

Sermon for Sunday, August 5, 1973 by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor  
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NO SILENT SAINTS

St. Luke 24:36-47

Text: "You are witnesses of these things." St. Luke 24:28

Early Wednesday morning our phone rang. Elizabeth answered and then handed it to me. "It's for you," she said, "Long distance." I wondered who would be calling me at home that early in the morning as I took the phone. The voice on the line was the familiar one of a dear friend. "Andy," he said, "Dr. Bell died in his sleep last night."

In a way I was not surprised. During the past year as he served as Moderator of our denomination I had watched him struggle with his health as he tried to fulfill the tremendous demands of the high office he held. Some of you will remember that when he spoke here at Central he asked us to pray for him and some of you have been faithful every day to remember him in your prayers. But the 79 years he wore upon his shoulders, the hardships he had borne on the mission field, the responsibilities he had carried as an active Christian layman deeply involved in the things of Jesus, had taken their toll. Now he was gone.

Elizabeth and I talked about Dr. Bell that morning. We talked about how excited and happy he was to be with his Lord. Surely the angels themselves rejoiced. But there was a deep sense of loss, too. Dr. Bell had represented many things to me--a friend, a counselor, a wise leader, and most of all the embodiment of what it meant to be a Christian. Indeed, he was one of the most Christ-like persons I have ever known. But of all the feelings I experienced that morning, I think the most profound was the sense of loss for the Church. Dr. Bell was no silent saint. He had deep convictions and he dared to speak out about them. He had a profound love for his fellow man and he felt that the greatest thing he could do for any man was to share Jesus with him. When the denomination departed from her historic faith or deviated from a biblical course, Dr. Bell stood up for his faith and his Saviour and called the church to task. Who would take his place? Then I knew how the Hebrews felt out there in the wilderness when Moses died. I knew how Isaiah felt that day he went to the temple in deep concern because his King, the leader of his people, had died. And I knew, too, something of what the disciples must have felt when their Master was so rudely taken from them.

It was in this frame of reference that I chose my scripture and sermon for this morning. You see, it is the nature of man that he grows old and dies. It is in the order of things that those who lead us grow burdened with time and pass from the scene. It is in the providence of God that the day comes when he calls into his presence his saints. And who shall pick up the fallen torch? Who will step forward to fill the empty place in the ranks? Who will stand up for Jesus when that last great enemy, Death, cuts down those who go in the fore?

In our scripture for this morning we find the answer to that question. Our scripture tells us that Jesus charges his followers--all of his followers--to be witnesses. There are no silent saints. As we look at our scripture for this morning, there are three points I wish to share with you. They are first the man, second the message and third the means.

First, let us look at the man, Jesus. There are many things we can say about him.

We can say he is both man and God. There are those today who try to deny either his manhood or his deity. The humanist of our day, for example, try to make him out as a mere man. And while they admit that he was a good and a great man, they seek to deny that he was more than that. They deny his virgin birth, they deny his miracles, they deny his resurrection and they even try to deny some of his ethical teachings if they don't fit in with some of our modern fads. On the other hand, some would deny his humanity. They make Jesus to be so heavenly minded that he is of little earthly good. They spiritualize him to the extent that he is no longer relevant to the hard arena of human needs and human hurts. Yet, the Bible keeps the humanity and deity of Jesus in perfect tension. He was man--man who could suffer pain and hunger; man who could know the hurt of rejection, the tenderness of compassion; man who could enter into the needs of others. Yet he was also God--God who could use the power of the divine in the lives of individuals; God who could use the laws of nature to his purposes; God who could reach out to heal the hurt and brokenness of our lives.

Yes, there are many things we can say about Jesus. Yet, the most important thing we can say about him is that he is alive. The man means nothing if he is a dead figure of the distant past. The man means nothing unless somehow we can enter into a relationship--a fellowship--with him. In the scripture this morning we find the disciples gathered together after the crucifixion. They are a despairing, fearful, defeated group hovering together in some secret hiding place. Then into their midst comes a living Jesus. He is alive.

Is he alive for you? At this point Christianity is very mystical. The Jesus who is alive is not available to the ordinary senses of touch and feel and hearing and sight. He is available only to the spiritual senses. Many of us are so busy feeding the physical senses that our spiritual senses are blunted and dulled. Our awareness of Jesus is very dim indeed. But just as the sense of touch and of hearing can become highly developed in a blind man to compensate for his blindness, so the spiritual senses can become highly developed. Different people are at different levels of spiritual sensitivity. But the crucial question for each of us is this: is Jesus alive to us--and is he becoming more alive, more real, to us day by day.

But notice not only the man--the man who is alive--notice also the message about the man. Jesus told the disciples as we read in scripture this morning, "that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations..." So the good news we have to share with others is that Jesus died for our sins. Now, men today have many problems. There is the problem of war, there is the growing divorce rate, there is the problem of immorality in government, there is poverty, hunger, disease. But what is man's greatest problem? What is the basic problem that lies at the heart of all of the other problems? It is the problem that man has malfunctioned. It is the problem that man isn't doing what he was created to do. It is the problem that man has broken his relationship to God. When a rocket goes off course, the scientists on the ground push a self-destruct button to destroy the rocket. Man is off course. His self-destruct button has been pushed. He is on a disaster course that leads to destruction. It is in this context that we have a message about the man. And that message is this: Jesus has taken our place. He has been destructed for us. And because he has, we can get back on course. We can have our relationship to God restored. We can be forgiven of our sins.

Now, all of man's problems are important. But the most important problem that lies at the base of all other problems is his brokenness with God. Jesus heals that brokenness. Bishop McDowell once said, "I would not cross the street to give India a new theology: India has a better theology than she can understand. I wouldn't cross the street to give Japan a new religious literature: Japan has a better

religious literature than she has a religious life. I wouldn't cross the street to give China a new ethical code: China has a better ethical code than she has an ethical life. But I would go to India, Japan and China and a round the world again and again to tell the story that 'there is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Immanuel's veins, and sinners plunged beneath that blood, lose all their guilty stains.' " Yes, "that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name."

I suspect that all of us this morning have problems of one sort or another. The solution to our problems begins in Jesus--Jesus who is alive; Jesus who has died in our place; Jesus who can restore a right relationship to God. And when you and I are in fellowship with God--when we have a holy relationship with the Father--the other problems in our lives will begin to be solved. And while I may not know the exact nature of your need or your problem this morning, I do know that its solution begins by establishing a new fellowship with Jesus.

So, we have the man--Jesus--the message--that he died in our place and heals our brokenness with God. Now we come to the means--the means whereby this is shared with the world. How is this to be shared? By the preacher? By great men like Dr. Bell? No, it is to be shared by all believers. Jesus said to all the disciples, "You (and that includes us all) are witnesses of these things." There are no silent saints. There are no exceptions.

This afternoon at two o'clock our time there will be a memorial service in Anderson Auditorium at Montreat for Dr. L. Nelson Bell. A great servant of God has fallen--who will pick up the torch? Who will step into the breach? Who will stand up for Jesus in his place? Why, you and I will. Our fellow Christians across the land will. You see, there are no silent saints.

Before the days of radio and television, there were public places where people gathered to hear lecturers speak on various subjects. Many years ago in London a lecture was being given before a great crowd of people against Christianity. When the learned speaker finished he said, "If any one here can say a single word in favor of Jesus Christ, I challenge him to come forward and say it." Not a man moved, no voice was raised and the silence was thick and heavy. No one wanted to make a fool of himself. Then, far in the back, two young girls stood up together and made their way forward through the crowd. "We are not as learned as you," they said, "and we cannot speak very well. But we will sing for Jesus." So, standing there before the great crowd two simple hearts lifted their voices in harmony and began to sing, "Stand up, stand up for Jesus, ye soldiers of the cross; lift high his royal banner, it must not suffer loss."

Last Tuesday evening Dr. Bell was asked to give the prayer for the opening of the annual World Missions Conference. Those who heard him said it was the most moving prayer they had ever heard. He went home to bed and to sleep to awaken in heaven. Now that he is gone, who will stand up for Jesus? Will you? You see, there are no silent saints.