3-29-20 Sharing Our Stories Rev. Amy Haines

Mt 4:18-22; 5:13-16 Lent Walking with Jesus

Online Worship

This week in Springboro, three more restaurants temporarily closed, another added dinner delivery, and a new pizza place opened. Everyday online I see our neighbors asking for food recommendations in order to eat local that night.

On Facebook this week memes have been shared to offer encouragement or simply a laugh.

I’ve personally been tagged in ones that offer a dunk tank for baptisms and a way to enthusiastically greet everyone our first Sunday back.

These are not ways to make light of the struggle we are in. Rather, they are ways to be together in the struggle.

We can take virtual tours of museums we will never visit, or find the latest tragic news from Italy, or worship together online, all through a few clicks on the internet. We live in such a wired world today that sharing our recommendations, thoughts and experiences on anything and everything can happen in seconds. We can also consider the advice of other ordinary people online, not only with where we eat or where we visit, but also with what we desire to buy and who we will trust for a doctor.

When was the last time you chose to visit somewhere without online research? When choosing a place to eat how often do you look up Google reviews?

In spite of all the slick advertising that surrounds us in our world today, the most powerful and effective form of advertising has returned to word-of-mouth.

There is something satisfying about sharing with someone else what we enjoy or find meaningful. There is contentment in following the recommendation of others and enjoying it just as much as they said we would.

This is true in so many areas of our lives. Except the one that really matters.

Why do we find it so hard to share our faith? Why do we struggle so much to even admit where we worship? Why are we slow to confess the truth that we are a follower of Jesus?

Beloved of God, we have good news to share! When we talk about our faith, when we share our experiences of God’s love, when we talk about what it means to be part of a church community, when we get excited about new insights into God’s word or the impact faith has in our lives, our faith deepens and our spiritual passion grows.

 -adapted from Adam Hamilton, “The Walk” Chapter 5: Share p.114

And yet, how hesitant do we find ourselves to share our faith with others, especially those closest to us? Are we afraid they will ask us questions we cannot answer? That happens to me all of the time! Are we afraid they will judge us on the actions of others? Most likely that will happen. Are we afraid they will ask us about our faith journeys? Give thanks if they do!

None of us have all the answers, and none of us live perfect lives. Yet we are all still called to share our stories of faith in word and action in such a way that Jesus is still seen through us.

Sharing our faith is the final holy habit we will reflect on during this season of the church year we call Lent. Throughout this long month of March, we have been reflecting on essential spiritual practices, or as I like to call them, holy habits, that strengthen our walk with Jesus

when they become part of our daily rhythm. For when we strengthen our walk with Jesus,

we deepen our faith, which deepens how we live with God and for God.

Previously in Lent, we have reflected on the holy habits of worship, prayer, and the study of scripture which ground us to live by faith rather than fear. Then, when we grow in our walk with Jesus, we live out our faith through the holy habits of service, giving and sharing.

The call to this final holy habit actually began early in Jesus’ ministry. For Jesus never intended to minister alone. He first called four ordinary men, two sets of brothers, and invited them to fish for people. He invited them to follow in order to learn to share their stories of what they would see and experience of Jesus’ teachings and miracles and care for the lonely and outcast.

After his death and resurrection, Jesus again commissioned his followers to go and make disciples of all nations, to share their stories of a crucified and risen Savior and Lord and invite others to believe in Jesus.

Now, Jesus still reaches out to us today, inviting us to share what we have seen, to witness to what we know is true, of God’s love and hope and compassion and grace.

Yes, to share our faith stories can be daunting, whether we share them in word or action. Yes, sometimes our faith stories include two steps forward and one step back, for none of us are perfect. Yes, we will not always agree with the witness of other Christians, just as they will not always agree with our witness. I learned a long time ago not to argue with those who do not believe in women preachers.

Sometimes, people are turned away from following Jesus because of the negative witness of Christians. Yet the majority of people who choose to follow Jesus still do so because of the positive witness of Christians with whom they trust, experience love, and see a compelling example of what it means to be a Christian.

 -adapted from Adam Hamilton, “The Walk” Chapter 5: Share p.118

Think about who has been or is still a positive witness to you. Who first brought you or invited you to church? Who shared with you the love of Jesus? Who invited you to walk with Jesus?

Who are your mentors, modeling a daily rhythm of walking with Jesus and growing in faith?

Maybe those who shared the faith with you were grandparents or neighbors, coworkers or friends, children or church members.

Give thanks for them today! Name them by name right now. Go ahead, say their names aloud.

Now, if they are still living, sit down later today and send them a quick text or note thanking them for witnessing to you in word or in action.

Think back on all those who have gone before us, from our biblical faith ancestors to our current mentors in faith, and what they might teach us today about living by faith, not fear,

and trusting God in all circumstances.

How have our personal mentors taught us to treat others? How have they taught us to care for one another instead of thinking selfishly? How have they modeled faithful relationships?

How have they taught us to be honest with our emotions like David in the psalms?

Consider our biblical mentors. Paul found himself in prison. Daniel was thrown into a lion’s den.

Esther had to speak up to save her people. The Israelites had to be patient in order to receive daily bread for 40 years. Their stories of faith and trust, of hope and conviction, encourage us to live by faith through whatever we face in our lives.

Those first disciples invited to fish for people not only saw the miracles of Jesus, they also agonizingly watched his death. They confessed their own betrayal, and were also commissioned to proclaim the good news of a Savior who died and rose again to share the depth of God’s love and forgiveness and redeeming grace.

How do we share this same good news with others, through what we say as well as what we do? How do we shine the light of Christ throughout our lives, as individual Christians as well as the church community? How do we be the church outside the walls of this building, for such a time as this?

Jesus doesn’t want us to hide in fear, or refuse to share our story because someone may scoff at us or not believe us. Instead, Jesus invites us to shine like a city on a hill, offering our good works not for our pleasure, but for the glory of God.

So consider how to live by the holy habit of sharing faith through word and action this week.

How can you share your faith on social media this week?

\*invite someone to worship online with you

\*share what you are thankful to God for this day

\*offer a virtual hug to someone struggling with the physical distance

\*be mindful of your responses to others, to be positive rather than judgmental, gracious rather than rude

I was brought to tears on Friday when one of our young men simply shared his faith and hope that we will get through this together by reciting the Lord’s Prayer on social media.

How can you share your faith in action this week?

\*Consider ways to serve or give or be a non-anxious presence to another

\*Consider ways to connect with others via text or phone call or card

How can you share your story of faith with others this week?

I’m not asking you for a 45-minute timeline of your faith journey, but a three-minute or less summary of why you walk with Jesus.

\*Who is Jesus to you?

\*What difference does faith make in your life?

\*How does walking with Jesus give you hope and strength in times of struggle, grief or fear?

Especially in times of uncertainty, we need to be able to share what grounds us and sustains us in faith.

Parents, I invite you today to share your story of faith with your children.

Widows, I invite you to call each other up and encourage one another by sharing your stories of faith.

Youth, I invite you to call one of our church elders this week and ask them to share their story of faith.

Can we share with one another how walking with Jesus makes a difference in our lives?

We each have a story to share. A story of Jesus’ love. A story of God’s presence. A story of a faith journey, with all of its ups and downs. A story proclaimed in word and action, in love and compassion, in hope and vision.

May our personal stories of faith reflect our common story of faith that proclaims the ongoing story of God with us.

HYMNS on this day:

UMH #77 How Great Thou Art

UMH #430 O Master Let Me Walk with Thee