

One day in our Men's Bible study, we talked about grief and loss. One of the guys asked how I dealt with the losses in my life. As we talked, I shared my own struggle with having to truly make faith not just an answer but a lifestyle.

And that is the point of this message -- do I believe what I say I believe? Do you? In other words, is faith simply memorized answers, or is it something that changes the way I live? In my case, especially as one who promotes and supports faith in Christ, either I had to live daily by faith, or I needed to find a new vocation. But for every one of us here today, it is the same. Do we live by faith, or do we need to find a new purpose and power and vision for each day on this earth?

Think about you express yourself in elections. When you vote, are you influenced by what candidates say about themselves? Do you believe their commercials? Or do you watch and see how they live their lives? How do you know for certain what anyone else believes? And how important is it to know if they truly believe what they say, or if they are only sharing words they think will get them elected?

Are you confused when words don't match actions or actions don't match words? Can you tell what is at the heart and soul of anyone else? And what do others know or assume as they watch or listen to you? What do you believe? When it comes to faith in Jesus Christ – do you really believe what you say you believe? Do your actions match your words? Does your living match your faith? Does the witness of your life match up with the witness of your faith?

Last week we experienced one of the most popular of our national holidays – Halloween. Every year some lament the pagan influences of Halloween. But to be honest, I worry a lot more about the pagan influences on everyday living! Rather than worrying about children wearing costumes, we should worry about adults who are timid to admit their gift of faith or seek to hide faith from those around them. So ... what about you? Do we live by faith, or do we hide what we believe and live by other values? And are we consistent?

Halloween is about hiding behind costumes. But many are often tempted to hide faith behind more politically correct speech. Or to be blunt, are any of you embarrassed to let people know who we really are and what we really believe? 1 John 3 says, "we are children of God, but world doesn't recognize us." If that doesn't sound like a reversal of Halloween, I am not sure what else it could be.

John clearly felt that sometimes Christian faith is "hidden" from world or is something our world can't quite understand. But I wonder if we don't often hide what we believe from the world! If we live by faith, why is it often so difficult to live by faith? To trust? To hope? To witness a loving Christ! When popular wisdom and contemporary culture says we are "foolish" to have faith, are we embarrassed? Do we worry about what others will think if they see us pray in a restaurant? And are we comfortable opposing something we feel is contrary to God's loving plan when neighbors and friends simply don't care?

When Mary's brother Lazarus died, she wasn't quite sure *what* to believe. She assumed Jesus was too late to help, and cried out, "IF you were only here This wouldn't have happened!" Her mournful accusation was a question and cry that the world knows all too well. What she was stating was "why did you? How could you? ...I thought you loved him!" (How familiar that is to us all.)

Jesus was "deeply moved," and wept. His tears were the same as always for the consequential death of every earthly life. Sin breaks God's heart and is the ultimate manifestation of how far we have strayed from God. Death is real, it is powerful, it is painful – and Jesus wept for that loss. But his love allowed those tears to wash feet and then claim that same place of death for each of us.

This story of Lazarus is raw and intense. It is as brutal as life itself. The image of a man walking out of a tomb, dragging the wrappings of death sounds more like Halloween or Hollywood than the Gospel. How powerful an image this is! Who CAN escape death? Who isn't held back by this dark power? In freeing Lazarus, Jesus proclaimed what he had come to do for us all! He has unmasked our fears and taken away our need to hide. He has changed life forever!

The next time someone came walking out of a tomb in the Gospels, it would be Jesus on Easter. But he would escape completely and cleanly, leaving the wrappings of death where they belong – hidden from the faithful. He would leave the costume behind and completely destroy death's power for all people and for all time! That is why it is so important for the world to hear this great news!

As we celebrate the Festival of all Saints, we remember that we believe what we believe because of Easter – the biggest HOLYday of all! Today we have been changed from sinners into saints. From "dead men and women walking" into a new creation that is waking with the breath of God's own Spirit.

Such a great gift must never be hidden. Instead of fearing to let the world know how we have been blessed, we are called to put on the work clothes of discipleship. We are challenged by the freedom of Christ to not be afraid to let others know who we are and what we believe ... for saints are sent as God's gifts to his world.

Do we believe what we believe? If so, others WILL know! Do we believe what we believe? If so, we will not hide our faith or fail to share the gift of Christ's peace! Why should others ever wonder what you or I believe? And what does motivate our thoughts, decisions, and actions?

Jesus' command to "unbind him, set him free," was spoken not only to the friends who would help Lazarus to recover, but also to each of us. This is our command -- our charge -- our joyful burden of ministry. Because we believe Easter's power, we are given the task of sharing this vision with the world. To live what we believe! To share what we know. To unbind and set others free!

As we celebrate the lives of all the saints, pray that God will help us to be what he has made us -- saints who know who they are and live what they believe! [TWSeeber]