

Permission to go public

You've got the Bible behind you when you talk about your faith



The Bible tells the stories of God's public relationship with the people of Israel and how that public relationship extends to all who believe through Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

We Lutherans tend to be pretty quiet when it comes to expressing our faith. We usually aren't quiet about most other things, as can be witnessed by walking into almost any fellowship hall on any given Sunday after worship. But we do tend to be very quiet about our faith.

Many reasons have been given as to why we are so quiet about this particular aspect of our lives, including the fact that we tend to see our faith as a private possession. I do agree that what a person believes has a private aspect. But I

would also argue that the Christian faith inherently has a public aspect. My study of Scripture through the years has convinced me that the Christian church was meant to be a very public entity, and the Christian faith has always been meant to be expressed in some very public ways.

The Bible—our guidebook of faith—is a collection of books that tells the stories of God's public relationship with the people of Israel, and how that relationship extends to all who believe through Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

According to these stories, God created the world and everything in it in a very public way. God brought the children of Israel out of bondage in Egypt and across the Red Sea on dry land in a way that all of their enemies could see. The prophets were very public with their message of repentance and obedience in ways that spoke to Israel, as well as to its adversaries.

Scripture also tells us that Jesus had a very public ministry that spoke good news to many people in many ways. His death and resurrection was accomplished for all who will ever live, not just for a privileged few. As Jesus departed this earth, his instruction to those who knew the good news was to make sure to tell others.

The book of Acts records the efforts of many disciples and emerging faith communities to publicly declare their decision to follow Jesus, and it includes their public testimonies of belief in the God who sent him. The last book of the

Bible, Revelation, even tells of those who lost their physical lives because they wouldn't publicly denounce the lordship of Jesus.

All of the characters in these Bible stories possessed a private faith. But at some point they decided to be active in a community of faith to join with others in word, sacrament and service.

Through the Word and Spirit of God, they received permission to be public with their faith. The Scriptures from the lectionary in September can begin to give us the permission we may need—along with the knowledge and courage—to go public with our faith.

Isaiah lets us know that God has given him a tongue to speak encouragement and healing to others. In the face of those who seek to silence God's witness, Isaiah is emboldened to keep speaking (50:4-9). The psalmist is so filled with private gratitude to God that he promises to serve God publicly in the presence of all the people (Psalm 116). James, the brother of Jesus, comes right out in his letter and says that if you have a private faith that is not being seen or heard of in public ways, that faith is dead (2:1-17). Mark's gospel has Jesus publicly healing a man who couldn't hear or speak, and the first thing the man and the crowd did when he got healed was to tell everyone they could about Jesus (7:31-38).

Jesus also says in Mark 9:50 that we who know and believe the good news of God's power and love are the salt of the earth, a flavoring and preservative that are needed and necessary for the sake of the world: "Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another." The gospel gives us permission to be public salt and to let our flavor be savored. □

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