

## Sharing the Love of God: The Hope Within Us

Kelli B. Trujillo writes in her blog: *Today's Christian Woman*  
About a friend named Alice:

*If there were a caricature of an evangelical on the popular show The Office, Alice would fit the bill perfectly. She embodies all the negative stereotypes our culture has about evangelical Christians: she's judgmental of all things secular, she frequently refers to "the Lord" in any and all conversations, she gets so pumped up when talking about her faith that her behavior borders on the bizarre, she's completely (and purposefully) out of touch with culture, and she regularly asks co-workers and customers alike what would happen to them if they got in a car accident while leaving the store. Would God let them into heaven or would they burn in hell?*

*Alice considers any attempt by a supervisor to get her to "tone down" her evangelism at work as persecution, spurring her on to even more zealous proselytizing. In a word, Alice is obnoxious.*

I'm not like Alice.

I'm not the confrontational, in-your-face type of evangelist.

I don't want to come off as pushy  
Judgmental, arrogant or superior.

And yet . . . I take seriously the call  
To share the love of God  
In both word and deed.

I want to share the good news of Jesus Christ  
Because I am a better person through Him  
And I wish others the same.

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Jesus made it clear  
When he finished his ministry on earth

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We are to be his witnesses beginning in Jerusalem  
And extending out to the ends of the earth.

In fact if it wasn't for those before us  
Who took his words seriously  
Who witnessed on behalf of Jesus

The Christian faith wouldn't be where it is today.

Therefore, the question before us this morning is this:

How do we remain faithful to the Great Commission  
And share the love of God to others  
Without sounding like a proselytizing jerk?

Last week, we discussed the notion  
That listening may be the most effective way  
To begin to share the love of God.

Seemingly counterproductive . . .

Listening shows a caring and concerned heart  
A sincere interest in the wellbeing of another  
And a desire to enter into a trusting friendship.

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Now, if the occasion arises when someone asks  
What do we say concerning our faith?

How do we prepare for such a moment?

Do we memorize all the key scriptures  
We think might lead a person to faith?

Do we whip out a Bible  
And start going from page to page?

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Do we come armed with a copy of the sinner's prayer  
Hoping to get someone to recite it?

I wouldn't do it that way!

Because not everyone comes to faith in Jesus  
In the same manner.

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Here's an example of what I mean.

Many Christians believe it is fundamental  
For a person coming to faith to pray the sinner's prayer.

Now the sinner's prayer goes something like this  
This is Billy Graham's version:

*Dear Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner, and I ask for Your forgiveness. I believe You died for my sins and rose from the dead. I turn from my sins and invite You to come into my heart and life. I want to trust and follow You as my Lord and Savior. In Your Name. Amen.*

The sinner's prayer, as important as it is  
Should only be used in the context  
Of someone overwhelmed by sin.

Not everyone comes to faith this way.

My daughter, Zherina, age 7, loves Jesus.

It's not because she's filled with the guilt of sin

It's because she knows that Jesus is God  
And He loves her unconditionally!

~

In my own born-again experience . . .

I was brought to faith

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Not by my feelings of being a sinner  
Although I knew I was . . .  
But by my feelings of being a failure.

I stood before Jesus Christ  
Convicted of my human failings.

I was 34-years-old and had a melt-down  
Due to a failed business venture.

But what I experienced was nothing short of  
The most profound sense of the love of God  
I had ever felt before or since.

That no matter how much I failed in worldly terms  
God loved and accepted me.

It was this experience that brought me hope.

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What's interesting to me is that the sinner's prayer  
Doesn't specifically mention God's love . . .  
To me the foundation of faith.

And so in that way  
Being prepared to talk someone into  
Reciting the sinner's prayer  
As the recipe for their salvation

Might not be the best approach in every given situation.

Remember this:  
Hope is not found in a formula.  
Hope is found in a relationship with God.

And hope in God will be individualized  
According to our human experiences.

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My hope in God may not be exactly your hope.

My hope may center on God's ability to transform  
The current person I am into the person I hope to be.

Others may hope for the life  
That extends beyond the sufferings of this life  
To the joy and peace found in eternal life.

What we can do, authentically and with integrity  
Is to share the hope we have experienced  
In the salvation found in Jesus Christ.  
Our passage from Peter is insightful  
As we think about effective evangelism.

There are three points to bring out  
In sharing the love of God.

They are found in verse 15  
This time from *The Living Bible*

***1 Peter 3:15 (TLB)***

***<sup>15</sup> Quietly trust yourself to Christ your Lord, and if anybody asks why you believe as you do, be ready to tell him, and do it in a gentle and respectful way.***

The three points are these:

1. When anybody asks
2. Be prepared to share your hope
3. Do so with gentleness and respect

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The first point . . . “when asked to speak”  
Can be interpreted as meaning  
That the invitation to speak  
Comes out of a larger conversation.

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This comes back to the idea  
 That to share the love of God most effectively  
 Requires a trusting and safe environment.

Hopefully, this is accomplished by our posture of listening.

Does it mean that we are never to share our faith  
 Except when asked?  
 No, I don't think so.

But don't you think there will be far more receptivity  
 When we're asked to share our faith  
 Than when we're not?

I believe we should be led by the Spirit's prompting  
 And not by our own agenda.

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The second point in our three points:  
 "Be prepared to share the hope within"  
 Begs the question:

Are you prepared to share your hope  
 If someone asks about your faith?

Have you thought through what it is  
 That brings you to church Sunday after Sunday?

What gives meaning and purpose in your life  
 Relating to your Christian faith?

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The Christian author Frederick Buechner writes this:

*I think it is hope that lies at our hearts and hope that finally brings us all here. Hope that in spite of all the devastating evidence to the contrary, the ground we stand on is holy ground because Christ walked here and walks here still.*

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*Hope that we are known, each one of us, by name, and that out of the burning moments of our lives he will call us by our names to the lives he would have us live and the selves he would have us become.*

*Hope that into the secret grief and pain and bewilderment of each of us and of our world he will come at last to heal and to save.*

Sharing the hope within us is a deeply personal thing.

But Peter tells us we should be ready to share  
When asked to.

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The third point is that when you are asked to share  
You do so with “gentleness and respect.”

We shouldn’t even have to say this.

But like in our beginning illustration  
There are those who want to shove their Christian faith  
Down the throats of their listeners.

To many people  
This is the biggest turn-off of the Christian faith . . .  
This need to push our faith onto others.

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Let me conclude by saying  
When an opportunity arises  
In which we are invited to share our faith

Peter tells us not to come armed to the teeth with Scripture  
Or spew proper theology or right church doctrine.

At some point you might be asked to explain these things  
And that’s all right.

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You do need to know the basics in Christian theology.

But Peter in our passage today is simply saying  
Be prepared to share the hope within you.

With the additional instruction  
To do so in gentleness and respect.

Be prepared.

Be ready to articulate when asked  
How Jesus has impacted your life  
And how he continues to impact your life.

Be prepared to share the love of God  
By sharing your own personal faith journey.

Don't hold back when asked to share  
The good news of Jesus Christ

Amazing grace how sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me.

I once was lost but now I'm found  
Was blind but now I see!