

I just can't help but tell you this story. Thursday after the seminary concert Jennifer and I dropped off the two men we were housing. We were right before Hefner Road gets to Rockwell Avenue, right after Sterling House where Delberta Brainard lives, right by the larger open field. Two lanes run both ways plus the turn lane in the middle and we were driving in the left lane. I could see a truck in the turn lane. Suddenly Jennifer yells, watch out. I steer around two guys fighting in the middle of the street like they mean it. A lady is trying to pull them apart. I stopped, but Jennifer didn't want me getting out. So we called the police. While she's still on the phone they break it up and walk away.

Those are the facts that I remember. Jennifer might remember other details. If needed we could both testify in court because we were eye witnesses. But I would also have to tell the truth. I would have trouble identifying the two men. I wouldn't know what was said, what started it, where they came from, or where they went. If called upon to testify I would speak the truth, as much as I knew.

One week after Easter we're all witnesses. Not firsthand like Peter or Thomas, but we were there. And in the first lesson we stand with Peter as he's held accountable for simply doing what he was told; being a witness. With a resurrection story like he had, could you keep quiet? A story like that would be better than my two guys fighting in the street. It means so much more for life. This morning we...

Testify to the truth
Wicked people want to stop it
Believing people can't stop it

If someone was spreading a false report about you ruining any chance at promotion you would demand they stop. The religious leaders thought Peter and the apostles were spreading bad information about them. Peter and his buddies seemed to be sharing news that Jesus died and came back to life. They seemed to also be saying that the Law of Moses didn't matter anymore because Jesus fulfilled it. These religious leaders were all about the Law of Moses, and didn't take kindly to someone talking against it.

The apostles were taken to prison, but God didn't let them there long. An angel freed them and gave them instructions to get back to their task without delay. **"At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people."** Talk about confidence in God. Day before they were commanded to stop preaching and teaching. Next day they were preaching and teaching, in the temple courts no less. But they had to; they'd been commanded by God.

Now the religious leaders were doing damage control. The story was that the doors to the prison were still shut, the guards were all standing their posts, but the prisoners were gone. How? When? The religious leaders had no answers but they were desperate the community not find out. None of them stopped to consider who was behind this. Never did they think that God might be getting their attention. Maybe persecuting followers of Christ wasn't God's will. Maybe they hadn't done what God wanted when they crucified Jesus. They never thought these things.

When the truth hurts we'll do almost anything to suppress it. Tiger Woods hid his double life. Lester Hobbs killed himself so the truth about what happened to Aja Johnson might be hidden. The truth is the truth hurts in our lives as well. When the Bible says, **"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"** it hurts us. But examine your life. Are you being petty over some bad relationship? Are you letting greed rule your life because you have too much or too little? Is some past wrong still stewing your anger? Do you think you've hid the sins of your youth or the nastiness in your personality or your constant gossiping? These sins and many more plague you. The truth hurts and you stop at nothing to stop it from spreading.

The good news is God didn't let the wicked stop the truth from spreading. There in the temple courts the apostles could once again proclaim the wonderful news. Jesus Christ is risen today. He lives who once was dead. **"The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead—whom you killed by hanging him on a tree."** Wicked people tried to silence the Lamb of God. But no amount of wickedness could keep this Savior down. He's the truth that saves you. First he shed blood for sinners like you and me. Now he lives again. It's a truth that injures the wicked that reject it because they'll be judged by it. But it saves those who believe it, so believe it.

I suppose the two individuals who were fighting on Thursday night wouldn't want me spreading the story around, especially if I could identify them. If they remain faceless and nameless the police can't hold them accountable. The apostles were busy pointing out to people the grace of God and the religious leaders felt the heat. They thought getting rid of Jesus got rid of their problems. But God raised him from the dead and made that the truth to testify to. People who believe that message haven't stopped telling that wonderful story.

When arrested the second time the apostles were treated a lot nicer. They weren't taken by force like the first time, they were questioned unlike the first time, and they were allowed time to respond not like the first time. The religious leaders even go on the defense a little, **"We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name, yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood."** Notice the high priest couldn't even bring himself to say the man's name. He despised Jesus so much that he spit on Jesus' holy name by not honoring him by using his name.

But nothing could keep these apostles from speaking the name of Jesus. They'd seen incredible things. They were doing incredible things, signs and miracles. **"We must obey God rather than men."** It was something they were commanded to do. And they were doing it with the help of the Holy Spirit. People were hearing their message and believing in Christ. And the more the apostles saw the results of their sharing the good news of a Savior who lives the more they were encouraged to share the message.

In the weeks before Easter members of this congregation, volunteers with a heart for sharing Jesus, passed out roughly 1600 postcards. These invitations were to come to our church and hear the gospel message that Jesus lives. It was a huge commitment of time, energy, and resources. Our results; one visitor. Are 1600 postcards for one visitor defeat? For me, for those that passed out the cards, and I hope for all of you that's success. Any person who hears the gospel is a success.

Where there's one, there's more. We've got momentum slowly building. The snowball is starting small but we can make it grow bigger. We must keep it going both as a congregation and as individuals. We've received a message, we know it, we cherish it. Now we can share it. **"God exalted him [that is Jesus] to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel."** That's our message. A man who looked the part of a criminal being crucified was made by God the author of our faith. Jesus' death and resurrection are something to believe and trust in. Jesus' death and resurrection are the very things that earned for us repentance. The ability to not just say we're sorry for our sins, but actually trust in Jesus to forgive them. That's only a work God can do and he does through Christ. Forgiveness of sins, we've got it through Christ. You've been made a believer who can't stop testifying to the truth.

There were a couple other cars that stopped on Thursday night. They would be witnesses too. Where we couldn't remember they could fill in the details. This morning you are not alone as a witness. Look around; listen because we're all testifying to the same truth. **"We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit."** The Holy Spirit testifies too. When you speak to someone and forget the details he works through you to share what can bring about faith in someone else. Wicked men tried to stop the testimony of the truth but believers kept it going through the strength of the Holy Spirit. By God's grace you're part of that chain of witnesses. You too can testify to the truth Christ is risen, he is risen indeed!