

"Can I Get a Witness?"
by Rev. Frances Savill
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Mark 6:14-29

Our text this morning from Mark's gospel is about the realities of discipleship.

In the book *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer says; "When Jesus calls a man, he calls him to come and die."

Amy Carmichael in her book *Towards Jerusalem* penned these words:

Hast Thou No Scar?

Hast thou no scar?

No hidden scar on foot, or side, or hand?

I hear Thee sung as mighty in the land,

I hear them hail thy bright ascendant star,

Hast thou no scar?

Hast thou no wound?

Yet I was wounded by the archers, spent,

Leaned Me against a tree to die; and rent

By ravening beasts that compassed Me,

I swooned:

Hast thou no wound?

No wound? no scar?

Yet, as the Master shall the servant be,

And pierced are the feet that follow Me;

But thine are whole:

Can he have followed far

Who has no wound nor scar?

Mark situates this story of the beheading of John the Baptist in the midst of the disciples being sent by Jesus.

John was the first witness to Jesus.

His witness was uncompromising, and it cost him his life.

As those who are called by Jesus to witness to him today, this text is important for us to consider.

We are Jesus' witnesses in the world – we provide a living testimony – what we say and what we do tells about the God we serve.

Our testimony is given so that others can judge – and they can decide about this God.

So, we live as a daily witness, in what we do with our money; do we save it, do we spend it, are we generous to those in need, are we care full or care free in the hands of God.

In what we do with our finances people judge what's important to us and to our God, and it speaks of our trust in God, and our willingness to trust God for our daily bread.

The watching world sees the decisions we make.

Co-workers see how we treat other staff.

Do we show up on time, do we make just and fair decisions, do we live in ways of caring, do we respect the world God has entrusted to us?

A thousand times a day, in every small and big decision, how we treat the server at the coffee shop, how we treat the person on the street, how we treat our parents, our children, our neighbours, people glimpse the God we claim to serve and make judgements about faith.

So what does the world see, what do the people you work with, live with, play sports or cards with, see?

When we said "yes" to following Jesus, the call was "take up your cross and follow me."

Following Jesus doesn't lead to Club Med or some hedonistic vacation, it doesn't lead to my self-fulfillment or self-actualization.

The promised joy and life in abundance comes through service, through giving and forgiving, in seeking God's kingdom, and God's glory.

In our reading from Ephesians, Paul spells it out clearly: "It's in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for. Long before we first heard of Christ and got our hopes up, he had his eye on us, had designs on us for glorious living, part of the overall purpose he is working out in everything and everyone."

It is in Jesus, in following Him, learning His ways, that we find out who we are and what we are living for.

Jesus has designs on us for glorious living, but that glorious life is not like the lives of the famous and beautiful.

The disciples were sent out, we are sent out in Jesus' name.

They were sent to bring healing, to point people to Jesus' way, to offer good news, to help the kingdom of God to become visible in the kingdom of this world.

They proclaimed The Way, meaning the way of Jesus.

Some accepted the message, and others rejected it, but the message didn't change.

Jesus met opposition, the disciples of Jesus met opposition.

There will always be those who would have us compromise this message.

We are asked to soften the message, to get with the times, we hear things like "everyone is doing it, and somehow that should make it okay with our faith in God.

The world tells us we "must be practical", meaning we must compromise the truth, and it often means that some people are expendable.

We hear that there are "economic necessities", and we are asked to bend, to turn aside from justice, or yield to convenience.

John the Baptist would have none of that.

He was a prophet calling all people to repent.

He was critical of King Herod, who had married his brother's wife.

To silence him, Herod imprisoned him.

John's preaching wouldn't get much of a hearing from the dungeons.

But Herod also seems to have had this strong interest in John and his message.

Herod didn't kill John, but saw himself as "protecting him." Apparently, John's words upset more than Herod.

But it becomes obvious that Herod had no real interest in repenting, in changing course and in the end Herod beheads John at a dinner party, in payment for beguiling entertainment, to save face in front of his party guests.

I think that Herod, in some ways, represents the powers of the world, or the powerful of the world, who have a casual interest in the things of God, maybe a desire to find a way to use God to enhance their own position, or even to find a compromise to keep faith at a safe, but interesting distance, or silent and uncritical.

But these powers are rarely interested in bearing a cross, or a bowing a knee, to acknowledging Jesus as Lord, or repenting and turning to Jesus in faith.

And when the things of faith are stacked up against reputation, or saving face, faith is beheaded and served on a platter.

But even as Herodias' daughter is dancing, Jesus' disciples, some of whom were first John's disciples, and went to Jesus because of John's testimony, were sent out two by two, spreading the message everywhere, teaching, healing, and casting out demons.

Herod silenced John, Herod could not silence God.

God raised up faithful witnesses who would tell of what God had done for them; men and women, teens, children and seniors, people in hospitals and nursing homes, schools, and workplaces, who would tell how God had been with them, how they had seen God's healing grace, how God lifts up the fallen and is faithful.

They tell what they have seen and heard of God's presence in their lives in the church, in the world, day by day.

They witness to the truth that is found in the Bible and in the way of Jesus alone.

They witness in what they say and how they live.

God raises up people who will not be silenced.

They are raised up, not because they are brave and courageous, but because the Holy Spirit teaches them day by day in the small things, and they grow as faithful followers, and teaches them to speak as witnesses to the truth.

They are raised up by God to take up their crosses daily, in small things and large, as Christ's witnesses in the world.

Maybe you've met one of them?

Maybe you are one of them?

Prayer

O God, you call us to take up our crosses daily and follow you, in the day-by-day decisions, in the choices of our lives, in the words we speak. May we speak of your love and faithfulness. May we give voice and not be silenced. May Your Holy Spirit help us to stand and to live lives as faithful disciples of Jesus. Amen.

Thanks be to God.