

Revelation 1:4b–8
“The Faithful Witness ”
3rd Sunday in Advent

December 13, 2015
Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Pastor Hartwig

Grace, Mercy, and Peace be unto you from Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior and God our Heavenly Father. Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Introduction]

In the movie *The Two Towers*, the second in the *Lord of the Rings* series, there is a moving scene just before the battle of Helm’s Deep.

A boy with fear in his eyes is getting ready for battle.
He says to Aragorn,
“I hear that our situation is hopeless and that we will all be dead by morning.”

Aragorn replies in barely a whisper, “There is always hope!”

Those who are good are vastly outnumbered and overwhelmed by the forces of evil. But the heroes are faithful as they struggle against evil for what is right and true, even though such struggle is painful, difficult, and costs them dearly.

In a much greater sense this is true in our text. The Book of Revelation, in fact the entire Bible, pictures an overwhelmingly powerful army of evil whose goal is to wipe out every good thing that God has created.

That evil is the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh.

But our text presents to us Jesus Christ, the faithful witness. Christ Jesus, in the face of overwhelming evil, faithfully witnessed to the truth, both in word and deed, unto death.

He refused to give up and went to the cross. Then he rose from the dead, was exalted, and now reigns with great power. His faithful witness makes us witnesses and inspires us to be more faithful witnesses.

[Faithful Witness] The Faithful Witness Makes Faithful Witnesses.
Jesus was the faithful witness.
Jesus witnessed to the truth in word.

1. In his trial before Pilate, our Lord summarized his life's mission when he said, ***“For this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify (witness) to the truth”*** (Jn 18:37). To witness means to faithfully declare the truth, even in the face of evil, no matter what the opposition.
2. What was the truth to which Jesus testified?

The Gospel, the Good News that he, the Son of God, became incarnate so as to be the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world (Jn 1:14, 29). The good news is that God gives such forgiveness freely to everyone who repents and believes the Gospel (see above). Jesus always faithfully witnessed to this truth, even before Pilate, even on the cross.

Jesus witnessed to the truth in deed.

1. Our Lord showed himself to be a faithful witness.
He refused to give up or give in to evil.
He refused to back down in the face of mass rejection (Jn 6:66; Mk 15:11–15).
He was a faithful witness to the truth by being willing to suffer and die for the truth.
2. Yet our Lord Jesus, the faithful witness, did not merely suffer and die for the truth; he suffered and died for us and for all mankind.

As v 6 puts it, Jesus is the one

“who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood.”

Our unforgiven sins were the chains by which our evil enemies had bound us.
But Christ, by his shed blood on the cross, and by becoming the firstborn from the dead, shattered those chains of sin and freed us by forgiving us.

Jesus Christ was a faithful witness so that each of us would be a faithful witness.

Jesus has made us witnesses.

1. By his death and resurrection Jesus has given us a new identity: ***“[Jesus] has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father”*** (v 6).

He has made us a kingdom of holy priests whose task is to serve God.

Every Christian is part of the priesthood of all believers. Notice that Jesus “made us” a kingdom and priests. We contributed nothing to our new identity before God; it was totally by grace, an unmerited gift. We did nothing. Jesus did it all.

2. Peter tells us that God has made us a royal priesthood, so that we *“may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light”* (1 Pet 2:9).

In other words, at the heart of being a priest before God is to worship God, specifically by testifying to the truth of how God saved us.

By testifying to the truth of the Gospel, we are faithful witnesses, even in the face of evil.

Jesus gives us the encouragement we need to be faithful witnesses

1. The original recipients of Revelation were the seven churches of Asia. In the late first century they were facing a growing pressure and persecution from the world.

The seven letters in Revelation 2–3 stress the importance of faithfulness in the face of persecution, false teaching, and worldliness.

Some were succumbing to the temptation to give in to the pervasive evil all around them, to compromise. But by so doing, they would lose everything. Only those who are faithful unto death will receive the crown of life (Rev 2:10).

2. So it is with us.
 - Surrounded by evil,
 - overwhelmed by disappointment and hardship, and
 - threatened with hostility toward our faith,

we also are sorely tempted to give up or to give in to evil.

We are tempted to stop witnessing, to stop testifying about Jesus in word and deed. In such a context of pervasive worldliness, we are tempted to ask,
“Why should I bother?
What good has come out of all my efforts?
Where are the results?”

[Conclusion]

But Jesus, the faithful witness, comes to help us.

He gave the Revelation about “the things to come” to the seven churches to challenge their complacency and to strengthen those who had grown weary of trying.

For the ultimate message is this: in the end the victory belongs to God and the Lamb. Though evil will prevail for a time, and though evil will at times overwhelm and outnumber those who embrace the good, Jesus Christ by his faithful witness has overcome evil.

And one day Jesus will come again. The victory will be his, and evil will be no more.

Then how happy will be those who remained faithful witnesses.

Therefore don't give up or give in to evil.

Cling to your Baptism and remain a faithful witness that you may share in the everlasting victory.

“Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen” (v 7).

Now, let us make a joyful noise unto the Lord. Amen!