

“Together in Presence-1Peter 3:8-15, Matthew 9:35, 36, John 17:20, 21

Last week I began a series of sermons based on the unity found in the early church. This unity began with Jesus’ prayer in John 17 when he prayed for unity as the early church was going to be formed. Last week I shared that the early church was successful in five areas that made a difference in their strength of ministry in the world. Over the next four weeks we are going to look at each one of these characteristics. Last week we looked at the first of these areas which was unity in prayer. They prayed for guidance from the Holy Spirit as to what they needed to do and be.

This week I want us to look at the second area of success and that is the early church was present. They were highly visible and their presence was felt in the society around them. They had impact. They were not passive sitting around hoping something would happen, but they were intentional and active. They were bold and not ashamed and active sharing their faith.

The Apostle Peter knew the significance of high presence and visibility in faith. In the passage that was read he makes two assumptions and gives two directions concerning the sharing of and the high visibility of our faith. The first assumption that Peter makes is that Christians are different. We are to live a life that is different. The second assumption is that people will want to know why we are different. In other words are we attractive to those outside the church and the faith. In verse 15 Peter writes that if we are living a positive, high profile, highly visible life, people will notice it and want to know why. In other words, we as Christians should have a faith that is attractive.

In this passage of Peter he gives a list of 14 reasons why Christians should be attractive. In verse 8 Peter gives the first five. Christians are attractive when they have unity and live in harmony. They are seen as working well together. Peter goes on to list additional reasons why Christians are attractive. Christians are attractive when they are filled with love, sympathy, tenderheartedness, and humble in spirit and in works. Attractive Christians are those who are not petty, not angry or snap back when people say evil things about them. In verse 10 Peter rounds out his list of attractive features by saying that Christians are attractive

when they can control their tongue and control what they say. Peter gives us a long list of what a Christian should and can look like.

Wouldn't you find attractive a person that lived out many if not all of these attractive characteristics? Let me ask you a question this morning. "Is there anyone around you who wants to be like you? Is there anyone when you are out that comes up to you and declares that there is something different or special about you? You talk different. You think differently. I am convinced that if we live out some if not many of the characteristics that Peter mentions then we will be a very attractive person with an attractive message and witness.

Peter gives us two assumptions: The first is that Christians are different. The second is that we are so positively different that people will want to have what we have. Peter goes on to write that based on these two assumptions there are two directions.

The first direction is that we need to be ready to share with people our faith story. Our faith story is how God has come into our lives and how we are living that story out now. Do you know your faith story? If someone came into church one Sunday and sat next to you could you share with them what your faith story is? George Barna who is a guy who studies churches and their growth took a survey on what Americans think it means to be a Christian. 22% said they had no idea what it means to be a Christian. 21% felt it meant being nice to people. 19% said it had to do with a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. 14% said to believe in God. 10% said to be a good person. 11% said going to church and act religious. Sadly only one in 5 Americans knew that being a Christian meant having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. We need to have opportunities to show people that we live a different life and to share our faith story of Jesus.

The first direction is to be ready to share our faith story. The second direction is to be ready to care. This means to reach out and care for people with our heart. In our story from Matthew 9 we find Jesus going about the everydayness of ministry: preaching, teaching, and healing. In the midst of this he observed that the people he was preaching, teaching, and healing were in need of good example. They were in need of someone to lead them and guide them. He

discovered that the people needed someone to care. Jesus observed, he felt, and then he acted. Hey, you want to make a difference? Jesus is our model.

I want to leave you with a challenge this morning. I want you to think of three neighbors or people over the next three months. I want you to pray for them by name in your prayer time and then secondly, I want you to make contact with them and in some way show them compassion. Spend time with them. Take them something. Invite them to come to church with you. Be present in their lives. Share your story as you care for their needs.