**Sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ**

**Romans 3:21-26; 2 Corinthians 5:14-21**

9/20/15

Thought for Meditation:

It is out of the exciting renewal of our own faith that the excitement of sharing with the outsider comes… It is simply the excitement of God's love in us that empowers us to have compassion for all people and to share with all people ourselves, and therefore our Lord.

*Jack Stotts*

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Will Campbell was a Baptist preacher and a social activist in the second half of the 20th century. He was friends with P.D. Eastman, the children’s author who wrote “Go, Dog! Go.” and “Are You My Mother?” Eastman had questions about Christianity so he asked Campbell – “In ten words or less, what’s the Christian message?” Campbell responded, “We’re all bastards but God loves us anyway.” Eastman pondered that and said, “You still have two more words.”

How would you answer that question? How would you describe the Christian faith, even if you had a couple of paragraphs? When I teach Confirmation classes I always have the students write a statement of faith. They usually grumble about the assignment, and struggle with it. But, when they finish their statements and read them to the session, the session members inevitably respond with amazement. Countless times I’ve heard elders say “I can’t imagine writing anything that good.”

I would suggest that at some point in time everyone should write a statement of faith. There are several benefits to writing a statement of faith. For one thing, writing a statement of faith forces you to clarify what you believe. What is it that truly gives meaning to your life? A five year-old girl was sitting with her dad in worship. They sat close to the front so she could see what was going on. This particular Sunday the pastor was baptizing an infant. He poured water on the infant’s head. The girl whispered to her daddy, “Why is he brainwashing that baby?”

Many nonChristians think that becoming a Christian means being brainwashed and leaving your mind behind. I would suggest that just the opposite is true. We are challenged to know what we believe, and writing it down is the best way to do that. The reason it is important to know what you believe is that what you believe will determine what you do.

I’ve never flown an airplane so I don’t know how it works, but I’ve heard that a pilot’s brain can play a trick on them so that they can get disoriented. They think they are flying right-side-up when actually they are upside down. It happened a few years ago to a pilot who thought she was doing a steep ascent, but she was disoriented and crashed her plane into the ground. What you believe matters. That is why it is important to know what you believe and a good idea to write a statement of faith.

The Scripture passage that Melissa read a few moments ago is one of several passages that explains what we believe. “All of us are sinners. ” Will Campbell used a different word to describe our problem. Whether you take “bastard” as a derogatory word or take it literally to mean an illegitimate child, it points to the same problem that Paul talks about when he says that “we’ve all sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” We don’t live as God want us to, the way we were created to live. Our sin breaks our relationship with God and cuts us off from God’s blessings. But now, in Jesus, God has justified us. Through his death and resurrection, that’s the sacrifice of atonement, God has forgiven us.

This is the same message as 2 Corinthians. Jesus died for us, and through his death and resurrection we are a new creation, we are reconciled to God. However, in this passage Paul gives us the second reason that we need to be able to say what we believe. Not only have we been reconciled to God through Christ, we have been given the ministry of reconciliation and we are ambassadors for Christ. We represent Christ to the world. God uses us to share the good news of Jesus. If we are going to share the good news we need to know what it is.

The word reconciliation is a great word. It literally means to bring two things that are opposed to each other back together as one. Our sin has separated us from God. Through Jesus’ death we are reunited with God. Our relationship is restored. The word for ambassadors might surprise you. The Greek word for ambassador is Presbyterian! “God has reunited us to Himself and has given us the job of telling other people about Jesus, so that they can be reunited with God. We are Presbyterians for Christ.”

Unfortunately, Presbyterians are not very good at this ministry. The word we use for this type of ministry is evangelism, and for a variety of reasons evangelism has become a curse word, an activity that is either despised or ignored.

Charlie Peace was a well-known criminal in London, England. On July 4, 1854 he was hung for his crimes. The Anglican church has ceremony for everything, including hanging someone. As Charlie was being led to the gallows a priest walked behind him and read these words from the Prayer Book: “Those who die without Christ experience hell, which is the pain of forever dying without the release which death itself can bring.”

When the priest said that Charlie stopped and faced the priest. He shouted at him, “Do you really believe that? Do you really believe that?” The priest wasn’t expecting that question. He hadn’t really thought about the words – he was just reading them from the Prayer Book. He stammered back, “Yes … I suppose I do.” Charlie said, “Well, I don’t believe that. But if I did I’d get down on my hands and knees and crawl all over Great Britain, even if it were paved with pieces of broken glass, if I could just rescue one person from hell.”

If we truly believe that Jesus is the source of salvation and our only hope, we ought to be doing everything we can to tell other people about Jesus. Imagine that someone had a cure for cancer but wouldn’t tell anyone else what that cure was. People would be livid at that person. If you have a formula that would save people from a dreaded disease, but won’t share it, the world would condemn you. In the same way – we know the cure for sin and spiritual death. Why would we not share it with others?

I have a sense that many people have a misconception of what evangelism really is. It is not badgering people and trying to convince them to believe in Jesus. I would suggest that evangelism has two parts. First, evangelism involves knowing the basics of the Christian faith. Humans have a problem, however you want to describe that problem, and there is nothing we can do about that problem. But what we can’t do, God has done for us in and through Jesus Christ. Second, evangelism involves telling other people how God’s love has made a difference in your life. How has Jesus’ love changed your life?

We are starting a five week sermon series today, looking at the new mission statement of Sharon Church. Session worked on it for several months and approved it at our June meeting.

The mission of Sharon Community Presbyterian Church is to share the Good News of Jesus Christ, welcome and encourage all who want to grow in faith, care for those in need and celebrate the glory of God in worship and in our daily lives.

We are going to look at each of the different aspects of this mission statement. This sermon is about the first one. Our mission is to “share the Good News of Jesus Christ.” That is our task, as a church, and as members of the church.

There are many different ways to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. Some of them are better than others. We’ve probably all seen enough of the bad examples to know why many people are turned off by evangelism.

Tony Campolo and his wife were traveling from New Zealand back home to Philadelphia. They had a layover in Honolulu, about five hours. They got off the plane and took a walk along Waikiki Beach. As they walked they saw a strange looking man, a street preacher. He was barefoot, had torn jeans and a dirty T-shirt on. He had a Bible in one hand and pointed his finger at everyone who walked by, pronouncing the judgment of God on those who did not repent.

Tony looked at his wife and said, “It’s guys like that who are an embarrassment to the Kingdom of God. People look at weirdos like that and get turned off to the gospel.” About an hour later Tony and his wife walked back up the street and saw two normal-looking men standing with the street preacher. He had his arms around their shoulders and as they passed by Tony could hear that they were praying to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. Tony’s wife looked at him and asked, “Well? How many people did you lead to Jesus today?”

I’m not suggesting that everyone ought to become a street preacher like the man in Hawaii. We need to find ways to evangelize that fit our theology and fit our personality. From my perspective, healthy evangelism will involve listening to people and their stories, serving them and helping them, and building relationships. Above all it involves telling other people how God is working in our lives. How has the Good News of Jesus Christ made a difference for you?

If we have received God’s love, his presence and love in our lives will impel us to tell others so that they can experience it too. How can we not share the best good news in the world?

A little boy came home from Sunday school and told his parents that his Sunday school teacher must be Jesus’ grandmother. He explained that she spent the whole time in Sunday school talking about how wonderful Jesus was and showing them lots of pictures of Jesus. That’s what grandmas do.

How many of you have pictures with you today of your grandchildren, or if you are not a grandparent, of your children? I imagine I wouldn’t have to twist your arm to get you to show me their pictures and tell me about them. Every grandparent likes to show off their grandchildren and brag about them?

Someday I hope to have grandchildren. I’m sure I’ll carry their pictures and be happy to tell you all about them. For now I only have four pictures in my wallet, pictures of Tanya and my three kids. I’d be more than happy to show you their pictures and tell you how wonderful they are. As wonderful as children and grandchildren are, we have a Savior who is even more wonderful. How can we not tell others about Jesus?

I invite you now to get out your bulletin and stand. Together, let us recite our mission statement, committing ourselves to reaffirming what God has called us to do and be.

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