

Matthew 28:16-20, 1 Peter 3:13-17
Sharing the Love of God: Speaking
WRCoB 4.23.23

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0fQ4K3lyZFE>

It doesn't have to be difficult.

Rather, in the right context

It's a joy to share the hope found in Jesus.

Sharing our faith doesn't have to be confrontational.

It doesn't have to be awkward.

We don't have to be obnoxious bores

Handing out tracts at the train station

Or striking up conversations

With the sole agenda of converting someone.

But Jesus did make it clear

We are to be his witnesses.

To share his Gospel in both word and deed!

The Church of the Brethren has done well

In sharing God's love through acts of service.

In fact, the Brethren's mantra of late

Could best be expressed by a quote from St Francis.

Go and preach the gospel and use words if necessary.

We have done an excellent job
Of serving others, loving neighbors
And doing unto the least of these.

We have done less well sharing why
We feel compelled to do what we do.

In fact, I wonder sometimes if we even know
What drives us to be in the service ministries.

So, the question before us this morning is this.

How do we share the love of God in word
Without being an insufferable annoyance?

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Today's context is no longer just post-Christian post-

We live in what someone described as post-truth era
When one can't even believe a news network
For the lies they spread

When many look down on Christians
As arrogant, narrow-minded, bigots
Completely out of touch with the real world

Where just the mention of evangelism produces
Looks of disdain and hostility

How do we speak of the truth as we know it?
How do we share the love of God?

Tough questions!

Last week, we discussed the idea

That listening is the most effective way
To share the love of God.

Listening reveals a caring and concerned heart

A sincere interest in the wellbeing of another
And a desire to enter into a trusting friendship.
With no other motive than being a friend.

I propose that Peter's thoughts in our second reading
Are insightful in how to be an effective evangelist.

He lists four points in sharing the love of God.

1 Peter 3:15 (TLB)

¹⁵ 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 four points are these

1. Quietly trust yourself to the Lord
2. If anybody asks
3. Be ready to share your hope
4. Do so with gentleness and respect

If, after listening and establishing a trusting friendship
Your friend now asks what makes you tick
The door is opened to share your faith.

Begin in a prayerful manner trusting Jesus
To be at your side in this sacred conversation.

It may take one conversation

It may take hundreds of conversations
Before someone asks.

The point being when someone asks

The person is receptive and open
To what you have to share.

Trust that God has opened the way for you.

Now, you can share in a sincere and intimate way

Because you have built a trusting relationship.

The US Senate Chaplain describes it this way.

You've got the right to say anything you like. But others don't have to listen! They're under no obligation to tune you in; when they do, they can also tune you out anytime they wish.

Your right to speak is guaranteed--but you must earn the right to be listened to. It depends solely on your integrity. Integrity is the prerequisite to acceptance. If you expect to be paid attention to, back it up with your life. Let your walk correspond to your talk.

This is fundamental to your witness for Christ. Many so-called Christians listen too little, talk too much, and live lives that contradict what they say. Their "witness" betrays Christ and alienates those to whom they speak.

The point “when asked to speak” implies an invitation.

Again, the idea

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

The opportunity is established for us to share.

Don't squander the opportunity God gave you.

Are we ready to share our faith?

Have we thought what we will share?

Have we memorized all the key scriptures

We think might lead a person to faith?

Will we whip out an ever ready Bible

And start going from page to page?

Have we come armed with a copy of the sinner's prayer

Hoping to get someone to recite it?

Please don't

What a person initially wants to know

When asking about our faith

Is how it impacts our life.

They don't want or need to hear about

Justification, sanctification

Or any other lofty theological terms.

They want to hear how faith makes a difference in our life

How it gives comfort and encouragement
Direction and guidance

How it creates meaning and purpose
And how it has given value in life.

Most people don't think about eternity
They need something to make it through the day.

They need something that offers strength for daily living.

If this Jesus can help them do that
Then they're in.

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You see, I don't think there is a formula for salvation.

We cannot simply suggest to someone
To recite the sinner's prayer and all will be well.

Salvation is a relationship.

The good news of Jesus Christ is multifaceted
Available for multifaceted people.

The C. S. Lewis Institute helped me think about this.

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Amy finds herself overwhelmed by life.

She is way too busy
And develops anxiety.

She goes to therapy
 She is on medications
 She can't find peace.

She needs Jesus, the rest giver.

Matthew 11:28 CEB

²⁸ “Come to me, all you who are struggling hard and carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest.

Rebecca says she needs cleansing
 From sins perpetrated on her by someone else.

She is not the sinner but the sinned against.

She feels dirty and ashamed.

She needs a gospel that frees her from the bondage
 Of shame and self-loathing.

Andrew speaks of the need to break his addictive behavior.

He needs a Savior.

Jack needs to find meaning and purpose.

Nathaniel needs relief from an anger-filled life.

Cindy needs a sense of belonging
 A desire to be a part of some greater cause.

Henry need answers to the intellectual rational for life.

The bottom line?

Faith meets the individual at his/her greatest need.

The Christian philosopher Clifford Williams lists a few needs

- *“I need to feel that life ultimately makes sense.”*
- *“I need to anticipate some kind of life after this earthly experience ends.”*
- *“Even though this life has many disappointments, I need to rely on the possibility of a place after this life — one without disappointments or pain or evil or sadness.”*
- *“I need to trust that there is such a thing as goodness and beauty and purity.”*
- *“I need to love and be loved. And those emotions are not just illusions.”*
- *“I crave meaning — not just in temporary ways but in ways that last forever.”*

The good news in the good news of Jesus Christ

Is that it satisfies all of those and many other needs.

No person comes to Jesus in quite the same way.

What journey brought me to Jesus

Will not be the same journey that brought you to him.

And so, when the opportunity arises

And you are asked to share your faith

What will you say?

Speak from the heart.

Speak of the hope within yourself
That Jesus gave you.

Speak of the encouragement and comfort you find in Jesus.

Speak of the new sense of value and purpose
Living a life of faith brings you.

Speak of an awareness of God's justice and peace.

Speak of the eternal hope in trusting Jesus Christ.

Speak from the heart of the joy you have
In being part of some greater good.

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When we make a friend
And build a trusting and safe environment

When conversations move from superficial
To genuine and sincere

When we become vulnerable
As we share each other's stories

We become part of something greater than ourselves.

We become participants in God's great commandment
By loving God and loving neighbor.

Yes, we love them by serving and caring for their needs.

We love them by sharing
The hope we find in Jesus.

Fred Rogers, popularly known through his children's show
Mr. Rogers Neighborhood
Made a comment in a commencement address
At Middlebury College

*When we look for what's best in the person we happen to be
with at the moment, we're doing what God does; so in
appreciating our neighbor, we're participating in something
truly sacred.*

These conversations will become Spirit-filled moments.

And so maybe the better idea is
Rather than secretly placing a "Jesus Saves" sticker
On the bulletin board in your office

Perhaps developing deeper friendships with people
To the point when they asked you to share your faith
You do so with gentleness and respect.

Trust God that what you are doing
Touches on the heart of the matter.

That it is God who makes all things possible
And we can depend on Christ
To touch us at the place of our greatest need.

And it just may be
In this post-truth society that we live in

That the truth we believe and espouse
Is the very thing our friend needs
To make it through another day!

Go and preach the Gospel
Use words when necessary.