

A Model to All Believers
SERMON October 18, 2020

Scripture reading: 1 Peter 3:15-22 & 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Golden verse: *“You became a model to all the believers.”* 1 Thessalonians 1:7

Dear beloved,

It is interesting to know how our congregation here at Calvin was established, and how we grew during the past 60 years. We’ve also seen where we started from on our Christian journey, where we are right now, and how we can grow.

Sixty years ago, a few families at St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church Kitchener decided to extend their church’s mission, establishing a congregation where our church is located today, and to reach out towards those who lived close by in the area. These families were working and spreading the gospel with great enthusiasm: witnessing Christ’s name and Christ’s love. This is how our Calvin family grew in spirit and in numbers, gaining a great reputation in the area.

In 60 AC, the congregation from Thessalonica had a similar great reputation. The good news about their faith and actions were spread all around. The Christians became role models, not only in their city but also in the surrounding area. People who heard about them or contacted them wanted to be like them. People tried to imitate their behaviour, their lifestyle, their words and actions.

How was that congregation in Thessalonica established?

Around 50 AC, Paul and Silas (in The Book of Acts his name shows up as Silvanus) were in Philippi sharing the news about Christ. For this, they were arrested, beaten up and they were restrained in jail for a while. After they were released, and ordered not to spread the news about the crucified and living Christ, from Philippi they went to Thessalonica, which was the next vibrant city in the area, only 160 kilometers away. Before they arrived in Thessalonica, the news about their arrival preceded them. In their midst, there were already people against Paul and Silas and their mission. For this, they stayed only a short period of time, before they were asked to leave the city of Thessalonica.

But even in those few days, as they shared the gospel, the Holy Spirit was working with a great power, and some people, as we read, in spite of persecution

“welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.” (1 Thessalonians 1:6)

As Paul mentioned, the gospel of Christ came to those people *“not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction.”* (1 Thessalonians 1:5)

Then these few people, who received the gospel and the Holy Spirit with joy, moved by the Holy Spirit, established a strong and vibrant congregation in Thessalonica. A few years later, Paul wrote this letter to comfort them and build them up in the faith.

In this letter, Paul mentioned what he heard about this small but powerfully growing congregation: *“You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord’s message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia - your faith in God has become known everywhere”* (1 Thessalonians 1:6-8)

Paul heard from others, how the new Christian believers *“turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead - Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.”* (1 Thessalonians 1:9-10)

Paul noted three very important and significant signs in their lives:

- how they connected to the living God, their connection with God;
- how they connected to other Christians; and
- how they connected to non-Christians.

These newborn Christians in Thessalonica came to the realization, that there is only ONE GOD, the Father of our Saviour Jesus Christ. They turned away from their old beliefs, and started to talk about the Living, Loving and Caring God who is with us in Christ all the day, and who will take us in His eternity at the end of our roads. Coming to this realization, they felt an eagerness to talk to others about their faith. And this is what we have to learn today, dear beloved.

Now let us see WHY and HOW we have to witness for Christ.

Witnessing for Christ means telling others what we experienced of God. Talking to our family members, friends, and neighbours about our experiences.

In John 1:45, there is a great story where we read that Philip found his friend Nathanael and immediately shared with him that *“We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”* It was important for Philip to share with his friend about his great experience, finding Christ Jesus, because Philip knew that this information is crucial for his friend as well.

Dear beloved, if we are connected to our God, we HAVE to witness.

Our Christian role is to witness. This is not God’s DESIRE; it is His ORDER to you and me.

Jesus Christ did not RECOMMEND, but He COMMANDED in Matthew 28:19 *“Go therefore and disciple all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”* People need to hear the gospel to believe. This is our responsibility toward our fellow human beings. Witnessing is the fruit of our faith. If we cannot witness, it means we bear no fruit. Can you imagine an apple tree which never brings fruit? Why would the gardener keep in His garden such a fruitless tree?

We owe it to the people around us, to our relatives, friends, co-workers, neighbours, and others to inform them about the gospel of Jesus Christ in order to believe in Him and receive eternal life. How are we expecting from this world to worship Christ if they don’t know about Him? How can they be saved?

In Romans 10:14, Paul says: *“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?”*

Let me ask you, my sister, my brother: Where would you be today, if someone had not spoken to you about the Lord Jesus? In the same way, we must witness to others about our Saviour because people around us cannot call upon the Lord to receive His salvation if they don’t hear about it.

Christ Jesus is expecting Christians *“To open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light and from the authority of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.”* (Acts 26:18)

We see how crucial it is for us to witness. Let us look at a few practical points of how we have to do it.

1. Remember, the theme of your witnessing is Jesus Christ.

He came into this world to show us God's love. He died for you to save you and to give you eternal life. He is with you always. He loves you the most. He is the ONLY option and the ONLY opportunity to enter into heaven.

He said: *"I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* (John 14:6)

2. The power of your witnessing comes from the Holy Spirit.

You have to be willing to be used by the Holy Spirit, then Jesus will transform you and will give you wisdom. Jesus Christ promised, that if we are committing ourselves to witness for Him, the Holy Spirit will give us the words to say.

3. Pray

Pray with your own words, summarizing what you understood and what you would like to do. Dear Lord Jesus, You are commanding me to witness for You. Please help me to see the importance of witnessing. Direct my life, and help me to see when and to whom I have to witness. Give me the words to say and how to say things in an effective way. Give me courage, strength and wisdom, humbly I pray.

4. Talk briefly

Dear beloved, in one or two minutes we don't have to compose long messages or to preach about the whole Bible in order to witness to people. We should speak briefly and in depth about our experiences of Christ.

Apostle John helps us with this when he says: *"That...which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at, and our hands have touched - this we proclaim concerning the Word of Life."* 1 John 1:1-3

We don't have to have all the answers to questions people may ask us. We only need to talk about what we know. We can tell them that we have a personal relationship with Christ, and we walk with Him each day. We can tell if Christ touched our heart and has opened our eyes. We can tell what He did for us. I am sure, all of us have a lot to say concerning our Lord Jesus Christ.

5. Feel encouraged to start to talk about Jesus.

It's never too late to start witnessing for Christ. If you did not develop so far a courage or a habit of witnessing, please start as soon as you can. It is never too late

to start. This can be a new beginning in your faith journey when you will develop your faith as a Child of Christ talking about Christ, Your Saviour. In this way, your faith will be revived and strengthened as you start to tell about your faith to others.

6. Let's make a new project here.

Let's start to talk to ONE person a week about our faith experiences. In this way you will start to practice witnessing. You should ask Michel Allard, Calvin's Music Leader, if you would be able to play the piano if you would never practice. In the same way, we need to practice talking about our faith. If you continue to feel discouraged, you will continue to put off your practice again and again, and I am afraid that you will never even start. As we practice, we will joyfully experience that we are learning how to start a conversation. In this way, step by step, we will be more effective.

“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect keeping a clear conscience.” (1 Peter 3:15-16) Let it be. Amen.