

What does it mean to be a faithful witness?

By Dana Kester-McCabe

Pop artist, Andy Warhol is oft quoted as saying that someday everyone will have their fifteen minutes of fame. It is very human to believe that we will eventually have some great tragedy or some significant triumph in our lives that is worthy of everyone's attention – even if it is only for one brief shining moment. This is a false pride that popular culture has always encouraged. Even as far back as when Greek mythology was the religion of the day, stories about encounters with the Gods were very popular. If you had such a meeting your reputation would be great. People aspired to this in hopes of being privileged enough to share such a story over and over again. Telling our story is in fact one of the oldest and most common traditions of all humanity. So being a faithful witness is certainly nothing new. It is a spiritual skill that has always been important to develop.

One aspect of this skill is the ability to recognize Truth in our lives – no matter how humble they may be. Though it is sometimes easy to see what is true or false, it is equally difficult to figure out what we should or should not believe. We all develop mental skills that help us sort out reality from fiction. At the same time, it seems rare that we are open to Truth with a capital “T.” We expect Truth to be revealed in the form of some profound discovery or dramatic event. But most often it comes to us as a newly profound understanding of what ever situation we are in. Our eyes are opened though we did not realize they had been closed.

*As God is present in all the universe so is Truth.
Be willing to experience and thoroughly
explore the Light it casts.
Let it convict you with integrity and cheerfully
testify unto it as a faithful witness.*

In order to be a faithful witness to Truth we have to be open to it. Is someone in the midst of a crisis capable of experiencing the Greater Truth? I would say – Yes. Sometimes we are suddenly enlightened by our sheer amazement at a situation. Clarity often comes to us in flashes when we need it most. But we also need to see that Greater Truth in our quiet ordinary existence. Stories of humility, steadfastness, and simple kindness are just as important to tell as the heroic rescue or tragic loss.

Sometimes the Light of Truth is bright enough to help us fully understand what is happening. But there are always those times when information is shrouded in shadow. There are places the Light has not yet reached. For example, we do not have a full understanding of what makes our weather. Through scientific study, we do know there are things we humans do which affect our climate. But, we have not conclusively proved which activities causes the most harm; or what may actually be beneficial. So, we are called to find out more. What is the Greater Truth we are witnessing? It is that we are ALL responsible for weather change at the same time that none of us are responsible for the forces of nature. This is a Truth as old as time.

Another longstanding Truth is that if there is a common enemy we can all unite against it is the cruel and capricious power of dangerous climate conditions. All our social, political, or religious differences pale in comparison. When we are truly open to Truth its Light helps us see our common humanity not just good and evil, joy and fear.

Once exposed to a Greater Truth, we cannot help but be changed by it. We cannot help but be convicted by it. It changes the way we make decisions. It reorders our priorities. Once this happens we communicate it in all we do and say. We fully live into it and witness unto it. Our actions and our words faithfully represent that Truth. When there is a disaster, people rush to help. We know where they stand. We know what their values are. They have served as faithful witnesses. But in our everyday lives we need to be open to that conviction as well. Some come to it early and seek Truth all their lives. For others it comes unexpectedly during a moment of despair or even great joy.

Teaching the spiritual skills that enable someone to see the Truth with a capital "T" is very much like teaching someone to ride a bicycle. Some people need detailed instructions and someone there holding the bike up while they build their confidence. Others simply get on and go. When I learned to ride a bike, no amount of coaching from my sisters and friends helped me. I needed to go off by myself and keep trying until I got it. Each of us has the same opportunities to develop our spiritual skills. They come from many places: from our upbringing, our schooling, religious or ethical training. Some people seem to just "get it." Others need coaching. Once found it is so amazing we cannot keep it to ourselves, just as my sisters and friends wanted to share with me the experience of riding a bike.

We live what have learned then we teach others by telling our stories. That is one journey of the faithful witness: to seek the Truth and to share it with others. What is it mean to you to be a faithful witness?