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# Becoming Witnesses

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*The Stoning of Stephen at Kölner Dom, Cologne, Germany (1800's)*

June 10, 2018

When I graduated from Lee University, I was expecting a graduation ceremony and then to be freed to go forth and change the world. When we attended our graduation meetings over the course of the semester, I finally realized that Lee celebrated twice for graduation. Someone called the first service a Commissioning. Here, we received our bibles and were encouraged to understand our degree not just as an act of academic rigor, but as a calling into something far more meaningful.

Lee University's Commissioning Service allowed me to experience the freshness of Christ's sermon at the end of Matthew in my own life.

Situated at the end of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus delivers a farewell address to his close friends and disciples. Upon a mountain preparing to ascend into Heaven, Jesus leaves them with the following words:

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20).\*

Another version of this event is given before Christ ascends in Acts:

"It is not for you to know times or season that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:7-8)

As Christians, we have a pretty hearty labor before us between Christ's ascension and His return. We're called to receive power, become witnesses, make disciples, baptize, and teach.

While we as Pentecostals may understand how we receive this power, our transformation into witnesses is just as important! Today we will discuss our witness and our testimony.

## *Witness*

Our witness tends to include both unspoken and spoken elements. The root word for “witness” is *marturia* (μαρτυρία). It is easy to see that while we have translated this as “witness,” the word “martyr” is present within the original language. Utilized to describe Christians who died because of their faith, we have isolated the word martyr to typically only refer to those who have sacrificed their lives.

An important distinction exists that we must remember. While martyrs have indeed died due to their faith, they are not martyrs because of their death. To quote H. Strathmann, “Stephen is not called a martyr because he dies, he dies because he is a witness for Christ (*sic*).” We must all realize that we are martyrs, regardless of death or sacrifice.

We must be willing to allow our lives to be witnesses in life just as much as in death. In this, we truly take hold of Paul’s appeal that, “To live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21).

We should not neglect the martyrs in their deaths, for truly the early Church father Tertullian was on to something when he said, “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.” Rather, we must realize it is not only death that can be rewarding to our testimony.

## *Testimony*

Testimony is the conversational component to our witness that allows us to engage in verbal or written expressions of our faith. By testifying, we speak of stories within our lives that encapsulate a pristine example of God’s activity with us. In fact, testimony is *essential* to who we are as the Church.

Amanda Hontz Drury suggests that the act of testimony is essential for adolescent faith development as well as good church discipleship. By allowing our testimonies to be practiced we invite the listeners into our stories, allowing them to sympathize (feel the same feelings as someone else) and ultimately empathize (see yourself from another’s perspective) with our reality.

Good testimony spurs forth challenging feedback to our own faith development and re-examination of an event; it can also provide affirming feedback that builds up our faith in another way. Either way, these exceptional moments can allow others to relive the event and fold it into their own testimony, improving their witness just the same!

### *Summary*

Both witness and testimony are necessary skills to develop as a Christian. It is with these understandings of our commissioning that Jesus Christ calls us to go forth and make disciples. Today, evaluate your witness and enable Christ to speak anew to you, reminding you that working on such things and preparing yourself to assist others is why we are here! Much like Lee's Commissioning Service, let's get ready to send each other forth!

Source(s):

\*All Scriptural citations utilize ESV

Amanda Hontz Drury. *Saying is Believing: The Necessity of Testimony in Adolescent Spiritual Development* (2015).

## Discussion & Reflection:

- 1.) Most companies have mission statements. They are used to make sure that all employees know the general goal of an organization. Christ's commission is much like this. Try to create a helpful way to remember this statement to guide you in the following weeks.
- 2.) Taking care of their witness was something people truly focused on in the early days of the Pentecostal movement. If our witness consists of our whole lives, what are some things we may want to avoid in order to keep that witness pure?
- 3.) We've mentioned testimony several times this past year. It has become something very important as the cultural shift of our society has focused so strongly on narrative. What are some stories or testimonies that have been impactful to you in your faith development?