

Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> April 2024. Benefice Holy Communion,  
Ampleforth

If last week's word for the sermon was 'affirmation', this week's is 'witness'.

We hear the word in both readings today from Acts as Peter speaks, "You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this." And the Risen Jesus says in the Gospel, "You are witnesses of these things".

The dictionary defines the word "witness" this way: "One who has seen or heard something" and "One who furnishes evidence." A witness is someone who can say, "I know this is true." In a court of law, a witness swears on a Bible and promises to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Witnesses are committed to tell the truth, and if they are good witnesses, that is all they do. A witness tells nothing less. Christian context, a witness is a person who tells the truth about Jesus Christ, but not only that, but also talks about having a relationship with Him. The disciples testified to the things they knew to be true about Jesus Christ and about the truth of the resurrection, but most of all about knowing Him.

Elsewhere in Acts we read, "We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen." and, "But God raised him from the dead, and for many days he was seen by those who had travelled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people."

So now they're discussing what we mean when we say that we know Jesus Christ personally. You can only have a relationship with someone who is alive. Which brings us

back to the resurrection. Either Jesus is alive, or he isn't. If he's alive today, then you can know him just as you know your parents or your neighbours or your children. You can know him deeply and personally and have a relationship with him because he rose from the dead and is alive today.

You don't have to be a theologian to be a witness for Christ. You don't have to go to Bible College, and you don't have to be a missionary. It doesn't require a college degree or a high IQ. Just tell the truth about Jesus to anyone who is willing to listen. That's where witnessing always begins. If you know Jesus, you can talk about what he has done for you, the beautiful relationship you have with Him as Lord of your life. You can tell how he guides you day by day, how he gives you strength to face your trials and courage to conquer your fears. You can tell how he found you in your loneliness and gave transformed your life. Most of all, you witness to the fact that He rose from the dead, and you have a relationship with Him. He is Risen. Everything comes back to that. That is the truth we all are required to be witnesses to.

So, when Jesus says, "You are witnesses" what should we do?

To understand that perhaps we need to ask a question of ourselves which is, "What is it that God want you to do on earth?" Putting it another way the matter another way what is it that we can do on earth that we can't do in heaven? We can sing on earth, and we can sing in heaven. We can pray on earth, and we can pray in heaven. We can fellowship with other believers on earth, and we will certainly fellowship with them in heaven. The list could be lengthened. But when you think about it, there is one main thing you can do on earth that you will never do in heaven:

You can bring the love of Jesus into someone else's life in compassion and service. Jesus tells us to be His witnesses, to do the telling by our words and actions, to inspire others to seek their own relationship with Him. We can't make them find that relationship, we can only make them see us and think, 'I want that', and invite them on the way - but only the Holy Spirit can make it happen and bring the change of heart and mind so that they discover His love for themselves.

There's a big difference between telling and changing. If you do the telling, the Holy Spirit can do the changing. You can't do his work. The first law of the Spiritual Life always remains: He's God and we're not. So, tell the truth about Jesus, tell how he's changed your life, witness to the truth of his rising from the dead and the living relationship He has with you and His love and pray. Then leave the rest the rest up to Him.

Thanks be to God. Amen.