

God SO Loved!– Tell Someone!

10/21/18 – Pastor Randy

Last week David Dominguez made a couple of comments that provoked me to think about our call to share the good news about Jesus. David shared that it wasn't until he was an adult already trapped in a life of drugs and crime that someone shared Christ with him; his wife, Shirrie. She came to faith listening to a radio program. Her one and only previous exposure to the gospel was by two people knocking on her door with an evangelistic “hit-and-run” gospel presentation. In David's words, the Christian “evangelists” seemed intent simply to persuade Shirrie to pray a prayer so they could be on their way, content that they had fulfilled their “religious obligation” and achieved a religious “victory”. There was no effort made to follow up with her. No expressed interest in any of her personal and practical needs.

How is it that two people living in the USA – and in Florida for that matter – can be uninformed about the gospel. We have intellectual and cultural ghettos where people live right next door, shop in the same stores, ride the same buses or trains, and work in the same companies, but never interact on a personal level that leads to sharing one's faith.

We must tell someone! I want to walk you through the first 8 chapters of the book of acts to give you a picture of the emphasis that the early church placed on telling others about Jesus.

*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and **you will be my witnesses** in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Acts 1:8*

*But Peter and John answered them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for **we cannot but speak** of what we have seen and heard.” Acts 4:19,20*

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*And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and **they were all filled** with the Holy Spirit **and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.** Acts 4:31*

*And every day, in the temple and from house to house, **they did not cease teaching and preaching** that the Christ is Jesus. Acts 5:42*

Chapter six opens with a decision by the church to appoint seven deacons to handle the distribution of funds for needy widows so that the physical needs would be met without taking the apostles away from their primary responsibilities which were to pray and to preach the good news about Jesus. One of those who was appointed to this team of leaders was Stephen. The next thing Luke records is that the Holy Spirit was working miraculously through Stephen as he went out in the community witnessing about Jesus. His preaching provoked some leaders from the synagogue to debate with him, but when they failed to refute his preaching they decided to resort to manipulation, distorting his words and falsely accusing him of blasphemy. Chapter seven records Stephen's preaching which confronted the sins of his accusers, resulting in his execution. Now we get to chapter 8 and we read:

*And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and **they were all scattered** throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles... **Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.** -Acts 8:1,4*

Two simple points God wants to impress upon us today:

1. **We Must Tell People About Jesus.** They first Christians were compelled to tell others. Their motivation came from two sources:
 - a) The Person of Jesus. They could not stop speaking what they had seen and heard because the truth was critical.
 - b) The Influence of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit comes upon a person, witnessing for Jesus becomes natural. In Acts 4 they were all filled and spoke the word with boldness.

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2. Sharing the good news is the responsibility of all Christians.

It is not the sole responsibility of a handful of trained professional preachers. For sure, the apostles had a specific calling from God to serve as the primary teachers in the early church. There is no question that the NT supports the notion that God has especially gifted certain persons to engage in teaching and preaching ministries. But that in no way exempts those who are not so gifted from sharing the good news about Jesus.

Evangelism in the Early Church, by Michael Green, a classic work of church history and theology, offers some invaluable insights into the spread of Christianity in the NT period. Listen to what he wrote:

“Christianity is enshrined in the life: but it is proclaimed by the lips. If there is a failure in either respect the gospel cannot be communicated.” (pg. 300)

“There was no distinction in the early church between full time ministers and laymen in this responsibility to spread the gospel by every means possible...every Christian was called to be a witness to Christ, not only by life but lip.” (pg. 245-46)

Highly respected Christian Church historian Kenneth Scott Latourette concluded that the “chief agents in the expansion of Christianity” were not professional preachers but ordinary men and women who spoke of their faith to those who worked and lived among them. (See *History of the Expansion of Christianity: The First Five Centuries* pg. 117)

If we are going to be faithful followers of Jesus, we must ask the Holy Spirit to give us the power to be witnesses for Jesus; to fill us with the conviction and boldness that Jesus’ first disciples had. Michael Green wrote that what really struck him and made a lasting impression upon him as he studied the spread of Christianity in the NT period was, “the sheer passion of these early Christians. They were passionately convinced of the truth of the gospel. They were persuaded that men and women would be lost without it.

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In Peter's first letter he wrote that our posture towards those who question us about our Christian beliefs and behaviors should be one of **"always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you"**. These words should not be misconstrued as to suggest that we are to passively sit back and wait for someone to ask us about our faith, as if our responsibility to share only begins after we are asked. In the context Peter is writing to Christians who were facing persecution for their faith and he was telling them not to fear unbelievers who would be prone to challenge them in a hostile manner about their faith.

Let's unpack this statement to learn some principles about sharing our faith: **1. Know what you believe.** Peter writes, "Always be prepared". There is work involved in sharing our faith. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would bring to our remembrance all that Jesus taught. That clearly tells us that we have to do some work. We have to read and study in order to learn the content of the gospel. We need to know what we believe and why we believe it.

Here is a great online resource where you can find answers to many of the questions and objections to belief in Christ and Christianity.

bethinking.org

2. Take the time to explain the faith. Peter instructed them to be prepared **"to make a defense...for a reason"**. This does not mean to be defensive, but to give a reasoned explanation. Faith in Christ is a "reasonable faith". Do not be afraid of people's sincere questions and objections. Love for people necessitates a willingness on our part to help them believe. Jesus did not get put off and angry at Thomas when Thomas expressed doubt about the resurrection. Jesus invited him to touch him. Jesus gave him evidence.

It is true that to be reconciled to God a person must be willing to take a step of faith. You and I cannot "prove" Jesus is the Son of God, creator and future

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redeemer of creation. That must be accepted by faith. But when the reasons for faith have been explored, acceptance requires only an enlightened step, not a blind leap. That leads me to an important point:

Sharing your faith is not a 'one time' or 'one kind' of conversation.

When I was growing up the vast majority of people I knew, if they were not Jewish, were raised in a home where they were taught to believe in the God and Jesus, even if they barely ever read or studied the Bible. The challenge that the church faced was to persuade people to actually practice what they believed to be true. It is similar to a patient who readily accepts his doctor's diagnosis and prescriptive cure, but who fails to follow "doctor's orders". Evangelism becomes more challenging when people don't trust your "doctor". In the spiritual realm the bible is our doctor. We believe the bible accurately diagnoses our sickness and effectively prescribes our cure, but far fewer people around us have that same confidence, so you might need a conversation that builds their confidence in the credibility of the doctor.

In the book of Acts, Paul's missionary strategy was to visit the local synagogue in the town or city and begin to share how Jesus fulfilled the Jewish scriptures. He frequently returned to the synagogue to share more in order to lead his hearers to faith. In Antioch of Psidia, Luke does not record any conversions resulting from Paul's first visit but the people begged him to return the next Sabbath so they could hear more. At Thessalonica, Paul and Silas shared about Jesus in the synagogue for three consecutive Sabbaths before Luke records anyone coming to faith. Luke commended the people in the city of Berea for not professing belief immediately but for having the integrity to spend days examining the scriptures for themselves to see if there was scriptural support for what Paul and Silas were preaching.

My point is simple and straightforward. We must respect the need people have to explore and process the message before accepting or rejecting. I had lunch with a man the other day who has been trying to "plant some seeds"

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about the faith in the mind and heart of an old friend, and was a little frustrated that his friend didn't show any signs of acceptance. I reminded him that there was a pretty long season of planting and watering the seeds of Gods word in his life before he I ever saw the sings of him accepting it. Be patient and persistent. Don't expect people to embrace Christ after one five-minute conversation. They need to know what and why they must believe.

3. Share your faith as the good news it really is.

In Peter's words we are to give the reasons "...for the hope that is in you". This phrase reminds us that the gospel is a message of hope. The "gospel" is the good news about Jesus. It is good news, so it ought to sound like it. It is true that the good news presupposes some bad news. This bad news is that mankind, because of his sinful rebellion against God, lives alienated from the presence of God, suffering along with all of creation under the condemnation and curse of sin and evil. But I think we do well to start where God's word begins; not with the fall, but with the truth about creation. We were created in the image of, as representatives of, The almighty, all righteous, all merciful, all loving Creator of the universe. That image has been corrupted by our sin but not completely eradicated. We are still valuable enough in God's sight for Him to send His Son Jesus to identify with us so He might rescue us from our sin. The bad news about our rebellion and guilt that warrants condemnation is real and must be communicated. Repentance from sin is at the core of the proclamation of the gospel. But this good news offers us a two-sided hope. Yes, it is very good news because it offers us the hope that we can be free from the judgment of an eternal hell, but it is also good news in that it offers us the hope of enjoying God's presence and His renewed creation.

Remember: The good news is the news about Jesus. A lot of conversations about faith get sidetracked and drift into controversial issues about the Bible and morality, or church denominations and traditions. Our number one goal should be to focusing our conversations with people on the person of Jesus.

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Why is Jesus the most influential person in the history of the world? What did he claim about himself? What did he do? How should we respond to the evidence for his resurrection? Turn their attention to Jesus. Lead them to Jesus. I believe that if you get people to investigate Jesus and they will discover that the Bible is a reliable witness. Our hope is not in a book and not in religious traditions. Our hope is in a person; the person of Jesus Christ.

I recently had the opportunity to share Jesus with two people while flying. The first was in the airport coming back from Paraguay and the second was on a flight coming back from visiting my family in Boston. In both cases I focused on what it was about Jesus that I found so compelling.

I want to close with three quick additional tips for sharing your faith.

4. Share how God's story has become your story.

Never underestimate the power of your personal story. What Jesus has done for the world can really come alive for people when they hear how Jesus has personally redeemed you. People can argue that your beliefs about God are false, but they can't argue that your experience with Christ is not real.

5. Cultivate a life of dependence on the Holy Spirit through prayer.

Conversion from unbelief to faith is not our work, but the Spirit's work through us. Paul reminds us that we plant and we water with our words and works, but God causes the growth. Listen to this conclusion from Michael Greens study of the NT Church: *"Evangelism was God's work, through human agency. They knew he would not reveal himself to pagans in saving power unless they displayed their utter dependency on Him through prayer."* In his introduction he stressed how utterly dependent the church was on the Holy Spirit.

6. The key to learning to share your faith is practice. Just do it! Prepare, but don't wait until you think you have a satisfactory answer to every question someone might ask you.

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Learn the good news about Jesus, live like the good news is really good news, and then go and share the good news! Ask God to help you initiate communication about Jesus with at least one person who is not a believer.