

## Witness in the Midst of Injustice

October 14, 2018  
Wittenberg Lutheran Center

One of our main themes this year at Wittenberg is Witness. Our calling as Christians is to be Christ's Witnesses to the world...living out our faith. The idea is that, by our lives as well as by what we say, our culture and society may come to see our Savior and hear His Good News. This Gospel that we preach is just as important as the Gospel that we exhibit. Our behavior and our creed should be in harmony with all that has been handed down to us, all that Christ taught and declared while living as one of us here on earth. We were created in the image of God, and we are to reflect the image of His Son. Whose image do you bear? Whose fruit do you bear? Whose witness do you bear? The world around us can sometimes seem like a very dark, cruel place. Our calling is to bear witness and to be "Glow-in-the-dark Christians", a light shining in the gloom. Often, that gloom takes the form of injustice, and our witness faces a real challenge.

We bear witness by our actions. One of my seminary professors, Dr. Joel Gibbs once said: "If you're perceived to be mean and stupid, be sure to prove them wrong!" Don't give them a reason to be mean to you. Sometimes you may have to turn the other cheek, or refrain from posting a toxic response on social media. And as another very wise woman in the Church also said, "make them work hard to be mean to you." We bear witness by what we don't say, too. Ecclesiastes says "*there is a time for silence and a time to speak*". Now, sometimes you have to speak up. To remain silent in the face of evil is just as bad as participating in that evil. It's actually a type of false-witness, and it carries a heavy consequence. Scripture tells us [Lev. 5:1], "*If anyone sins in that he [is called] to testify, and though he is a witness, whether he has seen or come to know the matter, yet does not speak, he shall bear his iniquity.*" Think of a mandated reporter of child abuse.

## Witness in the Midst of Injustice

Witnessing to the truth is a heavy matter. It can keep a people from falling away. 2,800 years ago, the northern kingdom of Israel had forsaken their Lord. One of the symptoms of disobedience in ancient Israel as it relates to God's covenant, is with regard to truth and justice in the public square. There was corruption within its legal processes. In those days, there was a sort of "peoples' court"; the elders in a given city acted as the community's judges in civil matters. Their system reflected a fair cross-section of the community's concept of right and wrong. This "court" heard the cases brought before them at the town's gate. There they listened to testimony. They acknowledged the witnesses who presented each case. This council of citizen judges took special care when cases involved the fatherless, the widow, and the alien. They recognized that the Lord defends such disenfranchised people without partiality. This they did, as it had been since the time of Moses, "*acquitting the innocent and condemning the guilty*" [Deut. 25:1].

In our text [Amos 5:6-7, 10-17], Amos calls us to live our faith as we work and do business in our daily life. It involves living out what we have been made to be by God Himself. He invites us to worship the Lord our God at all times and in all places in spirit and in truth. He demands that we serve no other gods. He looks for fruit of faith. He warns especially against the temptations that come with power and wealth. God's law requires equity and justice – fairness in all matters of our life. In prosperous times, the lure of luxury and great possessions can tempt us to exploit those who are weaker and poorer than ourselves. In times of liberty, there is a temptation to exercise our freedoms at the expense of others. We may seek to bend the rules in our favor. We may turn our eyes away, blind to injustice and indifferent to other serious moral issues. In short, we seek evil instead of good.

## Witness in the Midst of Injustice

When we hear such exhortations, we often hear judgment. That's because we're typically guilty of many of the same things ancient Israel was doing in Amos' time. Christians hear God's law and see in it a reflection of our own failures. That's what God's law does. Therefore, we mustn't take the grace of God for granted. We in His Church are the new Israel, His chosen ones. And in harmony with the whole history of God's chosen people, we're reminded [1 Cor. 10:11-12] that the words of prophets such as Amos "*were written down as warnings to us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. So if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!*" I think that's the point of all our Scripture readings for today. Christ, the fulfillment of the ages has come, and we're just as capable of falling flat on our faces now as ever.

To say with our mouths, "We are God's children" is a false and empty claim if our hearts don't also love His will. But if a few among our people might still hate evil and love good, and bear witness to Christ our Savior, and bear the fruit of our repentance by standing up to the rising tide of injustice around us, such a remnant just might provoke God to have mercy on our land. It might just keep us from becoming "*hardened by the deceitfulness of sin*". Among our many blessings, God has given us tremendous bounty... do we use it to get bigger and fatter and more powerful, or do we use it to help those who have fewer advantages than us? If Jesus were to return to judge the world today, would He see that we are bearing the fruit of repentance? Would He see that we're bearing witness to His mercy and grace? Would he see us bearing His image to those around us? The law of God can cause us to look at ourselves in shame.

Nevertheless, "*Seek the Lord and live*", says the prophet! The Lord, the God of hosts, is with us, just as He has said! Look in faith to the witness of the apostles

## Witness in the Midst of Injustice

and see the hand of God in the work of His Son, Jesus! Look in faith to God's loving gift of His law and see in it His divine guidance given to us to direct our path and steer us away from sin. Look and see how God's righteous justice has been satisfied by the perfect life and sacrificial death of His own Son. Recognize that God distinguishes and separates good from evil. "*Seek good, not evil, that you may live!*" The Lord does not forget His mercy. "*Seek Me and live*", says the Lord! The life here offered is the coming of our resurrected Savior, the Messiah, the Good Shepherd. Through faith in Jesus, the very Son of God, and by way of trust in His Word, we receive the spiritual life which leads to eternal life and endures forever.

Proverbs 14:34 says, "*Righteousness exalts a nation; but sin is a disgrace to any people.*" Our government and judicial process has historically been concerned with administering our laws and judging them fairly. Our constitution lays out the basic principles of fairness that is written on the hearts of all men. A person with a grievance has a right to be heard. A person who is accused is presumed innocent until the weight of evidence and the testimony of credible eye-witnesses proves his guilt beyond any reasonable doubt. Trials are conducted in an orderly way and protocols are in place to insure fairness in every step. Whether you are rich or poor, male or female, gives no advantage. And in this process, bribery of any kind is forbidden. These are all gifts of God, administered to us through His appointed rulers in the halls of government, and we thank God for the justice this good government ensures.

As Christians, we hold our citizenship in the eternal kingdom of Christ Jesus. And while we enjoy such citizenship, we temporarily hold a dual-citizenship here. We're subjects to earthly governments. When our nation upholds and protects

## Witness in the Midst of Injustice

peoples' rights, it upholds and protects our rights. As the nation prospers, we too prosper. That's why we lift up our governing institutions in prayer as we do. These are the tools of God for establishing order and maintaining civil justice in the land. Of course we pray for them; it's for our own good. At the beginning of this service, we prayed in our Introit, "*It is well with the man... who conducts his affairs with justice.*" Such is the loving will of God. So when we're confronted with injustice, our witness is of extreme importance. Transformed by the Holy Spirit, we now bear the image of Jesus. Our witness is our testimony of Christ the Lord, Who is coming one day in glory, to judge both the living and the dead, Whose kingdom has no end. Persevere in that witness, and GLOW IN THE DARK! Depart in His peace, bearing His name. Amen.

+ + + + + + + + + + + +

And the promise of our Lord strengthen and preserve you until His coming.  
Amen.