

Libbie, Taylor, Sadie, you are witnesses. A witness is someone whose eyes have been opened to recognize and see Jesus. You have been taught during four years of instruction, from the Bible, from Martin Luther's Small Catechism and from The Lutheran Hymnal concerning the way, the truth and the life that is Jesus Christ. You have been taught the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the truth concerning the Sacraments of Baptism, Confession and Altar. You have been taught the importance of prayer, praise and thanksgiving, and how to live the Christian life in an unchristian world. Your eyes have been opened to the truth of Jesus Christ, concerning who He is and what He has done. You have been built up and strengthened in the one true faith.

To be a witness, is more than just head knowledge. It is more than just learning something because pastor taught it to you. It is more than just memorizing something because Pastor made you. To be a witness, is like the shepherds at the birth of Jesus. They are not just content to hear the message the angel proclaimed, they are determined to "see the thing that has happened" and so they go to Bethlehem and see. To be a witness is to be like Simeon, who rejoiced when his eyes saw for the first time the baby Jesus in the temple, saying, "this is the Light to lighten the Gentiles and the Glory of the people of Israel." To be a witness, is to be like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, on that first Easter Sunday, whose eyes were opened in the breaking of bread, in the Lord's Supper, to see that this indeed was the Risen Lord, Jesus Christ. Jesus said to them, "You are eyewitnesses of these things." To be a witness is more than just seeing, you are not just hearing, you are not just spectators, you are actually being made participants in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. You are participants in a loving relationship with the one true God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

Libbie, Taylor, Sadie, to be a witness, is not something you do from time to time, it is an identity, it is who you are, it is continuous. You became a witness, concerning the truth of Jesus, when you were baptized; when you were adopted to be a child of God, when you received the Holy Ghost and the gift of faith. To be a witness means you have a relationship with Jesus Christ, you are His brothers and sisters, you are children of the heavenly Father, you are heirs of heaven, you members of the family of God. To be a witness means more than just a spectator, you are participants in an intimate, personal, loving relationship. And how you live, now that you have been taught, as you make your bold confession concerning Jesus Christ and the one true faith, will be shaped by the reality that Jesus is with you always unto the end of the age. Jesus will never leave you or forsake you. He is always speaking to you, leading and guiding you unto the way of peace, and salvation.

In our Scripture reading this evening, we hear about another witness, Saint John, who stood under the cross, as his friend Jesus hung there dying. As John stood under the cross, looking up, taking in the whole experience of Good Friday, one of the soldiers pierced the side of the dead Savior. Saint John, the witness, saw blood and water come from the wound with great force.

Saint John saw a sign in that event, something that had a deeper meaning than just blood and water. For you see, in that blood and water that came forth with a great gush was a stream of life. That stream of life, which came from the dead Savior's side, comes again to you and to me with water in Baptism and blood in the chalice on the altar. The water of Baptism and the blood of Communion are connected to Jesus' words as He hung dying on the cross: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" "Today you will be with Me in paradise" "My God, my God, why has Thou forsaken Me" "It is finished" "I thirst" "Father, into Thy hands I commend

My Spirit". These words of Jesus are words of compassion and understanding and love for you. These words of Jesus are words that create a close and personal relationship with you. The words of Jesus, which is the power of the Holy Ghost, the Comforter and the Helper, have one purpose, to return you again and again to Jesus. Like the words of Jesus, His water and His blood give you forgiveness, they give you life, they assure you of your eternal salvation in heaven.

Libbie, Taylor, Sadie, Saint John writes about the sight that he experienced as he stood below Jesus' cross. These words should remind you that Jesus has come to be with you always in the waters of Holy Baptism. In that life giving water Jesus makes you a witness, one of His disciples, teaching you to obey everything He has commanded, and that He is with you always. As baptized Christians, He has also come to be with you in Communion. On Palm Sunday, you will be an invited guest, to a great banquet, the Lord's Supper. Remember, you can't eat your Lord's body and drink your Lord's blood once, as with Baptism, and then go on your way; that is not enough. The Lord's Supper is something to participate in regularly, often, every Lord's Day; remember, you are the honored guests and Jesus wants you to come. It is through that eating and drinking that you will be strengthened and encouraged as you become an adult and deal with adult situations and make adult decisions.

Through Baptism you are adopted into the body of Christ, you are together as one flesh with Jesus and with each other and with me and with all the baptized faithful. In Baptism and in Communion the stream of life, which poured out of Jesus' side, will pulsate in your veins, it will run throughout your bodies and you will have strength and hope; the devil will have no power over you. In Communion you will feed on the source of life and forgiveness, your cup will run over, goodness and mercy will follow you all the days of your life. When you kneel at the altar

for the first time, you will participate in the suffering of the cross and glories of heaven at the same time. At that time you will taste and see that the Lord is good, that He never leaves you or forsakes you and you will want to be here every time it is offered.

John explains that there are three witnesses that point you to Jesus and His abundant grace, mercy and peace for you and for all sinners: the Spirit, the water and the blood. Be thankful for all three of these witnesses of Jesus Christ. It is not enough that you have one or two of these witnesses. Rather, it is wonderful, it is a blessing, that you have the Holy Spirit who speaks to you in the preaching and teaching of God's Holy Word. That makes remembering you Baptism all the more precious. And it is good right and salutary that you will have Holy Communion to strengthen you in the faith that I have taught you. You are indeed witnesses of Jesus Christ. Amen.