

**May 21, 2023**  
**Seventh Sunday of Easter**

**Meditation:** “Witless or Witness?”

Early in the week the first time I read the scriptures for today I noticed a couple of things. The gospel lesson contained a definition of ‘eternal life’ – “And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God” (John 17:3).

And the reading from the book of Acts brought back memories of Elijah – “As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. Elisha kept watching and crying out, “Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!” But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.” (2 Kings 2:11-12) “When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.” (Acts 1:9). I wondered, was Luke comparing Jesus with Elijah, or casting him as the new Elijah?

When I reread the texts, trying to figure out which one to work with, I noticed verse 8 of Acts chapter 1. The risen Jesus and the eleven remaining disciples met and Jesus said to them, “you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Who can tell me what a witness is? Right, according to the dictionary, a witness is “an individual who, being present, personally sees or perceives a thing; a beholder, spectator, or eyewitness”; or “a person who gives testimony, as in a court of law.” Jesus was telling the disciples that they were to go and tell the entire world about Jesus, or so it appears.

Who can tell me what witless means? Right, according to the dictionary, someone who is witless is someone who is “lacking wit or intelligence, stupid, or foolish.”

On Thursday evening my wife and I went to St. Thomas to tour Indwell’s newest project there, The Station. It’s a collaboration between the city and Indwell. The city expropriated land for a new fire station and thought, ‘we need to house the homeless. What if we combine the fire station with deeply affordable, supportive housing?’ The building, or at least the upper two floors

where the apartments are located, will be complete by the end of June, and the first tenants will move in this summer.

The Station has 45 apartments, each with a bedroom, a washroom, a small kitchen, and a living space. Some of the 450 square foot units are accessible. There is also a common dining room, a community kitchen, laundry facilities, office space for the support workers, and a couple of small meeting rooms. The support workers will supply, among other things, mental health support, behavioural support, and addiction support. There will also be help with learning how to cook and do all of the other mundane daily tasks that we take for granted, like how to fill out a job application or rehearse for a job interview, or how to apply for social assistance.

After the tour, we went to a presentation held at the local public art gallery. Indwell is celebrating another step in a goal to have 100 supportive housing units in St. Thomas. The first 15 opened a couple of years ago. The Loft supplies short-term housing. The station adds 45 units. And there are plans for another complex that will have another 45 to 60 units.

Several people spoke that evening. Some from Indwell, and some from other social services in St. Thomas. Two of those others spoke about the impact Indwell had had on their clients. They spoke of how finding safety and acceptance had been instrumental in helping them turn their lives around. They were witnesses of lives transformed, and they testified to us of what they had seen.

There was also a short video of Indwell tenants who spoke about their experiences, and what skills they had learned as residents of another Indwell housing complex. And, of course, when can you have any type of event like this without a politician showing up and speaking, the mayor of St. Thomas spoke. There was one thing that he said that was profound. He said, and I paraphrase, 'Until everyone is taken care of and has a place to live, we are not a community, we are just a place where a bunch of people live in proximity to one another.'

What the mayor was saying is that it isn't enough to say the right things, we actually need to do the right things. And that takes me right back to the scripture. It isn't enough to be a witness (noun), to tell people about Jesus, we have to bear witness (verb) to Jesus' life by showing others how Jesus

lived by living the same way. We can witness, give testimony, in words, or we can bear witness in our actions, and in our lives. There is a famous quote, mistakenly attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi, that goes something like this, "Preach the gospel at all times; use words only when absolutely necessary." It is the spirit of what the mayor was saying. We need to demonstrate, by our actions, the things we say we believe, or in other words, we need to walk the talk.

Indwell believes in the inherent dignity of all people, due simply to the belief that all people are created by God in God's own image. It lives out that belief by treating all people, housed or homeless, addict or not, mentally ill or mentally healthy, with dignity. The difference between witness as a noun and witness as a verb makes all the difference in the world. I think Jesus was sending his disciples to witness (verb) to his life, by living out his lessons to them, as far as the ends of the world, and not sending his disciples to witness (noun) or simply talk about him. The latter is foolishness, for it lacks integrity. How we live is a witness to what we believe.

We are Jesus' disciples in 2023. Will we be witless, or will we bear witness? The question is, what do you believe? Your actions are speaking.