



“Living Signs”

Sermon Preached by Jackie Taylor

Scripture: Mark 2: 13-17 and Duet. 6:1-9

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This past June, I had an opportunity to visit Kenya. There we planted trees, helped to build church, and worked with the youth to paint their new school. I stayed at the home of Lyle and Terry Dykstra who live on the campus of the Presbyterian College in Kikuyu. After observing them leading their class in Clinical Pastoral Education, I walked a half a mile back to their house. On the road was a sign that read “Presbytery of Kikuyu with an arrow pointing left. I looked and there was no office, a sign but no building. I wondered to myself if the office was an illusion, virtual or existed somewhere else where I could not see it. I later met the General Secretary, a person whose ministry spanned the entire area. When I met the Secretary, I found that the presbytery ministry was in the local churches.

I wonder if people see us that way. Unlike Kenya, there are plenty of outside buildings of all shapes and sizes, and all denominations but can the unchurched see us as signs inside the building that embody the work of Christ?

We can all agree that we want people to join and support our church. Perhaps what they are reading in the Christian church today are committees taking precedence over commitment, groups over gospel, management over ministry and budgets over benevolence. Saints of God, are you a living sign for God’s vision and God’s victory? When people walk into our church do they know they are in a place where the transforming power to God can change their lives? We are approaching the seasons of signs so for the next few minutes I would like to contemplate the purpose of signs.

A sign can tell you where you are. We are in Westminster Presbyterian Church. For some, that is enough. Certainly someone who wants to come to our church can find us. But there are those outside this familiar place who need to hear and see the Good News that God loves them. We find this in Mark’s gospel where Jesus goes out to meet some folks who would not normally come into the Temple. For them, they discovered God in the most unlikely place. Jesus establishes a relationship with them first. Then they come to know the love of good and participate in God’s reign. Sometimes we first have to go meet people where they are. Members of a Boy Scout troop were out on a first aid training exercise. Two young scouts were sent into the woods to play the role of the injured victim. “Lie out there in the woods and wait for the rest of

us to come and give you first aid” was the instruction. The troop found the first little boy but they took so long to minister to him the second little boy became discouraged. When the troop finally got the place in the woods where he was supposed to be, they found a note that said, “I have bled to death and gone home.” There are those outside and inside our churches that are in danger of bleeding to death and going home. If we strengthen our ministries through our love of God and others, they folk might stay awhile.

A good sign points a direction, tells you where you need to go. Sometimes we are the beacon that guides others to Christ. We have to be visible for this to happen. The good news is that God accepts us as who we are but wants us through our lives and our examples to show others. Last Spring I went on a contemplative retreat to a Catholic center in the Philadelphia area. While in the house I was greeted by Sister Catherine Louise, a woman in her late seventies. With a bright smile and quick wit, she apologized for the late welcome and related that she had to go to the store and buy something for her car. “The convent nurse, Sister Mary Alice told me to put one of those tennis balls on the top of my aerial so I wouldn’t keep losing my car in the parking lot. I couldn’t find one so I had to get something.” The feistiness in her voice told me something was coming. She continued her tale. When Sister Mary Alice saw my car she remarked, “Oh Catherine, you got an angel holding a candle, she’s got wings. How perfect.” Sister Catherine drew close to my face, “I told her, ‘that’s no angel. It’s a bunny rabbit with big ears holding a beer bottle. That’s all I could find on such short notice.’” Face it, there are more of us with beer bottles than with wings, but God uses us just as we are.

A really good sign will not only point a direction, but will tell you what you will find when you get there. This is ultimately in our daily actions. Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote “Man’s actions are the picture book of his creeds.” Who we are is important to God. The Israelites in Duet. were reminded of the mighty acts of God on their behalf and therefore, like a bracelet or a frontlet on their forehead, those signs were to be visible for future generations. They spoke of the mighty acts of God and they gave to God’s temple for the operations and for the poor. Sanctified by Jesus Christ we are witnesses to God’s reign now and in the age to come. Are we an example? Are we a living sign for the Son of the Living God? It’s time for the church of Jesus Christ to be a living sign.

In Kenya, the people are some of the poorest of the poor. They live in huts, shacks and small apartments if you have money. But they are some of the most generous people. Some walked two hours to bring our lunch when we worked. Sunday, some walked five hours to church and then gave the little they had to the church. They are called to be living signs and they are. One last story. There’s a story of a husband and wife who were on a hiking trip. The wife slipped and broke her wrist. The husband wrapped it but they knew they needed a doctor and the nearest hospital was two hours away. After an hour with no luck, they happened upon a sign that said, medical doctor. They knocked on the door and a man came out. The husband explained their situation. The man looked down and said, Abut I am no longer practicing medicine. @ The husband in his frustration exclaimed, “if you are no longer doing what you do, then take down the sign”.

Friends, if we are no longer the church, if we are no longer making disciples of all nations, we need to take down the sign. If we are not giving to the work and ministry so that others may hear

the gospel, then take down the sign. If we no longer support the house of God so that the blind may see, the lame may walk, then we need to take down the sign. But if we are preaching good news to the poor, release of the captives, giving sight to the blind and proclaiming the acceptable year of the Lord, sharing our resources so that the gospel may be preached to every nation then we are living signs.