

Palm Sunday would be the day when churches often process - with or without palms - sometimes around their village or town, sometimes just out the door, round the churchyard and back!

It would sometimes be called "a walk of witness".

Witness might seem a strange title - why don't we call it a "Palm Sunday procession"?

So I want to talk today about the next mark of being a Christian - after God, the Bible, prayer, church, Jesus - today I want to say that a Christian is someone who bears witness. And the first half I think you'll like, and the second you'll find challenging.

Nowadays the word witness conjures up images of jury's and courts.

But the word "witness" means to have been there - to give evidence to the facts - and to testify, that is to give testimony about something.

So what are the facts we are saying, what are we testifying to when we march with our palms? What is the evidence we want to declare?

The fact that there was a man called Jesus, and that this week - the Sabbath before the passover, about 2000 years ago, he entered Jerusalem on a donkey, and the streets were thronged with people, with many holding palms and throwing them on the road.

These are the facts, this is what we declare. This is what we bear witness to.

And in church circles, we also bear witness to our faith - that he died and rose again, and sent the Holy Spirit. As the hymn says - all of this bears witness, one church, one faith, one lord.

This link between belief and testifying - between faith and witness - is there is the grit of the text. When it says that the disciples bore witness, the greek word is martyreo - where we get our word martyr from. For the early church, to die for your faith was the ultimate way of declaring your faith in Jesus Christ.

Nowadays, they might say we get off lightly. You can imagine the conversation in heaven - so what did you do to show people you were a Christian? Oh I wore this little cross round my neck! I see - in my day, they chopped my head off at the neck!

But however we show our faith - by wearing a cross, by losing our life, by marching round at 9am on a Sunday morning with some palms - the thing is - this is the 6th mark of being a Christian - acting out our faith.

It doesn't matter if you have the tiniest mustard seed, or your confused the heck out of the creed and world faiths - if you want to be a christian, if you think there is a God and Jesus was real - then you have to show your commitment in some way - You have to put your money where your mouth is -

Anyone can say - I want to be environmentally friendly, or governments can say - we're going to reduce carbon emissions by xx %. But unless you do something to make that happen, unless you change in some way - its just cheap talk.

So Christians have to act - to show their faith.

As our dear Saint James says in his epistle

*Suppose a brother or a sister has no clothes or food. Suppose one of you says to them, "Go. I hope everything turns out fine for you. Keep warm. Eat well." And suppose you do nothing about what they really need. Then what good have you done? It is the same with faith. If it doesn't cause us to do something, it's dead.*

Faith has to cause us to do something. A Christian is not someone who agrees to a series of intellectual proposition in their head. Its not I believe that, its I believe who.

And you have to bear witness to the relationship, you have to show your commitment.

And some people say - witness is when you tell someone else about how you came to faith and encourage them to do the same. Or testimony is when we tell lots of people about our story, like Billy Graham. That is one way.

But St Francis said - share the gospel, use words if you must.

So the fun thing is - bearing witness can be in so many ways - as many types of flower and plant that use different shapes and colours of turning the sun's rays into energy.

One of my favourite theologians (am I allowed favourites?) says that going to church on a Sunday morning is our main act of bearing witness to our faith. This is pre-covid times - Whilst the rest of the world goes to football practice, or worships at a garden centre, or stays in bed and reads the Sunday papers, in normal times we walk or get on our bikes, or go in our cars, and go and do this thing. We make time for it, we are committed to it - it is showing our faith by what we do.

But what about what St James say - to care for widows and orphans, or look after the poor and hungry - this is the best way to show your faith, to share your faith. No one remembers Mother Theresa for her theology or sermons (except the drop of water thing) but boy do they know about her faith from her care for others.

So yeah - we bear witness by coming to church, or by showing God's love in action.

But this is where you're going to find it harder - I certainly will

Because St Francis said - that sometimes we would have to use words. Sometimes, we need to speak.

When they ask - why do you go to church? Why are you waving those palms?  
When they ask - how can you not be afraid in a pandemic?

Then do like St Peter says - Always be prepared to give an answer for the reason for the hope that you have. (But do this with gentleness and respect)  
1 Peter 3:15

Because somebody once told you - unless you stalked them to church, but even then someone must have told you when you were inside.

I know its a terrifying thing, and so un-British to talk about the things that really matter. And don't worry, I'll come back to this and we'll help one another to tell our stories. But I can't get over to you enough, that whilst witnessing can be about Marching with palms,

or looking after neighbours, or a thousand other kindnesses - there is also a time for speaking.

As Paul says in Romans -

“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone telling it to them?

There - I've given you Paul, Peter, James and St Francis! All to tell you to bear witness to your faith. Otherwise, if you don't act, no-one will know you have a faith. Not even God.