

Sermon Transcript

May 31, 2015



Five Hats We Wear - Messenger

1 Peter 3:8-18

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on May 31, 2015, at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio copy of the sermon on CD is available by request at (860) 563-8286. An audio version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at www.wethefc.com.

Sermon Text
1 Peter 3:8-18

⁸ Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. ⁹ Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. ¹⁰ For

“Whoever desires to love life
and see good days,
let him keep his tongue from evil
and his lips from speaking deceit;
¹¹ let him turn away from evil and do good;
let him seek peace and pursue it.
¹² For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous,
and his ears are open to their prayer.
But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

¹³ Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, ¹⁵ but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. ¹⁷ For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.

Putting Our Series Together

This morning we conclude our series on Work and Faith. During this series, we have been considering how Sunday impacts our Monday to Friday. Let me remind you of some of the key thoughts that have guided our conversation to this point.

- The actual “job” you do is sacred because through your job you are doing God’s work in this world. When you make things, sustain things, express compassion, promote justice, reveal knowledge and restore what is broken; you are doing God’s work in this world.
- Like every area of life in this fallen world, work is not always easy and there are some very hard issues we face in our jobs. But in Christ, we can count the struggle as “all joy” because God is using the difficulties of our work to do his work in us. Through suffering we learn to depend upon God.
- Not only is God using our work to do a work in us. But work is also a place where God wants to do a work through us. Your job is not just about earning a living so you can provide for your family. Rather your job is a way to serve God and love people through what you do and how you do it.

These three thoughts have led us to consider the “Five Hats We Wear” when we step into Monday. Each hat helps us understand how we can serve God and love people through our jobs. I mentioned last week how each hat conveys some nuance of the gospel. While the theme of serving God and loving people has been a redundant and a repetitive theme throughout this series, these hats remind us that the power to love comes from the dynamic work of Christ in us through the power of the Holy Spirit. So this love for God and for others is a supernatural work that God works through us.

Hat #1: Image-Bearers - Through the Kansas City Royals hat, we are reminded that we bear the image of God and that as Christians, our lives are being transformed more and more into the image of Christ. And so when we go to work, we should be conscious of the fact that we bring the presence of Christ with us and we want his character to shine through us.

Hat #2: Imitators - Through the Minnesota Twins hat, we are reminded that we imitate God through our work. One way we imitate God is through what we do. When we make things, sustain things and renew things, we are imitating what God is doing in this world. But we also want God’s character to shine through our lives. For that to happen, God needs to be our portion. We need to be “twins of heart.” We can’t treat God like a pie and make him a “piece of our lives.” Rather, God needs to be more like a wheel, where God is at the “hub” of our lives and fully present in every “spoke” of our lives.

After the service last Sunday, someone shared with me how he was reflecting on this thought while out on a bike ride. He said, “While I was riding my bike one day, I looked down at the hub of my front wheel and realized that no matter how fast or slow I went I could still make out the name of the manufacturer of the wheel on the hub because it was printed right to left along the hub. I then realized, no matter how hard I tried, I could not make out the printing on the outer part of the rim.”

Reflecting on this, he said, “There was a point in my life when my name was written on the hub and God was one of the many spokes in my life. When life presented it’s challenges I used to get so frustrated and angry because no matter how hard I tried, I could not bring God into focus and what needed to be done to straighten things out. Only recently has God helped me realize that when we make God the hub of everything, he can bring into focus all life’s blurriness. When the wheel of life begins to spin fast enough that we lose our ability to keep life focused, we can rest in the knowledge that if we look to the hub we can clearly see God and we can know that he will bring into focus all of life’s challenges, clearing up the blurriness we thought we could clear up on our own and ultimately revealing His will to us as He sees fit.” And I would add, and this when God’s character can shine through us even in the “blurry” moments of life.

Hat #3: Sons and Daughters - Through the Washington Nationals we were reminded of God’s incredible love for us through Jesus and that we are part of God’s family and God’s kingdom. We considered what it means to be adopted “sons” of God. We are objects of God’s incredible love and because we are loved, we are free to love others. It is here we considered the question Tim Keller asked, “At the end of your life, will you wish that you had plunged more of your time, passion, and skills into work environments and work products that helped people to give and receive more love?”¹ It is questions like this that cause us to examine the motives driving us to work. If we are honest, “self” tends to be the motive for our work and not the love of others. But when we realize that we are loved by God, we are free to love in and through our jobs.

Hat #4: Stewards - Last week we used the San Diego Padres to remind us that the opposite of being idle is not just being busy at work. Again, the motive is important. And so we are stewards who are responsible to use what God has given us to the glory of God. When we commit what we do to the glory of God, even if it is washing dishes, it changes our attitude and frees us up to joyfully love and serve others in what we do.

Hat #5: Messengers - This brings us to our final “hat to wear” when we step into Monday. When we began this series, this is “the hat” I think most of you thought would be the focus of the entire series. When I said we are going to talk about Work and Faith, I think most of us thought that this was going to be a series on how to be a testimony at

work as we seek for an opportunity to share our faith in the workplace. Hopefully, what you have discovered through this series is that “Work and Faith” is much bigger than that. And yet, part of what it means to be a Christian is that we are messengers and we do have a wonderful message of hope to share with others. Peter puts it this way at the end of our passage this morning, *“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.”* In Jesus, we have a message that can bring someone to God. We feel compelled to share Jesus with others.

Our final hat comes from the California Angels. The Greek word for “angel” is the same word for “messenger.” Often the role of an angel in the Bible is to bring a heavenly message from God to man. On the night Jesus was born, it was an angel that brought the heavenly message to the shepherds. *“I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord.”* It was two angels who greeted the women who came to the tomb of Jesus that first Easter morning. To their alarm, they found the stone rolled away from the tomb and the body of Jesus was gone. It was these angels, these messengers from heaven, who filled in the blanks for these women by saying, *“Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.”* And so like angels, in every “spoke of life” we are “messengers” and we carry with us a message that can bring others to God because it is a message that speaks of a Savior and an empty tomb.

As we begin to reflect on what it looks like to be “a messenger” in the workplace, I want to ask you this question. Have you ever considered the thought that where you are working is a place where you have been “sent” by God? Have you ever considered the thought that the people you work with and encounter at work are people you have been “sent to?” We talked last week about being a steward and often we define that by how we steward our time and our abilities. Robert Alexander invites us to consider that our “workplace relationships are entrusted to us by God.” And so he says, “Enjoy them!”²

Living a life of “sentness” is not just an issue that pertains to the formal missionary. Last week was Pentecost Sunday and the significance of the coming of the Holy Spirit is that we are all witnesses for Christ and we have all been sent. I am struck by what Paul says in Acts 17 when he is giving testimony to Christ in Athens. In Acts 17:26-27 he says, *“And God made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place.”* In other words, God has placed you and your co-workers, for that matter, right where you are. Why? He goes on to say, *“that they should seek God in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him.”* And so as we wear this hat, as messengers with a heavenly message, we want to recognize that wherever we are, we have been sent and placed. So how do we live as one who is sent?

Messenger: A Person of Peace

If we are going to live as “messengers” who are “sent” then we need to realize that it is not just the message we speak that is important. There is also a message we need to live. We all know people who may be persistent in “speaking the message” we are called to share, but the “tone of their life” makes it difficult for others to hear the message. In our passage this morning, Peter addresses “the tone of life” that ought to mark us. The fact that this verse begins with “*Finally, all of you,*” implies that the virtues listed here apply to all of us. This is the tone that we ought to be known for “down at the workplace.” I would characterize this tone as “a tone of peace.”

Peter writes, “*Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.*” Can you see words that promote a “tone of peace” in these verses? There is the obvious “*not repaying evil for evil*” but rather giving blessing, instead. And words like “*unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, tender heart and a humble mind*” are also words that communicate peace. In verses 10-12, Peter quotes from Psalm 34 to substantiate this list of virtues and in summary fashion he says in verse 11, “*let him seek peace and pursue it.*” As a “messenger” who is “sent” into a place of work, I am to be a “person of peace.” This moves me towards people who are different than me.

This week, someone sent me a video clip from the show “America’s Got Talent.” On this show, people display their talents in front of four judges hoping to move on and eventually compete for the grand prize. The video clip I received was of a young man who was a comedian, only he had a terrible stuttering problem. About four years ago he was playing softball. He was the pitcher. The ball struck him in the throat and his vocal chords were permanently damaged causing him to have a major stuttering problem. At the encouragement of his girlfriend, he coped with this impediment by taking up comedy and it was a very moving story. As they were telling his story he said something rather convicting and quite profound. He said, “The person I was before would probably never hang out with who I am today. Before, I thought people were lucky just to talk with me.” As he was saying that, he bowed his head with a measure of shame. It made me wonder where I would have to bow my head in similar shame? Where do I withhold a measure of peace from those “different” than me?

Think of all the ways people are “different” than you in the work place and how these differences cause you to keep your distance. That difference could be found in different lifestyles, different cultures, different races, different political views, different beliefs, different personalities, different looks or a different worldview than yours. And these

differences cause us often to just stick to our job and to somewhat isolate. And yet these words “*sympathy, brotherly love, tender heart and a humble mind*” are words that when present move us across that divide and move towards relationship. It is looking at people the way God looks at people. It is looking at people the way God looks at you. You need to see people not as your enemy, but as victims of the enemy.

Do you remember the story of Jonah? Obviously, when we hear the name Jonah we automatically think of a fish. But I am intrigued by the latter part of the story. God told Jonah to go to Ninevah to preach to the people of that city. He didn’t want to go. Do you know why? Quite frankly, he didn’t like them. And if you understood some of the cultural issues of Jonah’s day you would understand why Jonah felt the way he did. The people of Ninevah were Assyrians and they were known for being ruthless towards their enemies. So Jonah went the other way. But God picked him up through a fish and set him among the people of Ninevah and Jonah shared God’s message with the people and they repented. The whole city repented. And what do we find at the end of the story? Jonah is sulking and depressed. Do you know why? Jonah said to God, “*I knew you were a gracious God and merciful and slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.*” Do you know what he is saying here? “I knew you were a God who would forgive if they repented.” But deep down, Jonah didn’t want them to be forgiven. And at the end of the book you have this great insight into the heart of God for people when he says to Jonah, “*Should I not pity Ninevah, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right from their left?*”

Do you know what it means to be a “person of peace” in your place of work? It means that you move towards people. It means that you choose a spirit of hospitality and you promote a sense of welcome and warmth. And it is not just with those you are most comfortable with or most similar to. “A person of peace” implies that you make this move towards people who are different than you. You see yourself as being “set among.” God’s love through you is a welcoming love; it embraces outsiders, it forgives, it is long-suffering and it is merciful. In other words, it sees people the way God sees people and it moves you towards people who are different than you.

Messenger: A Person of Presence

In order to be a “messenger” we need to be present in the lives of people. We need to be so present that they can see Christ in us. Christ is seen by the way we live and by the way we love. I love what Robert Alexander says. He says, “It is not our job to bring people to Jesus. Rather, it is our job to bring Jesus to people.”³ How do we do that? We do that by the way we live and are present in the lives of people. By being present, I mean we are engaged in the lives of people.

Peter writes in verses 13-17 things like, *“Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.”*

In this passage we are exhorted to be *“zealous for good works”* I love that word *“zealous.”* Sometimes I get concerned for what it is we are most *“zealous”* for and it is not often good works. I will be honest, I often cringe with the way many Christian engage in political conversation. I am all for political conviction and I believe vigorous political debate is good and healthy. But often the rhetoric turns to character assignation and some of the most hateful things are said by Christians. If you want to express your faith with zeal, be zealous for doing good works. Be zealous at being present in the lives of your co-workers. Be invested in how they are doing. Consider how you might regularly meet a need and express concern and in very tangible ways express love.

Many of you know of Ravi Zacharias. He speaks all over the world and gives reason and arguments for why Christianity is true and why Jesus is the answer to life. He is incredibly articulate and he has argued for the faith in many of the highest places of the world. Consequently, he has seen many people come to faith in Christ and has heard many stories of how people have turned from some of the major religions of the world to embrace Jesus as their Savior. Listen to what he has discovered. He says, *“It is of enormous interest to ask recent converts to Christ—converts from one of the world’s major religions, why, humanly speaking, they were drawn to Christ. The answer is commonly one of two predictable replies. Either there was a supernatural intervention within their lives, or a Christian cared enough to reach out to them by life and example.”*⁴ That is a pretty powerful statement.

Who are the people you encounter at work? Consider making it one of your *“work goals”* to connect with someone in a meaningful way this week. Now, don’t make people into projects. No one wants to be a project. But out of genuine concern, invest in someone this week. Join them for lunch. Get to know them. Share some of your life with them. Is there a way you can be helpful to them? If a need is expressed in your conversation, follow up the next day to see how things are going. Talk about normal things. Share with them what is happening in your life. It is a simple thing called relationship. It is being a person of presence. Truth often needs to pass *“the smell test”* where people don’t just hear it, but they also see it. To be *“sent”* is to be *“present.”*

Messenger: People of Process

It is good to be reminded that when someone journeys to faith, it is often a process. It is not so much an event, but a process that happens over time and in the context of relationship. In almost every testimony I hear, the common denominator is that there is at least a person who made an impact. Probably the most familiar phrase in our passage this morning is verse 15, “*always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.*” When we read this verse, I think what we most often see is the call to be ready to give an answer for why we believe what we believe. But can we take time to consider what is implied in this verse as well.

What is it that prompts people to ask you “*for the reason for the hope that lies within you?*” What is the context where that question is asked? It is a question that emerges out of relationship. It is a question that comes from others having observed your life because you have been a “person of peace” and a “person of presence” and so they want to know what makes you tick. Make it a goal to live in such a way that this kind of a question would be asked of you. Another way to ask the question would be this way. “Is there anything about your life down at work that would even elicit such a question?” Lets live in such a way that we prompt these kinds of questions.

If you are a “person of peace” and you are a “person of presence” then you will be sharing life together and your faith will be part of your conversations. For example, when you are asked what you did this weekend, you would include the fact that you were in church this morning. This is who you are. When difficulties in life come to your friend, you can offer your prayers. When you mess up and make mistakes, you can humbly ask for forgiveness. We need to be transparent about our own failings because Christianity is not about being good. It is about being forgiven. As your relationship deepens, you can share with this person what God is teaching you. In July, Glenn Sunshine is going to be here and he is going to share what is happening in parts of the world where the church is experiencing explosive growth and it is through ordinary people that God is doing this great work. In community, they spend time in the Scriptures and they ask three basic questions. What is it saying? What am I going to do as a result of what it says? And then the third question is, “Who am I going to tell?” If you are in authentic relationship then you are going to share with others what God is doing in your life. Some of you pass out that sermon transcript to people at work.

The bottom line is this. To be “sent” is to recognize that *giving a reason for the hope that lies within* is born out of the context of often long and sustained relationship where you are authentically sharing your life with others. Lets live in such a way that we elicit this kind of question.

Messenger: People of Proclamation

Finally, to live as one who is sent, we do need to share the truth that does bring others to God. They can't believe unless they hear. We are reminded in our passage to engage over matters of faith with "*gentleness and respect.*" And at the same time, we must come to a point where we speak truth and we must let them know that "*Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.*"

It has been my joy this year to be in a small group with young adults. One of the things we did early on in our time together was each week we would get in groups of two and practice sharing our story in two minutes so that we could be ready when we found ourselves with the opportunity to share our faith.

Do you know how to share the gospel in such a way that someone would know what they need to know to turn in faith to Jesus? My favorite presentation of the gospel is called Two Ways to Live. It goes like this:

The message of the Bible is about God and his Son, Jesus. It is about life and death, and the choice we all face. And it starts with a loving God who created all things. God is the loving ruler of the world. He made the world. He made us rulers of the world under him. It says in Revelation 4 that God is worthy to receive glory and honor and power because he made all things and by his will we have our being. *But is that the way it is now?*

No! We all reject God as the ruler of our lives and we try to run life on our own without God. But we fail to rule ourselves, our society and our world. The Bible tells us that there is no one who is righteous, not even one. There is no one who understands or seeks God. All of us have turned away from God. *What will God do about this rebellion?*

God won't let us rebel forever. The punishment for our rebellion is death and judgment. The Bible warns that we are destined to die one and then face the judgment. *God's justice sounds hard, But . . .* because God's love, he sent his Son into the world, the man Jesus Christ. Jesus always under God's rule and by dying in our place he took our punishment and brought us forgiveness of sin. It says in 1 Peter 3:18, "Christ died for sins once and for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God." *But that's not all . . .*

God raised Jesus to life again as the ruler of this world. Jesus has conquered death for us and gives us new life and will return to judge the world. Through God's great mercy

he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. *Well, where does that leave you?*

You basically have two ways you can live. You can live your own way and reject God as the ruler of your life and try to run your life your own way. The result is that you are condemned by God and you face death and judgment. Or you can live God's new way. Confess your sin. Rely on what Jesus has done for you on the cross and through his resurrection from the dead. Submit to Jesus as the ruler of your life. The result if you are forgiven of all your sin and promised eternal life. Jesus said in John 3:36 that whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him. Which of these represent the way you want to live?

Conclusion

At the heart of what it means to be a Christian, we are God's messengers wherever we go. So as we go to work tomorrow, let us move towards people as "people of peace" and "people of presence." May our lives be of such that they at least elicit the question, seeking for the reason we have this hope in us. And so we seek to be "people of process" committing ourselves to relationship. And then, by God's grace, we pray for the open door to be "people of proclamation" that others may come to know forgiveness of sin and enter into relationship with the living God.

¹Tim Keller *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work* (New York: Dutton, 2012) 206

²Robert Alexander *The Gospel Centered Life at Work* (Greensboro: New Growth Press, 2014) 118

³Ibid., 119

⁴Ravi Zacharias "The Touch of Truth" in *Telling Truth* ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000) 40

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COMMUNITY GROUPS

Getting To Know Me Questions

1. Reflecting on the sermon series "Work and Faith", share one or two thoughts that you found most helpful. Reflecting on what you have learned, what impact has this had in your Monday to Friday?

2. Get in groups of two or three and try to share your faith story in two to three minutes.

Some Guidelines

- Try to imagine sharing your story with someone who does not have much church background.
- Try not to use "churchy words" but rather words that would translate with someone outside of the church
- Ask for feedback
- If you are still in process to faith, simply share where you are at the moment.

Come back as a group and share how you felt sharing your story and what you observed through this exercise.

Diving Into The Word

3. Read Acts 17:24-28 - It says in vs 26 that in God's sovereignty he has "determined allotted boundaries for your dwelling." How does this give you confidence that you have been "sent" into your place of work? Can you see the hand of God in where he has chosen to place you? What does this imply about your co-workers? Reflect on vs 27 - What does this verse imply about those outside of faith? What does this verse imply about our role as we live out our faith?

4. Read 1 Peter 3:8-18

Person of Peace (3:8-12)

Identify some of the ways people are different than you at your place of work.

How do these differences inhibit you from drawing near to them?

How does 1 Peter 3:8-9 help move you towards people who may be different than you? How does it change the way you view people?

Person of Presence (3:13-17)

What do you think it looks like to be "zealous for good works?"

Consider how you might apply these three steps.

- How can I get to know someone?
- How can I share myself with others?
- How can I talk about God?

Person of Process (3:15)

What might it take to prompt someone to ask you for the reason for the hope that lies in you? What is it about our lives that would prompt such a question?

Person of Proclamation (3:18)

How comfortable are you in sharing the gospel? What steps could you take to grow in this area?

Taking It Home

5. Which of the four aspects of being a messenger do you want to work on this week? What do you want to do?

6. Have each person offer a "thank you" prayer and a "help me" prayer.