

Conversation Starter

For the week of May 25 to 31, 2008

This week's theme: Experiencing Persecution

Reading #1: Acts 6:8-15 & 7:54-8:3
Reading #2: 2 Timothy 3:12
Reading #3: Matthew 5:10
Reading #4: 1 Peter 4:14

In reading #1, we learn that Stephen, a deacon within the Christian Church, received directly from the Holy Spirit strength, conviction and boldness to preach and teach the good news ... to be an effective witness for Jesus Christ ... to perform "great wonders and miraculous signs among the people" ... and to confront the pride and devious ways of the members of the religious group known as "Synagogue of the Freedmen." In fact, the author of Stephen's story as found in the book of Acts writes: *...those opposed to Stephen could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by which he spoke... (Acts 6:10) [And] when they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. (Acts 7:54-55)* As followers of Jesus, we too can have this same spiritual strength to proclaim the good news as Stephen did. God desires to fill us with the Holy Spirit so that we can, in love, boldly tell others about the need for a personal relationship/friendship with Jesus Christ. However, a word of caution: telling others about Jesus and living as Jesus would want us to often means we end up experiencing persecution as well. (See reading #2.) Sadly, there are people who do not want to hear OR are not able to hear the good news. If, for some reason, you are persecuted for being a follower of Jesus, check out God's promises to you in the above readings (#3 & #4) from Matthew & 1 Peter.

1. Have you ever been persecuted for following Jesus? If willing, share some details about your experience.
2. What are the most common ways people in North America are persecuted for their faith in Christ?
3. Thinking of the Christian Church throughout the world, what are some additional ways you know Christians have been persecuted?
4. What hope does Matthew 5:10 & 1 Peter 4:14 give you?
5. How do we become people who have strength, conviction and boldness in our ability to tell others about Jesus?
6. In what ways has God's Spirit helped you with telling others about Jesus?
7. In what ways has God's Spirit helped you when persecuted?
8. In what ways has God's Spirit prompted you to pray for others throughout the world who are persecuted for their faith in Jesus Christ?

Written by: The Rev. Robert Roe
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