

“Get Out!”

Matthew 28:16-20

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This morning I'm going to use a word that some people say shouldn't be used in mixed company. Some say it should **never** be used from the pulpit because it will alienate any visitors you have. And still others say it is so repulsive a word that it should never be used at all. I'm going to go out on a limb this morning and use that word.

I'm talking about the “E” word - Evangelism. So, what about the word “evangelism” itself? Well, the word “evangel” means “good news.” It is news, something that comes **to** us, rather than something that comes from within us. It is good because it is something that God does **before it is anything we do**. God makes himself known to us in a way that we could never know otherwise. It is good news because God is gracious. He makes himself known to us in Jesus. God does all the work in bringing us to himself.

A Christian is not someone who just believes that Jesus is the Son of God, Saviour of the world. It's not just a warm feeling about belonging to Jesus. It is about being given an assignment by Jesus. In Jesus' ministry, he was all about being in constant movement **out into the world**. And that is where he asks his disciples to be. In Matthew's gospel, Jesus turns to this rag-tag group of losers who had performed so horribly at his arrest, trial, and crucifixion. He turns to them and says, **“Go! Get out! Quit sitting around here in Judea. I'm not satisfied with Judea. I want the whole world! Get out! Make disciples!”**

What an astounding thing to say to these undependable disciples who had been so unreliable! And you see...that's **us** too! Oddly enough, he commissions us to go too.

On Easter morning the women who came to the tomb were met by this figure in white. And the figure in white doesn't say **“He's raised from the dead! Now you'll get to see your loved ones when you die and go to heaven.”** No. The angel actually says, **“Go! Get out of here! Why are you looking for the living among the dead? Go tell somebody...”**

Now, listen, we need to be honest. And this is the reason that we preachers hesitate to preach about evangelism. As a church, our history has shown that we have not been very good at it. At times we have failed at it and acted like barbarians. We have done horrendous things and called it evangelism. We have sinned against Jesus in the way we have presented Jesus.

We can think back in church history to the Crusades. And much more recently to our treatment of our indigenous neighbours in regard especially to the residential schools.

Horrendous things done in the name of Jesus. Thankfully, the Truth and Reconciliation conversations will shame us, and enable our indigenous friends to make us repentant, and thus better Christians. Most often people fail to receive the good news, not because of Jesus, but because of us! They say, **“Jesus seems like a wonderful person. How did he ever get mixed up with the church – with you people? You’re not half as interesting as he is.”**

And that’s a sobering thought. Because the only way people are going to meet Jesus, if they do, is through the church – us – the Body of Christ.

Can’t you just hear Jesus say: **“Yeah, you have messed up so much. But that’s all I have to work with. You’re all I’ve got right now. You’re going to have to do. And you received the gospel from the hands of sinners yourself. So you should know that I am able to redeem even the testimony of tainted, corrupted sinners into my word. So go, get out!”**

And that is true. In fact, to be honest, that’s what you’ve got today with me preaching here... a tainted, corrupted sinner up here, with the unmitigated gall to be talking about holy things. Like those first disciples, we reach out to others in the name of Jesus because, in Jesus, God has reached to us in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That Good News wasn’t discovered by us as we sat and contemplated our inner psyche. The knowledge of our God doesn’t come to us from the inside. It came to us from outside. From someone proclaiming the Good News **to** us. From the Spirit of God coming **to** us.

There may be religions that come to you through long walks in the woods, or pondering your psyche, or of gazing up at the stars. But, Christianity is not one of them. This faith comes from the outside, by hearing something we would not have known had not the church told us. Some of us have bought into the notion that our faith is private and personal. One reason for that is that we are in a culture that is detached and individualistic and lonely. The thing is that all truth is public truth.

Sometimes we are given the impression from the media that you’ve got these pushy, arm-twisting Christians who want to corral everybody, converting them into our narrow, culturally bound point of view. The idea is that everybody has a blank slate, and that they are completely uninfluenced by anything else. And that by evangelizing, we are unduly influencing them.

Yet the truth is that everybody stands somewhere, everyone has been “baptized” into some kind of world view or culture. Everyone has been converted into some belief system. And whether we are aware of it or not, everyone is trying to convert everyone else to their belief system all the time – either overtly or subliminally.

The conversion may be to a culture of unbridled North American capitalism. Or it may be the officially sanctioned culture of consumerism that attempts to convert us daily. Or it may be the culture of the modern nation state that asks me to be converted to

patriotism. But be well assured that everyone has been “converted” into something. Into some world view. So, the issue is not “Will I be converted?” Rather, the question is - **which** pushy, arm-twisting culture will have its way with your life? **Which** “god” will have its way with you? So why shouldn’t we, why can’t we, present another option?

When we engage in conversation with others about the faith, it should be exactly that – a conversation – not a monologue. A real and caring engagement of two souls. Evangelism requires that we learn the everyday language of the recipient in order to understand not only the words spoken but the person behind the words. We need to respect the tradition and the cultural background of the person we relate to.

As Christians we ought to be intensely curious about the faith of others. We ought to listen, both in order to understand our neighbours better, and also better to understand ourselves. Open to learning something valuable from them and to be humble enough to know that we don’t know everything. In this excerpt from his book “Faith in the Shadows”, pastor and author Austin Fischer tells about the need to be vulnerable with our own faith:

“.... I’ve always found that unbelievers are much less offended by the hypocrisy of our morality than they are the hypocrisy of our certainty. Every human, believer or unbeliever, knows what it’s like to fail to live up to one’s beliefs, to fail to embody one’s moral ideals. Moral hypocrisy is a universal experience, so unbelievers can be remarkably understanding of our moral fragility because they know it too.

What unbelievers fail to understand is how we can pretend to be certain of things all the time...

I once spoke with an atheist who told me he would love to hear me explain my Christian faith, but not until I admitted that, at times I was also uncertain about my beliefs.

I asked why and he responded... ‘because I haven’t any time to waste talking about something this important with someone who lacks the decency to admit we are two uncertain human beings trying to make sense of mysteries. I know that I am an uncertain human. Do you?’”

Faith is not the absence of doubt. Faith is the presence of love.

Evangelism is how the church mixes it up with the world **out there**. Jesus did not die for the church. Jesus died for the world. John 3:16 says: **“For God so loved the world...”** The whole world. God wants it all.

Pray. Listen. Love. Live your faith. And be ready to tell others in your world of influence what’s really important to you - what’s ultimately important to you.

Jesus is saying to the church – to you and me:

“Are you going to join in with me? Are you going to make church the adventure it was intended to be? Or are you going to just sit there and keep house with people who don’t frighten you, and look just like you, and think a lot like you? Or, are you going to get out on the edge and look at what I am already doing out there? Because I am not going to be content with the church as it is. The whole world is mine!”

Next time you get into a wonderful conversation with someone about deep things, things that really matter in this life of ours – would you risk saying:

“Would you like to come worship with us next Sunday? I’ll pick you up if you want. We can’t have church the way we want to have church, without you.”