives us the opportunities to speak the Good News. God gives us the words to use in speaking the Good News. God gives us the power to speak the Good News. And God gives power to the words. May we from now on renew our witness to Jesus Christ and tell of Him often. And, when we die, we shall hear Jesus say to God the Father, "Yes, I know him. He belongs to me." Then He shall say to us, "Come and receive the kingdom prepared for you before the world began." And what an exciting time that will be. Amen.