

Evangelism (2)

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[0:00] Old guy jokes. This is my last Sunday of old guy jokes. I can tell old guy jokes. I have permission! Because I am an old guy. Okay, so three old guys walking through the park. Guy one, wow, it's really windy. Guy two, not windy, it's Thursday. Guy three, I am too, let's have a beer. Wait, what? Well, one thing we do hear loud and clear. Jesus talking to us not only across the centuries, but into our hearts. He said, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all I have commanded you, and lo, I'm with you always to the end of the age. Jesus speaking to us directly.

Do you remember, some of you remember, some of us remember all too well, the 70s when we first got involved in the establishment churches in the whole subject of evangelism. In 1973, I really cut into something called, I forgot the name of it. Old guy. I'm an old guy. No, it was before that. It was a key, oh, key to evangelism, 73. That's what it was. And we were going to convert the whole nation to Jesus, and it was just a matter of, we were going to do it by the year 2000, and then the Lord would come back.

Some of you were involved in that. I don't know. One thing I do know, we did not convert the whole nation. I got that figured out. But we didn't give up. You know, the 80s were kind of a building thing for evangelism, and some of the major denominations declared the 1990s to be a decade of evangelism. But then we got involved in sex wars, and disunity overtook us. Chalk one up for Satan.

So evangelism is basically dead as a doornail. Perhaps we need to bring that word out, dust it off, and see how it applies today, which is quite a different world than it was in the late 1900s.

Let's take a look at that. Now, I just, my little machine here just shut down. But now it's back. Okay. And it went to the conclusion, what is my machine telling me?

[2:47] Well, I'm paying no attention to the machine. This summer, we've been doing a series of sermons on the local church, what's it for? Today, evangelism for the local church in the 21st century. Now, as we have been known to do this summer, we start with the dreaded, the dreaded word study. If you want to check out, you can, and then come back when I continue on. The basic word for evangelism comes from a Hebrew word, G-S-L. So they didn't use vowels then. So how do you pronounce that? I don't know. Gissel.

But that meant a public announcement from God. On TV, it would be, and now a word from our sponsor, God. I love you, and I want you back. That's basically the Hebrew word for evangelism. Then we move to Greek, of course, because our Bible, our New Testament, is written in Greek. There's a word called euangelion. Now, U is like a V, so it's evangelism.

Okay, evangelism, and that means glad tidings, good news. Well, we move to Old English. Some of us have come from Old English, Old English parts, and the word is God's spiel. God's spiel. God's talk. God's announcement. God's spiel.

And then it became God's spell. We are transformed. It's like a spell on us. We are transformed by God. God's spell. And then finally today, it's gospel. So the word gospel and the word evangelism are together.

[4:36] There's one last Greek word we need to talk about, and that's called caruso. Do you remember the book Robinson Caruso? Go back and read that. It is a great book.

He's kind of a heathen. He gets on a deserted island through shipwreck. He goes back to the ship, which is on the sand, and he gets a Bible, he reads the Bible, and he becomes a believer.

It's like 20 years he's on that island by himself, proclaiming the gospel. Trees, animals, and finally another person shows up, and he proclaims the gospel to him.

And then finally, finally, he is freed from the island and spends the rest of his life proclaiming Christ. That's what we're called to do. That's evangelism.

So summary, evangelism equals announcing to the world God's love and forgiveness through Jesus Christ. It's trying to lead people from worthless pursuits to good pursuits.

[5:42] Think parents of teenagers. All right? How do you lead a teenager from just wanting to go the wrong way to wanting to go the right way?

It's an art. That's what God does for us in evangelism. So, we have to say that God does not use just one method to draw us to him, but he almost always uses another person.

How was the story of God given to you? How did evangelism work in your life? I've told you before that I was a young marine captain, kind of ditty-bopping along, and my heart had stirred me.

It stirred me to seek him. I didn't know what that was all about. And God presented me another marine in my peer group to bring me to the Lord.

When I think back on it, his name was Greeny. Greeny did not use conventional means to bring me to the Lord because God uses all kinds of words and hearts to bring people to Christ.

[7:00] That's what he calls for us. He has an appointment for each one of us with someone who will lead us closer to him. And guess what? He makes us to have an appointment with someone who can come closer to him.

If that had not happened, you and I would not be Christians today. There'd be no Christian church. It's only through evangelism that we are sitting here today.

So we move to evangelism today. The challenges the early church had with evangelism and how it's reflected today.

Do you know the first words out of the mouth of Jesus in Mark? He said, The time is fulfilled.

The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel, the good news. You see, that was the first words out of his mouth. Evangelism.

[8:10] And then the last words before he ascended? The Great Commission. Go and make disciples of all nations. Evangelism is what Jesus was about.

The cross is evangelism. It's God bringing us into his kingdom, forgiving us our sins. The apostles got it when the Holy Spirit came upon them.

Listen to these words from the Apostle John. 1 John 1.1 1 John 1.1 He said, A great economy of words here.

In one long sentence, he lays it all out. That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked on and have touched with our hands, all the senses.

Concerning the word of life, Jesus. This life was made manifest or plain, and we have seen it, and we proclaim it, keruso, to you.

[9:17] That which we have seen and heard, we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us. And indeed, our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

You know what that's speaking to? The local church. The fellowship is what we have together when we together love Jesus.

Evangelism takes place within a church building. It's amazing how that works. So the Apostles saw it, they got it, and they did it.

They had a tough time. They had to convince fellow Jewish people for whom the cross was a stumbling block. Why on earth would God become a man and die on a cross?

That just makes no sense to a Jewish believer in that day. They had to proclaim it to the Gentiles for whom it was folly. One God?

[10:18] What good is one God? You need five or ten gods. You got to get covered by all angles. They had to, they had to work in a time of challenge. Not only did they have a challenge of ideas, but they had a challenge from their own government.

They were called upon to worship the emperor. To put incense down, to worship the emperor.

They couldn't do it. They suffered martyrdom. If they didn't suffer martyrdom, they went to jail. If they didn't go to jail, they were denied jobs.

It was not easy. It was even harder than what we have today. I'm not sure where it's going to be tomorrow, but it's not easy to proclaim the gospel in America today.

They had it even worse. Yet they took the challenges, and within 300 years, Christianity had swept through the Mediterranean world. It was the dominant faith and remained so for many years.

[11:27] So based on their struggles, how do we deal with our struggles? Evangelism in the 21st century. Can it be done?

Is there any hope? Is there any hope for Church of the Holy Trinity? Christianity. You may have not noticed, but there is a death struggle in the churches of America.

It's a death struggle. Some are, in fact, predicting the demise of Christianity in the Western world. Now, do you remember that guy, Will Rogers? Remember the story where he went to Europe, and while he was in Europe, somebody said he had died, and it was in all the headlines in the newspapers.

And when he came back to the States, he called a press conference. Remember his famous statement? Rumors of my demise have been somewhat exaggerated. Well, I think rumors of the demise of the church in the West are somewhat exaggerated, but we're still threatened.

[12:38] A few exceptions, of course, in the Western church. It seems like non-denominational Rara Sispumba churches, and we've got a couple of Rara Sispumba's over there.

That's good. They tend to be growing. Sort of very, very traditional churches, immortal, invisible, God only, wise, are dying.

I don't know what that's telling us, but mostly, the church is dying in America. It's dying from within. Heresy, apostasy, apathy, all within its walls are taking their toll.

And from without, did you know that we are living today more and more with a churchless Christianity? Some of our kids have caught that and grandkids.

I can believe in God without, why would I want to go to church? And that's, that's not just young people now. That's people of all ages. There's a churchless Christianity going on, and it's about that deep.

[13:51] But it makes people feel okay about not getting involved in church. Have you noticed the invasion of Sunday morning? We never had things going on on Sunday mornings because church was Sunday morning.

Now, I'm a runner, and I can tell you that almost every running race is on Sunday morning. Have you had kids in soccer programs? Sunday morning.

We have been invaded. The country's going along, it doesn't really care about the church. church. We also have a distrust of organized religion.

And every time some long-head pastor does something stupid, the rest of the world says, see? And we've got folks that are living in open sin, and they don't want to be confronted.

If they stay away from church, they do not have to confront their sin. All this sort of puts a labor on us. And not only that, are you feeling bad yet?

[14:56] Let me add one more thing. The government seems to be somewhat hostile to Christianity. The latest in simply just one of these is the whole gay issue.

You cannot offer your opinion of sexual conduct or you have violated someone's civil rights.

sex. Now, right now, we have a little bit of a protection in the church. I don't know how long that'll last. But it's not just sex.

You're not even supposed to mention God in any public forum. And you can be in trouble if you do. So the public skepticism has us being labeled as bigots if we disagree with groupthink.

now you really feel bad. Unless you're not paying attention which then doesn't really matter. So, in the 21st century, the believing church is so beleaguered about what it stands for that it now stands for nothing.

[16:11] Irrelevant. Who knows? Who cares? There is no evangelism. The church is shrinking and dying. Which comes to our last point.

This is a four-point sermon. I forgot to ask Jack to take the time. So I think we're about six minutes now in the sermon. So I'm ready to the last point. You know, down in Louisiana, they have Cajun folks.

And so there are two famous Cajuns, Boudreau and Tibidot. And so one day, these two guys were doing this sign. and the sign said, it said, the end is near.

Turn yourself round before it's too late. They put up the sign. And this guy from the north, he probably had a New York license plate, stopped, read the sign and said, you religious nuts, leave us alone.

And he drove off around the corner and drove right into the river. And Boudreau said to Tibidot, maybe instead we should have just said, bridge out ahead. The end really is near on this sermon, I

can tell you that.

[17:26] It's near. How do we at Church of the Holy Trinity handle our responsibility of carrying out Matthew 28, 19?

Making disciples, baptizing, teaching. What is our way forward? Under impossible odds.

How do we do evangelism? Well, actually, it's not that impossible. The first step is prayer, fervent prayer. Every one of us ought to be praying every day for people to come to know Jesus Christ through Church of the Holy Trinity.

It needs to be just like a breath. You know, when we wake up, we say, thank you, Lord, for the quiet and rest of the night. Help me this day that when I come to the end, I may praise and adore you.

Okay, that's the first prayer. Second is, Lord, help us as a church to win people for Christ. Fervent prayer. And number two, we need to follow the four step formula for church growth, which works every time.

[18:34] The four steps are invite, welcome, disciple, and assimilate. Okay? Invite. Do you know, nobody knows this church is here. We have two signs out there, but we put them out on Sunday morning.

How many people are driving around saying, I've got to go to church somewhere, where can I go? Oh, there's one. Okay. That may happen, but that's not the primary way God brings people into church.

How does he bring people into this church? We've got to invite them. Personal invitation. We have to invite people to come. Invitation. Second is, once they come, we welcome them.

You see, when people walk in that door, this is our home. When people come in, we welcome them to our home. If you have friends that come to your home, you don't say, I've got stuff to do, sit down. Right? We welcome them. So, invitation, invite, welcome, disciple is the first step. That's what we're doing today. That's what we're doing in Sunday school.

[19:41] That's what we're doing in Bible studies, intercessory groups. We're discipling people so they can be disciples of Jesus. That's the third step, disciple. And the last is assimilate.

You can be a guest for a while, but the point is you become a believer in Jesus and you join us. And if you're already a believer in Jesus, you join us and we give you ministry.

That's the way the church grows. Invite, welcome, disciple, assimilate. Okay? That's the third thing. That's the second thing. The third is, what's our target audience?

Have you thought about that? What is our target audience? If it's older people, perhaps we should do a seminar in elder law and dealing with, closing in on the end of life issues.

Is that our target? How do we hit that target? If our target is young marriage, what do we have to say about how to raise kids? Do we have any teachings on that whole area?

[20:42] Is it college age kids? We've got a whole bunch of them checking in here. How do we reach that group? I mean, what do we have to we're a bunch of grandparents for them? And in my case, maybe great grandparents for them.

How do we reach out? If that's our target audience, how do we reach out to them? And if it's kids, how do we reach out to kids? How do we get them involved as acolytes? How do we do youth groups?

How do we touch these kids if that's our target audience? They can't all be our target audience. There's, what, 55 of us, maybe 57 of us.

So we have to focus. What is our focus? What is our focus? And then becoming attractive. All right, we're working in our building.

We're working in our building. The vestry is doing a fantastic job of trying to get upstairs ready for Christmas Eve. You need to be praying for them. This is hard work.

[21:40] It's very complicated to turn an empty space into a beautiful worship space. We need to be inside and outside the building attractive. Our hearts need to be attractive to people so that when they see us they don't run away, but they want to talk with us.

Okay? And then finally, learning how to simply share your faith without being obnoxious about it. 1 Peter 3 15.

In your hearts, reverence Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to make a defense for those who question you, but do it in sincerity and with gentleness.

We need to share how Jesus has affected our lives. Be able to share that with people and then invite them into that beautiful world. We have reached the end of this sermon.

What's the local church for? That's a great question. What's the local church for? Primarily, the local church is for winning people to Jesus Christ and making them disciples.

[22:54] Evangelion. Evangelism. It's the gift that keeps on giving. Let us pray. Blessed Lord God, we are humbled, surprised, and moved that you would call us to bring peace to your world.

In the midst of chaos and challenge, Lord, use us mightily to touch your world. We pray this in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.