

## **“See and Tell: Sharing Our Faith”**

*Exodus 16:6-19; Luke 9: 1-10*

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Almost every day on the northwest corner of Yonge and Dundas you can hear the cry: “Believe”! I remember the first time I walked past him when I was a student at Knox. I almost jumped out of my skin. I was just crossing the road and when I stepped up onto the curb, and this man in a white t-shirt stepped right in front of me with a booklet in one hand and a Bible in the other: “Believe”! I think I screamed a little bit. Not because he was particularly scary, but because I was definitely not ready for it. His name is Sarko, and almost every day for the last 20 years he stands on the corner of Yonge and Dundas, handing out tracts, occasionally preaching, but mostly just exhorting everyone who passes by Canada’s busiest intersection: Believe! He’s actually really friendly and pretty easy to talk to. He can be a bit startling if you don’t know he’s there, but for a lot of people who live in the downtown core of Toronto, he’s become a fixture.

But I also found him to be a bit unsettling. Not because of anything he did or said, but because of what he represented to me: an evangelist. I used to wonder to myself, is this what evangelists do? Is this how we spread the word? Do we have to go out and stand on street corners? Speak to thousands of strangers? Is this what Jesus meant when he said to go and make disciples of all nations? Is this what I’m supposed to do?

I think for a lot of us, the word evangelism can be a little intimidating. What do you mean I have to go out into the world and make disciples of all the nations? How am I supposed to do that? How am I supposed to *teach* people to do that? Do we all need to take apologetics courses so that we can argue our faith with unassailable logic? Or do we all need to learn to be great speakers and orators who can move the hearts of thousands? Do we need to scream at the top of our lungs to get people’s attention and shock them out of their daily routines?

In our gospel reading this morning, Jesus sends out the twelve on their own for the first time. You know, I can’t imagine how they felt. Asking questions like: Am I ready for this? Do I know enough? Am I gonna come back a failure?

And knowing, I’m sure, all the questions that must be swirling through the disciples’ heads, Jesus does something that I always thought was a little bit odd. First, he encourages them: “he gives them power and authority over all demons and to cure disease”. You can do this, He says. You’re going to be great. Have faith. And I think, “That would be pretty convincing!” But then he does something radical: He makes it harder. “Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money—not even an extra tunic.” Nothing. Nothing to eat. Nothing to buy supplies with. Nothing to protect yourself. No change of clothes if it should rain, or you get muddied or bloodied. Jesus doesn’t so much take away the safety net as He takes away the

tightrope and says to His disciples, jump from this platform to that one over there. Take a leap of... faith.

When the disciples go out they have to rely on the kindness of strangers for anything they receive. Their food, their shelter, their protection is all up to the people they are being sent to. I mean, just imagine doing a mission trip that way. Okay, we're going to go to the airport, and we're going to tell people what we're doing, and they're going to give us money for our boarding pass. But it's okay, because we're not going to be taking any luggage with us, so we're going to save on the handling fees.

Now, of course, different culture, different time period. And yes, the Jewish people of Jesus' day took seriously their obligation to provide welcome and hospitality to travellers and strangers. The disciples at least have the rules of the faith and the culture of the day on their side. But still, this is a leap of faith. Nothing will be given to them in advance. Everything they need for the journey will be supplied along the way. In some ways it brings up images of another time in Israel's history—before Israel could even rightly call itself a nation, when they were just a huge group of wandering refugees out in the desert, before they had any land to call their own, God fed them.

The people of Israel complained to Moses that they had nothing to eat; that he had brought them out in the desert to die. And Moses said to them – it isn't me, but God whom you are complaining against. But even in the middle of their complaining, God was faithful. Every morning, when the people awoke there would be a thick layer of dew and when it lifted, there would be bread – Manna – enough for everyone. And every evening before the sun would set, quails would cover their campsite – enough for everyone. For those first wandering Israelites it was a lesson that God would be faithful to them. God would care for them. God would provide. There was no need to take more than they needed for the day; in fact if anyone did take more, to try and store food away for later, it would go bad. Every day was an exercise of faith. Trust in the Lord.

Just like those early Israelites, Jesus sends his disciples out with nothing telling them to accumulate nothing. To receive the bread that is given to them day by day, and the shelter that is provided for them as an act of hospitality, as gifts from God. "God taught the wandering people of Israel to trust. God will provide. Now go out in faith, knowing what God has done for you in the past, and that God will provide again.

Kingdom of God has arrived in Jesus. The hungry are fed, the thirsty are given water, the sick are healed. How do you know that? The people ask. You can imagine the disciples' response. Well, I came here without food or drink and no money, but here among you, God has provided for me. I had nothing, but when I came here, I was given everything that I need.

That's a really powerful two-way message. For the disciples they realize that even when they begin with nothing and accumulate nothing that God will take care of them day by day; God

provides for them. And for the people hearing the testimony of the disciples, they hear about Jesus and the Kingdom Jesus is preaching about; but they also hear first-hand, how that Kingdom and God's Love is already active in them.

When we hear the word evangelism, usually the first thing that comes to mind is about sharing Good News! The Gospel! The life, death and resurrection of Jesus. And it *is* about that. But sometimes when we think of how to do that we think we have to have every last detail right. Every 'i' dotted, every 't' crossed. We don't want to make a mistake with scripture, we don't want to get our arguments all confused, or we don't want to embarrass ourselves.

But evangelism can also be about giving witness to the ways that God is working in our lives at this very moment. Hugh Halter, author of "The Tangible Kingdom" talks about how most of his conversations about Jesus begin simply because of the way God has worked in his life. Hugh and his wife, Cheryl, when they were married, all either of them wanted was for Hugh to be a normal pastor. But their son was born with a severe form of epilepsy. He had grand mal seizures – several of them daily – some days more than 10. And Hugh and Cheryl found they could never be away from home. That's a hard way to run a congregation. But they still felt called to ministry. What they discovered was that the best way for them to share their faith, was just to live their lives with others. Invite people over for meals, help the neighbours build a deck or renovate a kitchen, watch someone else's kids while they went out to do errands, help a neighbour out financially when they could. Those moments led to real conversation about family, marriage, neighbourhood, community, relationships. And that those real conversations were the places where they had experienced Jesus and that they could share authentically with others.

Yes, we want to share who Jesus is but often we can also do that by sharing what Jesus has done in our own lives; and pointing to the ways that Christ is alive in the world. That's not a task that needs to be reserved for scholars or theologians who know the scriptures inside out. It's a task that God gives to fishermen, tax-collectors and political activists. Anyone really, who's bold enough to follow Jesus; everyday people whose lives have been changed by God.

I'm going to be honest, Mr. Sarko has a unique passion and gift to be able to share his beliefs with thousands of strangers every day; engaging anyone who passes with his hope and faith. And to be able to do so in a way that is a certain combination of humble, kind, and self-effacing. He isn't upset by those who would mock him. And he isn't discouraged when he's asked hard questions that he can't answer. But nor does he suggest that his way of sharing faith is the only way. In fact, his own suggestion to me, 15 years ago, was to share my faith in the way that God made me, through the ways I had experienced Him at work. So let me ask you to consider, what do you have to share? Where do you see God at work in your own life? Where do you see God's presence? And where do others see it in you? That's the place that evangelism occurs. For some of you that will look like knowing scripture well, being able to teach it and share it with others. For a handful, like Sarko it may look like engaging with

strangers on a street corner. But for many of us, it will be uncovering the places that God is at work in our lives, seeing what God is doing, and being willing to share it with others when the time comes.