
Witness Unhindered:
“Grace Taught My Heart To Fear”
 Acts 5: 1-11

Thoughts to Shape and Spark Discussion:

“Perhaps the most common invitation to cynicism about the church is hypocrisy. Cynicism’s standard cliché about the church is that it is “filled with hypocrites.” This is a curiously powerless criticism. Of course it is filled with hypocrites. What else is new? Hospitals are filled with sick people. Hypocrisy is a human problem, not a distinctively Christian problem. Is anyone suggesting that there is no hypocrisy outside of the church? . . . Just because hypocrisy is so widespread, almost normal, this does not lessen its seriousness. Jesus reserved some of the most stinging rebukes for hypocrites. He repeated, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!” no less than seven times in one chapter (Matthew 23) as he denounced one hypocrisy after another in the religious leadership. They crucified him at the end of the week.” – *Dick Keyes*

“I hate, I despise your festivals,
 and take no delight in your solemn assemblies . . .
 Take away the noise of your songs;
 I will not listen to melody of your harps.
 But let justice roll down like waters,
 and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” – *Amos*

“The fear of God is that affectionate reverence, by which the child of God bends himself humbly and carefully to his Father’s law.” – *Charles Bridges*

Themes and Questions to Guide Reflection and Response:

- What from the Scripture passage or the sermon made an impression upon you? Are there lingering questions to be answered or rabbit trails to be followed for you?
- Acts 4: 32-37 and Acts 5: 1-11 mark a stark contrast in terms of appearance and reality of spiritual lives.
 - What are some of contrasts you notice between the two accounts?
 - Why would Luke make sure that both accounts are part of his narrative? Why might he have been tempted to exclude Ananias and Sapphira’s demise?
 - What is the value of seeing both side-by-side?
- Acts 5: 1-11 puts us face-to-face with God’s judgment and discipline.
 - How can God’s love and his judgment, his mercy and discipline, his grace and truth work together?
 - Can God’s judgment actually be restorative?
 - What does a healthy “fear” of God look like?
- The root sin God confronts here is hypocrisy (see Dick Keyes’ quotation above).
 - Why is gap between appearance and reality so important to God?
 - How do we “put on a mask” around others to portray the person we want others to see?
 - How does the Gospel free us from this dishonesty and self-focus? How does it relieve our fears?