

Dear Fellow Christians who follow Christ,

There is an old story told by preachers about a church that had a vacancy. It had been vacant for some time. Every time a candidate was discussed, the congregation found fault and did not want to call the man. One final candidate was presented. They were told, “if you don’t want this man, we don’t have anyone who can fill your pulpit.”

To the horror of the congregation, they learned that the candidate had previously been an unbeliever and anti-Christian. He had become a Christian and a minister. However, the congregations he started had been small and often troubled. He had also been kicked out of various cities because of his ministry. He had also been thrown in jail more than once.

The congregation rejected the candidate outright. They were then told, *“The candidate described was the Apostle Paul. He was chosen and called by Christ himself.”* The story goes that the congregation was humbled and agreed to look again at the list of candidates that had been proposed.

The Apostle Paul had people in his congregations who doubted him and criticized him. This is a valuable thing for any faithful pastor to remember. St. Paul defends his ministry in 2 Corinthians and he makes a valuable point about ministry and ministers. What makes ministry effective and blessed is Christ and his word. When a minister or a Christian testifies about Christ using God’s word, that is powerful testimony. We consider the apostle’s words and remember we too can give **Powerful Testimony About Christ!**

### **1. Testimony that is needed** vs. 12-13

Stories can be used by preachers to grab people’s attention. However, powerful testimony happens when people see and understand their need for Christ.

A. In 2 Corinthians 2:12, St. Paul mentions that there was “an open door” for him in Troas.

1. God the Holy Spirit led people who heard Paul preach to realize that they had a need. Historians tells us that there was a lot of immoral living in the city of Corinth. St. Paul reminds them that while they lived that way once, but he goes on, **“you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified**

**in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.”** (1 Cor. 6:11) We don't know much about the people of Troas, but reasonable to believe that the sins that were in Corinth and in our world today, were a problem in Troas. The very message that had helped the Corinthians would also help the people of Troas.

B. It wasn't only the people of Troas that needed God's word. It was Paul himself. He had an opportunity in Troas, but he was distracted. He was concerned and worried about the situation in the Corinthian church and he moved on to Macedonia in the hopes of hearing news from Titus about their situation. St. Paul needed encouragement. Part that encouragement involved Paul hearing that he had been forgiven and called to his ministry. Christ would not abandon him. Paul had his own need for powerful testimony.

C. What was true for Paul is true for ministers today. It is very easy for pastors to get caught up in the running of the church, their families, etc. A pastor who spends his time surrounded by people can end up feeling lonely and empty. The biggest culprit is that the pastor does not get enough time to spend in meaningful meditation on God's word. Pastors today need time to hear that their biggest problem is not busyness, but sin. It is in the word, the testimony about Christ, that pastors find peace in the forgiveness sins.

The testimony about Christ is needed by all and it is powerful.

## **2. Testimony that brings the aroma of victory (in Christ). vs. 14-17**

St. Paul continues in verse 14 to tell us about the testimony. This testimony about Christ brings the aroma of victory.

A. To help us understand, the apostle uses a picture that his world was familiar with, the triumphal procession.

1. The Roman conquerors loved their parades. One historian explains it this way, *“In Roman triumphs...garlands of flowers were prepared to decorate every shrine and image. Incense smoked on every altar.” Victorious Roman soldiers enjoyed those sweet smells, but the same sweet odors told Roman captives being dragged through the streets that they were soon to die. In the same way, Jesus' resurrection attracts believers, but repels unbelievers.”* (Sermon Helps WELS Easter 3 B)

2. Paul was both a captive of who had been won by Christ and a minister for Christ. As a servant of Jesus, he spread the aroma or news of the risen Christ everywhere.

B. The message of Jesus' Resurrection and Ascension has an aroma or smell to it.

1. The aroma is the news that we are all sinners and we deserve to be condemned by God for all eternity. However, Christ has paid for our sins in full as demonstrated by his resurrection from the dead. As Peter said in the first reading today, Christ is the only name given under heaven by which we must be saved.

2. St. Paul goes on to say that for some this is the smell of life. That would be for those who see Jesus by faith as their Savior. For those who don't believe it is the smell of death. This is why unbelievers can get so angry when they hear the message of the risen Christ. *"What you mean I am not going to heaven unless I believe and am saved? Who are you to tell me I am not good enough?"* It was this angry thinking that put God's Son to death.

C. Since testifying about Christ leads to eternal life or eternal death, the apostle says, ***17 Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, as those sent from God.*** St. Paul was serious about his ministry.

In the ministry and in the congregation, we do not do things because of profit or advantage, or because it is easy. We preach, make decisions, do the work because we sincerely carry out a ministry that means eternal life or death for people. We do everything to hold up the cross of Christ.

### **3. Testimony that impacts lives. vs. 3:1-3**

Many lives have been impacted by the aroma of Christ. In the book *"Then Sings My Soul"* by Robert J. Morgan, we are told that John Newton, famous preacher and hymn writer, was taught about Christ by his mother. When she died he became entrenched in a sinful life. He deserted from the British Navy, became involved in the slave trade and contemplated suicide. He repented and trusted again in the Lord after a life-threatening storm overwhelmed his ship at sea. He is most famous in our circles for writing the hymn we call, *"Amazing Grace."*

A. St. Paul had come to Corinth and testified to Christ. This had changed the life of the Corinthians for the better. However, false teachers had come into their midst with letter's recommendation. Paul's ministry was being brought into question. He writes that the Corinthians themselves were his letter of recommendation. They had gone from immoral, worldly lives to moral,

Christian lives. They weren't perfect, but there had been a dramatic change.

We don't typically use personal testimony in our services unless it is a visiting missionary. However, there are some amazing stories of God impacting the lives of our members and friends of the congregation. We typically hear those in Bible class or private conversations. Maybe we are reluctant, because we don't want to make it about us. I want to encourage you to share stories of how Christ has impacted your life. Our testimony is in the end testimony about him. He is the one who has saved us.

#### **4. Testimony made competent by God.** vs. 4-6

In the end of this section St. Paul says that he has a very competent ministry. The reason is that his testimony is made competent by God. He says, *"He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."*

What these false teachers were doing was bring the letter of the law. They telling people, "Do this and you will be saved." It was salvation by the law.

St. Paul reminds that his ministry was not a ministry of the law, but the Gospel which the Holy Spirit works through. He held up Jesus and his death and resurrection to the Corinthians. The forgiveness of sins means life. The Holy Spirit had opened their eyes to see that salvation was through the gift of forgiveness in Christ. This Gospel preaching made for a competent minister.

I can tell you that the WELS Pastor and Teacher training system sees to it that every worker knows how to explain the Law and Gospel. They come out into our churches knowing that they preach the Word and testify to Christ. Paul assures you and me that this is a powerful message.

Conclusion: People comment when they get back here after summer.

*"Pastor, I was traveling and stopped to worship. I heard this great sermon."*

That's good. Once in a while, someone will confide that they heard a sermon that wasn't helpful. Sometimes ministers have an "off day", sometimes their strengths are not in preaching.

Please pray that our pastors and pastors everywhere testify to Christ. The message of Jesus is powerful. A minister who proclaims Christ is a competent minister. Testimony isn't for pastors alone. We can all testify to Jesus in our daily lives. When people see Jesus as Savior, it is the aroma of victory. It changes lives. Testimony for Christ is powerful! Amen.

2 Corinthians 2:12-3:6 (NIV 2011)

12 Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me, 13 I still had no peace of mind, because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said goodbye to them and went on to Macedonia.

14 But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere. 15 For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. 16 To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life. And who is equal to such a task? 17 Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, as those sent from God.

1 Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you? 2 You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone. 3 You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

4 Such confidence we have through Christ before God. 5 Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. 6 He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.