Preaching Series: Eight Factors in Life Transformation
Sermon Title: Sharing Your Faith

Text: Acts 2:42--3:16

Introduction: On the morning of September 11, 2001 **Jeannie Braca** switched on the television to check the weather report, only to hear that a plane had just hit the World Trade Center. Her husband, Al, worked as **a corporate bond trader for Cantor Fitzgerald**. His office was on the **105th floor of Tower One**. Al had survived the World Trade Center bombing in 1993 and had even helped a woman with asthma escape from the building. Jeannie knew that he would do the same thing this time, "***I knew Al would stop to help and minister to people***," she said, "***but I never thought for a minute that he wouldn't be coming home***!" A week later, like so many others who were in that building, Al's body was found in the rubble. His wife, Jeannie, and his son Christopher were devastated! Then the reports began to trickle in from friends and acquaintances. Some people on the 105th floor had made a last call or sent a final e-mail to loved ones saying that a man was leading people in prayer. **A few referred to Al by name**. His family learned that Al had indeed been ministering to people during the attack! When he realized that they were all trapped in the building and would not be able to escape, Al shared the gospel with a group of 50 co-workers and led them in prayer. This news came as no surprise to his wife, Jeannie. For years, she and her husband had been praying for the salvation of these men and women. According to Jeannie, Al hated his job and couldn't stand the environment. It was a world so out of touch with his Christian values, but he wouldn't quit. Al was convinced that God wanted him to stay there, to be a light in the darkness. Just before they all perished, he shared his faith with his co-workers….many of whom had sarcastically nicknamed him "**The Rev**." On that fateful day, however, on September 11, in the midst of the chaos, the Rev's co-workers looked to him—and he delivered!

When we hear stories like this we are grateful for people like Al who, when the opportunity presents itself, even in the last moments of life, stand ready and willing to share the Gospel with those who are perishing. I suspect there are some in heaven who credit the Lord using Al to share the message with them just before they died. Sadly, people like **Al Braca** seem to be in the minority, however, when it comes to witnessing to their faith in Christ. Too many believers today, while enjoying the benefits of the Christian faith for themselves, are simply unwilling to share the good news with others. This lack of evangelistic zeal certainly seems to be in contradiction to what the Lord said would happen when the Church received the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. In **Acts 1:8** He said, "**But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you shall by my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth**." Given that these are our marching orders, we have to wonder why only 3 in 10 unchurched Americans say a Christian has ever shared with them one on one how a person becomes a Christ. Thi begs the question, "**Why does the church in America seem to be so reluctant in testifying to others of our faith in Christ**?"

This is the 6th message in our series, "**Eight Factors in Life Transformation**." It is based on the research of LifeWay Ministries in a study entitled "***Transformational Discipleship***." If you care to listen to any of the previous five messages, just go to riverridge.online and click on the header for "sermons."

Few would argue that the church in the book of Acts was evangelistic at its core. How else could one explain the rapid spread of Christianity so that by the beginning of the fourth century it became the dominant faith of the known world? ***From the first chapter of Acts, we learn that this has a lot to do with the work of the Holy Spirit. He is the one who enables us to effectively share our faith with others. This morning I invite you to join me as we look at our passage and see what we can learn about the ministry of the third person of the Trinity that can make a difference for us today in evangelism***.

The Presence of the Spirit in the Life of the Church (**Acts 2:42-47 -- And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved**). In these verses, Luke, the author of the book of Acts, provides us with a little snapshot of the church immediately following the the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came to live on a full-time basis in Christ's followers. I want you to note ***three observations*** about their interior life that was led the Spirit and made them being effective witnesses – **(1) THEY WERE A LEARNING CHURCH.** They devoted themselves to the Apostle's Teaching. The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Truth in **John 16:13. He** creates in believers a hunger to receive instruction on the Christian life. And that's what happened in the early church so that they soaked up God's Word. **(2) THEY WERE A CARING CHURCH**. They devoted themselves to the fellowship, another product of a Spirit-filled assembly (**Philippians 2:1-3 -- If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves**). The word for fellowship is "**koinonia**" and refers to the common life of the saints. They shared the Lord with one another and they shared their possessions with one another. This was not some form of communism, by the way, where no one owned property, but it marked a generous attitude displayed by those who had more than enough with those who did not; **(3) THEY WERE A WORSHIPPING CHURCH**. They shared in the breaking of the bread (*the Lord's Supper)* and the prayers (*corporate prayer gatherings*). Note that their services were both REVERENT (**an awe came upon every soul**) and JOYFUL (**praising God**). They were also FORMAL (**attending the temple together**) and INFORMAL (**breaking bread in their homes**). This was a church that was consumed with glorifying God. HERE'S SOMETHING FOR YOU TO THINK ABOUT: It is no coincidence that ***when*** the interior life of the church is where it needs to be, it becomes an outreaching church. **We're told that even in its earliest days the Lord adding to their number day by day those who were being saved**. Three quick comments regarding THOSE WHO PUT THEIR FAITH IN JESUS: **(1)** the Lord did it; **(2)** it happened regularly; and **(3)** God did not add them to the church without saving them. ALL OF THIS TOOK PLACE BECAUSE OF THE PRESENCE OF THE SPIRIT IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH WHO CHANGED THE WAY THEY LIVED.

The Power of the Spirit in the Ministry of the Church (**Acts 3:1-10 -- Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. 2 And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the Beautiful Gate to ask alms of those entering the temple. 3 Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms. 4 And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us." 5 And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. 6 But Peter said, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" 7 And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. 8 And leaping up he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. 9 And all the people saw him walking and praising God, 10 and recognized him as the one who sat at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, asking for alms. And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him**). In **Acts 2:43** we're told that the many signs and wonders were being done through the Apostles. These would have authenticated the message they preached for ONLY God can do real miracles. Here in the first ten verses of chapter three, we have an example of another miracle that clearly demonstrates the power of the Holy Spirit working through Peter and John. While on their way to the temple to pray, they encountered a man who had been lame from birth who was begging for alms (**money given to the poor**). Having none to share, they gave him something far better. Peter said, "**I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the**

name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" And then taking him by the hand (*Peter had seen the Lord do the same thing for Jairus' daughter* – **Luke 8:54 -- … taking her by the hand he called, saying, "Child, arise")** he helped the man up. Instantly, his feet became strong so that he jumped up, began to walk and without hesitation became a worshipper of the Lord God Almighty. (**Review: The Presence/Power of the Spirit in the church**.)

The Participation of the Spirit in the Witness of the Church **After he was healed, the first thing the man did was enter into the temple with Peter and John and give glory to God**. When those who recognized him saw that he was walking and leaping, **they were filled with wonder and amazement**. He was, after all, the same guy they had seen day in and day out begging for alms because he was unable to walk. That's when Peter seized the moment to share the Gospel with the crowd that gathered. "**Men of Israel, why are you amazed at this? Or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made him walk? 13 The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you handed over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. 14 But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked to have a murderer given to you. 15 And you killed the source of life, whom God raised from the dead; we are witnesses of this. 16 By faith in His name, His name has made this man strong, whom you see and know. So the faith that comes through Him has given him this perfect health in front of all of you** (**Acts 3:12—16**). Wouldn't it be something if people looked at us the way they looked at the man in this story? Imagine if they were *filled with wonder and amazement because of the work God has done in our lives by the power of the Holy Spirit*. Salvation is a miracle of God as He reaches down and to save us from death and hell and brings us into the kingdom of His beloved Son. Now that we have been touched by God through saving faith in Christ, we should HOPE that our unbelieving friends and loved one will see the difference He makes and stand amazed at the Holy Spirit's power to transform us.

The Transformational Discipleship Study: In their survey regarding the **eight factors they say are essential in life transformation,** the respondents scored lowest in measuring how frequently they shared their faith. **Here's what the survey revealed**: Though nearly six out of ten had received at least some training in evangelism…

1. *When the respondents were asked how many times in the past six months they had shared how to become a Christian with someone, **78%** said zero times*. Some people think that newer believers are more zealous to share their faith, but the research doesn't bear this out. LifeWay discovered that those who have known the Lord for a longer period of time say they share the Gospel with others more frequently.
2. *When the respondents were asked how many times in the past six months they had invited an unchurched person to attend a church service or program, **59%** said zero times.*

How can we avoid such a lack of compassion for a worldthat is dying and going to Hell here at River Ridge Church? Consider these thoughts as we wrap up our message…

- **Witnessing occurs when the church is devoted to the right disciplines**…the Word, the fellowship and worship. Of course, these disciplines must be led by the Spirit of God. When we allow other things to draw our attention away from the Word, the fellowship and worship, we lose our evangelistic zeal.

  Hudson Taylor, considered by many to be the greatest missionary since the Apostle Paul, used to tell of the story about Peter, his Chinese convert and disciple as he challenged English students to join him in China mission work,. On one of their sea journeys, Peter (*who did not know how to swim*) fell from the side of the boat. Fortunately, there were fishermen nearby, just a grab away from where Peter fell. Taylor shouted at the fishermen and asked them to help his friend, "***Hey, help my friend, he is drowning***." However, the fishermen did not bother to heed his call for help because they were busy loading their catch from the net to their boat. Taylor continued to yell, "St***op what you are doing, and help my friend. He is just a grab away***." But the fishermen continued on their work until the last fish was loaded to the boat.

Then they jumped in and retrieved Peter from of water. They tried to revive him, but to no avail. Peter died of drowning. He could have been saved because he was just a grab away from the fishermen. After Hudson Taylor finished the story, he would ask the students/church members what they thought of about the Chinese? Some said they are bad, evil, selfish, unconcerned about the salvation of a dying man. You know how Taylor responded? He said, "***I saw it differently. I think those Chinese men are like most Christians today. They are unconcerned about the plight of the sinners who are now just a grab away from them. The reason is that they are so busy (doing other things)***."

- **Witnessing is the church's response to God's supernatural work**. When questioned about the miracle God had performed through them (**verse 12**) on the lame man, Peter and John shared the Gospel message ("***to this we are witnesses***" – **verse 15**), giving glory to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and His servant Jesus. Perhaps there is so little witnessing going on in the church today, because there is so little evidence of God's supernatural work occurring among us. When God begins to move in and through His people, maybe then we will have as many opportunities to share our faith the early church.

- **Witnessing must address man's sin and God's solution**. Here in **chapter three**, Peter tells the Jews that in ignorance they delivered God's Servant, Jesus, to be crucified; they denied Him, the holy and righteous One, in the presence of Pilate; and they killed the Author of Life. Yet all of this happened in keeping with the words of the prophets and the promise made to Abraham (**Genesis 12:3 – through you all the nations of the earth will be blessed**). Now God has raised His Son Jesus from the dead vindicating His claim to conquer sin and death. Those who repent (**turn from their self-centered ways to Christ**) will see their sins blotted out and be refreshed by the presence of the Lord through faith.

- **Witnessing is a joyful yet risky venture**. If you continue to read in the book of Acts, you discover that the priests, the captain of the temple and the Sadducees were greatly annoyed by what Peter and John had to say. They were teaching the people and proclaiming in Christ the resurrection of the dead (*something the Sadducees did not believe in*). The two men were arrested, kept in custody overnight and then questioned about their teachings. Despite the fact that an undeniable miracle had been performed, they were sternly warned not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. Their response? "***Whether it is right in the site of God to give heed to men rather than God, you be the judge. But we cannot stop speaking what we've seen and heard***." Both men ultimately did suffer a great deal for their witness of Christ as they led so many to faith in Jesus that more people called Jesus their Savior than participated in any other religion in the world.

The church today needs witnesses who share the same resolve because they share the same convictions. We, too, cannot stop speaking what we've seen and heard! I love this story. Long ago in the days when the ruling passion of the **Roman Emperor Nero** was the extermination of the Christians, there lived and served him a band of soldiers known as the **"Emperor's Wrestlers**." They were fine, stalwart men, picked from the best and the bravest of the land, recruited from the great athletes of the Roman amphitheatre. In was in that venue they upheld the arms of the Emperor against all challengers. Before each contest they would stand before the Emperor's throne. Then they would cry out: "***We, the wrestlers, wrestling for thee, 0 Emperor, to win for thee the victory and from thee, the victor's crown***!" When the great Roman army was sent to fight in far away Gaul (*now France*), no soldiers were braver or more loyal than this band of wrestlers led by their **centurion Vespasian**. But news reached Nero that the Christian faith, that seemed to know no bounds and leap all barriers, had come among the wrestlers and many had accepted it. To be a Christian meant death, even to those who served Nero best; so that this decree was sent by a messenger to the centurion Vespasian: "***If there be any among the soldiers who cling to the faith of the Christian, they must die***!" The message was received in the dead of winter. The soldiers were camped on the shore of a frozen inland lake. The winter had been hard, but the many hardships they had endured together had only served to unite them more closely. So it

was with a sinking heart that Vespasian, the centurion, read the Emperor's words. Yet to a soldier there is one word supreme - and that is "*duty*". Vespasian called the soldiers together and asked the question: "***Are there any among you who cling to the faith of the Christian? If so, let him step forward***!" Forty wrestlers instantly stepped forward two paces, respectfully saluted, and stood at attention. Vespasian paused. He had not expected so many. "***The decree has come from your Emperor***," he said, "***that any who cling to the faith of the Christian must die! For the sake of your country, your comrades, your loved ones, renounce this false faith***!" Not one of the forty moved. "***Until sundown I shall await your answer***," said Vespasian. Sundown came. Again the question was asked, "***Are there any among you who cling to the faith of the Christian? If so, let him step forward***!" Again the forty wrestlers stepped forward, and stood at attention. Vespasian pleaded with them long and earnestly without prevailing upon a single man to deny his Lord. Finally he said: "***The decree of the Emperor must be obeyed, but I am not willing that your blood be on your comrades. I order that you march out upon the lake of ice where you will be left to the mercy of the elements. Fires, however, will be burning on the shore, and at the largest, I, your commander, will be waiting to welcome any willing to renounce this false faith***." The forty wrestlers were stripped and then without a word they wheeled, and falling into columns of four, marched out towards the lake of ice. As they marched they broke into chorus with the old chant of the Arena: "***Forty wrestlers wrestling for Thee, O Christ, to win for Thee the victory and from Thee, the Victor's crown***!" All through the long hours of the night Vespasian, the centurion, stood by his camp fire and waited, listening to the wrestlers' song, now fainter and fainter in the distance. Then as morning neared one figure, overcome by exposure, crept quietly towards the fire; in the extremity of his suffering he had renounced his Lord. Before the words were out of the lone man's mouth, from out the darkness came the song, "***Thirty-nine wrestlers, wrestling for Thee, 0 Christ, to win for Thee the victory and from Thee, the Victor's crown*!"** Vespasian looked at the figure drawing close to the fire - and then out into the darkness to the place where the song of faith continued to be sung. Perhaps he saw the greater light shining there in the darkness! Because at that moment **Vespasian** removed his helmet, dropped his shield and sprang upon the ice proclaiming, **"*No! Forty wrestlers wrestling for Thee, 0 Christ, to win for Thee the victory and from Thee, the Victor's crown*!"** And the number of God's own (overcomers) was complete.