

Ok I'm going to ask you a question and then on the count of 3 I want you to shout out your answer. What is your favorite restaurant here in Kingman? Ready, set, go! Let me congratulate you. You just showed that you are able to witness or testify about something you love.

An interesting thing happens when we talk about something we love, enjoy, or find meaningful. Our positive feelings towards that person, place or thing will increase.

The same is true of our faith. As we talk about our faith, our experiences of God's love, of Christ presence in our lives, of being a part of a church, of new insights into faith, our faith in Christ deepens and becomes more real to us. By giving away our faith, by sharing it with others, our faith and spiritual passion will grow.

I remember when I was a lay person at Santa Cruz Valley in Sahuarita. Anytime I received thanks for helping with some aspect of ministry, teaching Sunday School, being the liturgist, helping with the bookkeeping, singing with the praise team, I couldn't help but think. "But I get so much out of doing this."

Even today as I preach or teach, my faith becomes more real and my knowledge of and desire for God increases through the act of sharing my faith with others.

There was a point in John Wesley's ministry when he felt as if his faith was faltering. He asked his friend and Moravian preacher Peter Bohler if he should stop preaching until he had more faith. Bohler's response? "Preach faith till you have it; and then, because you have it, you will preach faith." This wasn't suggesting that John preach insincerely. Bohler was saying that the very act of talking about what little faith Wesley felt he had would help increase his faith.

Today we look at our fifth essential spiritual practice, sharing. Testifying, bearing witness to our faith will deepen our love for and our faith in God. But this isn't just a nice to do practice. It is a missional imperative from Jesus. By this spiritual practice others come to see and follow Christ's light.

Today it is so easy to share thoughts, feelings, reflections, and recommendations about...anything. A click of a button allows us to use places like Yelp, Google, or Amazon to write reviews. Who uses these sites to make decisions on purchases, new restaurants, movies or tv shows. Word of mouth is a powerful and effective form of advertising.

Since we know how to use these places to write reviews, it should be easy to share our faith. But it isn't. Why is that? Maybe because we know too many who are skeptical of faith, who dismiss being involved in "organized religion".

And who can blame them? Think about the bad reviews that Christians and churches receive. Hypocritical, judgmental, irrelevant, mean-spirited, anti-intellectual.

Reviews that are far from Jesus, the gospel he preached, or the church he intended. Let me add this. These reviews don't reflect most Christians and most churches. But sadly, most of us know someone who faced an unfortunate church experience.

A woman announced to her pastor that she no longer wanted to call herself a Christian. She was approached by a man who shared his faith, but then shared views she found offensive and contrary to what Jesus taught. She said. "I don't want to be associated with the faith this man was professing." Instead of calling herself a Christian, she would call herself a follower of Jesus.

The pastor paused after all of this. Then he pointed out, "If people like you stop calling yourselves Christians, how will anyone know that there is any other kind of Christians than the kind that man reflected."

Did you know that none of us are perfect in how we live out our faith. That isn't enough to discount our call to live and share our faith. Most people who choose to follow Jesus do so because of the positive witness of other Christians. Christians who demonstrate love and offer a compelling example of what it means to be a Christian.

The number one religion in the US right now is claimed by those who are “spiritual but not religious”. The nones. Jesus dealt with his fair share of Nones. Those who had spiritual yearnings but who were rejected by organized religion. Jesus was drawn to these people like a moth to a flame.

The first disciples Jesus called were fishermen. He called them to be fishers of men. Later he tells the disciples to send out workers into the harvest field. He was known as the friend of sinners, tax collectors, the broken, the sick, and the demon possessed.

Look at Zacchaeus the tax collector. So short he had to climb a tree to get a glimpse of Jesus. Jesus seeks him out, invites himself over for dinner, and helps Zacchaeus find his way back to God. Jesus lived his mission as he stated in Luke 19:10, “To seek out and save the lost”.

As followers of Jesus, as Christians, shouldn't this be our mission too? We are commissioned to do just that. In verse 8 of our passage today Jesus says. “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

How did you come to faith? For me it started with my grandma and grandpa, Rudy and Esther Sandegren. My mom and I lived with them for a time after I was born. They were devout members of the First Swedish Lutheran Church in Des Moines, IA. Regular church and Sunday school attendance was a must. We started each day with a devotion and ended each day saying the Lord's Prayer. It was quite common to hear hymns blasting from the stereo. When the Roll is Called Up Yonder is burnished into my brain forever. I can still remember my grandma beaming whenever she would take me to a woman's fellowship.

I also have faith because of my mom and dad. I know I gave my mom more than a few gray hairs and I can't even imagine how many times she prayed Psalm 46 over me. She was invested in making sure I had a Christian education beginning with a Christian Preschool, followed by attending a Lutheran School for elementary and jr. high school. She and my dad also made sure

I had the opportunity to attend Oral Roberts University so I would have a Christian college experience.

Who shared their faith with you? Think about that for a moment. Maybe even write that name down in your bulletin. If that person is still alive, how about writing them a note, so they know the difference they made?

Who are the ones that will say you played a key part in their becoming a follower of Christ? Did you invite them to church, did you share your faith with them. Did you listen and pray with them? Did you teach them in Sunday School, Bible study, or Vacation Bible School. Did you demonstrate such authenticity and love that they considered following Christ?

It's never too late to be more intentional about inviting or sharing your faith or bearing witness to what being a Christian means to you.

There are some easy ways to do this. Can you check in on Facebook at church? What about sharing photos of serving with a team from your church, especially in telling about the work being done to help the community.

If you think about those most responsible for you being a Christian today, many have the same examples I do. Parents and Grandparents. Church family, pray for your kids and grandkids every day. When you are with them, be intentional about sharing your faith with them. Let them see you pray. Buy them books that contain stories from the bible. Teach them The Lord's Prayer and when you do, help them through those big words like hallowed, kingdom, trespasses, and temptation.

I know it's discouraging when our kids as adults lose interest in church. Faith takes a backseat in their lives. My son is one of these. Continue to pray for them daily. Try not to force faith on them. Show them grace and steadfast love.

There was a lady by the name of Gina. She attended church when she was young, but dropped out when she went off to college. It wasn't until she was in her 50s that she began attending

church again. When asked why she returned, here's what she said. It was because of a letter from her mother when she was a young adult. As her mother was battling cancer, she wrote this to Gina. "Gina, you have everything a person could ever hope for – a caring husband, wonderful children, and now a grandchild, financial success, a beautiful home. Yet the one thing that is most important in life, you are lacking. I long and pray for you to find a church and to walk with Christ."

"When I receive this letter, it really made me angry," Gina said. "I was a grandmother by this time and my mother was still trying to tell me what to do." Gina didn't throw away the letter. And when her mother died a few months later she read it again.

Years later, Gina received a mailer from a church and decided to pay a visit. For the first time since she was a teenager, Gina chose to become a follower of Christ and she's been doing so ever since. This is the power of a parent's witness even if it takes years for a child to return to faith. Have you shared with your children or grandchildren the importance of your faith. Maybe what you share will be read again and again.

What is St. John's known for in the community? Are we more than just a building people drive past? How often do the spiritual but not religious people in Kingman drive past St. John's without even noticing it?

St. John's is a beautiful campus. Our sanctuary is breathtaking. When you tell people that you go to St. John's, what reaction do you get? And now for the real question. What would you want them to say?

Would it surprise you to know that the spiritual but not religious people don't care as much about the things that we do? They aren't interested in worship styles, theological distinctives, or the programs we have.

What makes an unchurched person take notice of a church? When those inside genuinely care about them and are actively engaged in making a positive impact on the community. They notice a church that serves selflessly, gives generously, and loves radically.

Maybe that's what Jesus was thinking when he said in Matthew 5:16: "Let your light shine before people, so they can see the good things you do and praise your Father who is in heaven."

I want you to picture a horizontal line. This line represents the world as it is. Next picture another line coming out of the horizontal line at a 45% angle. This line represents the world as it should be. Closing this gap. That is our mission. To look at our community and ask what it would look like if we regularly prayed that God's kingdom would come, and that God's will would be done.

Yes, there may be larger churches, yes, we live in a community with somewhere around 60 churches. But I guarantee you church family. St. John's can close gaps in our community in a way that will make others notice.

Sharing your faith. However, can you make that happen. Our most powerful sermon typically comes from what we preach with our actions. As St. Francis of Assisi said. "Preach the gospel at all times. When necessary, use words."

One last time, let's look at our hands. Clench your dominant hand. This represents the witness of our church. The mission to be the light that shines in our community. The unclenched hand represents your personal practice and the goal of sharing your faith with 5 people this year. And to be clear, these are 5 people who don't attend a church. Those who are spiritual but not religious. Someone who knows you, someone you have some influence with. Someone who's life would be positively impacted if they followed Christ.

Five fingers, five people, one year. Now let me offer you a way to go fishing and reflect the light. Jesus loves me; This I know, for the Bible tells me so.

Let us pray...you can join me if you like.

Jesus loves me...