

Evangelism & Our Mission

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Date: 07 January 1991

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[0 : 00] that we ask your presence with us, that as we turn to your word, you might open it to us and open us to it. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

This sermon was written entirely on Kleenex, and we'll be interrupted by it from time to time as well, so you can stand by and we can all do it in a synchronized way.

I have an imaginary Uncle Everett, and he can fix anything, and if you sit down and talk to him, he's very wise, but he's a little bit loud, and he cries quite easily, and when he laughs, he just roars.

He gets along very well with children, and he's the best house guest you could ever have, as long as you don't have to introduce him to your friends. Then he gets embarrassing.

He tells the wildest kind of stories. He asks the most embarrassing kinds of questions. He seems to know exactly what people don't want to talk about, and he talks about it.

[1 : 28] Well, my Uncle Everett is really just a personification of the work of evangelism in the Anglican Church. The diocese went around and asked everybody, what should we be doing?

And the absolute priority for everybody in every parish was we should be doing evangelism. And the diocese is embarrassed by it because you can't manufacture it, you can't import it.

It's dangerous even to define what it is. All the bishops of the Anglican Church got together in Lambeth about a year ago and decided that the 1990s should be in the Anglican Church a year of evangelism, a decade of evangelism.

That's the thing that we should primarily be doing. But it's difficult. Here we are, the 1990s have begun, and we as a parish have invited John Chapman, who is skilled, determined, articulate, very knowledgeable.

One year ago, he led the Cambridge University mission with 700 to 1,000 students turning up every night of the week to hear him.

[3 : 11] He is honest. He is direct. He is articulate and knows his business. The difficulty, you see, is in us.

You are such nice people. And the danger of offending your sensibilities or doing anything that would upset you is something I stay awake at night and worry about.

But then I get over it. And it's very difficult for us.

You know that parable about buying some land or buying a cow or marrying a wife? As the mission gets closer, there's a whole lot of commerce going on in cows, wives, and land now.

And people are finding themselves very busy. And I think it's simply because we find it very difficult to share our faith with our friends for fear of embarrassing them or for fear of being embarrassed ourselves.

[4 : 26] And nobody wants really in our kind of society to stand up and put yourself on the firing line and be asked to explain what the Crusades are all about.

And what about the Spanish Inquisition? What about Jimmy Baker? What about the rest of the TV evangelists? And what about Lebanon? What about Ireland? And what about people, good people that don't believe in God?

And what about the people who have rejected Christ? And how do we know that God exists? And surely religion is just a crutch. And does it matter what you believe? And how does prayer work?

And are you not just hiding from the reality of life in your religion? Nobody wants to answer those. And inevitably, you do have to answer them. You have to answer them over and over and over again.

The only advantage, really, is that there's only about a dozen of them. And once you've got through them, the conversation can go on to something worthwhile. But inevitably, you have to work through them all.

[5 : 32] Now, the purpose of this week, which is called the time of your life, is described for us perfectly in a parallel passage to the one we read this morning, Luke chapter 8.

So if you turn to page 64, I'll show you what it says. Particularly, I'd like you to look at verse 15 of Luke chapter 8, the top left-hand corner of page 64.

The purpose of the week, then, is that soil will be planted, that seed, the seed which is the word of God, will be planted in good soil, and that those hearing this word of God will hold it fast in an honest and good heart and bring forth fruit with patience.

You can break that down. What we need to do, and it applies to each one of us, because this week is not for somebody other than you, it's primarily for you, and through you, for your friends.

And it's for you in terms of your own life, because in your own Christian life, there is always a certain amount of slippage takes place, a certain amount of drift sets in, a certain amount of wandering away, and all of us need to be brought back.

[7 : 15] And the time of your life is a time to be brought back to the things most surely believed among us. So that it is, it is, that the seed of the word of God will be nourished as it grows in our lives, to strengthen us in our own understanding of the faith.

Secondly, to give us permission to ask the questions we want to ask, because we all need to ask questions, and we all have very profound questions, and we need somebody patient enough to sit down and work through these questions with us.

And we can do it in large part with one another. Third thing is to test our personal faith by deliberately seeking to share it with somebody else.

Most of you are the kind of people who could create in another person a kind of dependence upon you by being good to them consistently so that they gradually learn to depend on you.

But the sharing of your faith is to teach somebody to depend on Jesus Christ independent of you. And that's what the woman of Samaria did that Jean Begg told us about this morning.

[8 : 37] They came and said to her, we believe now not because you told us but because we've heard for ourselves. And so that's the thing that we're trying, that's the third thing that we're trying to do. Strengthen our own faith to create a climate in which we can ask the questions that need to be asked and to test our personal faith by deliberately seeking to share it with someone else.

The method outlined in the bulletin in the program of the week, the time of your life week is there. The program is to use our homes for dessert and coffee parties to invite our business friends to lunch at the Four Seasons.

Church is not really a very good place. It's a pretty foreboding place for a lot of people to go and listen and they find it hard to hear. We hope they might hear if they came to a place that they're more familiar with.

And so there's a luncheon at the Four Seasons Hotel and there's another lunch, a ladies' lunch, at the Shaughnessy Golf Club. And that's simply because we want people simply to hear what the essential content of the Christian faith is.

Most people in our society who are not Christians also lack any understanding of what this faith they don't believe in is all about.

[10 : 02] You remember I told you about the Australian gentleman who moved into a new house and the man hearing that he was a minister went to him and said, I want you to know right now from the beginning that I don't believe in God.

And the minister came back to him and said, well tell me about the God you don't believe in. That's one of the things that needs to be done. People need to be asked to do that. We need to invite our friends to hear John at the services which the meetings which will be held at the church and to help people try and hear the gospel without all the prejudices.

You see lots of people come to church and the last time they were here was when they buried a loved one. And so the foreboding and the gloom and the sorrow that attaches to this place is quite overwhelming for them.

Or they may have come here for a marriage that didn't work. And that doesn't make it a very happy place to be either. So there's lots of people who have all sorts of strange feelings about coming to a church.

And that's why they have to be helped to do it and encouraged and loved into doing it. If you want to know what really summarizes what we're trying to do turn to page 44 in your prayer book.

[11 : 24] In the little maroon prayer book. There's the statement of it.

We could perhaps read it together. It's the prayer. Let's just read it together. O God, our Heavenly Father, we humbly pray thee to bless abundantly the efforts that are now being made to turn thy people in this parish to sincere repentance and a more lively faith.

prepare all hearts to receive the seed of thy word. Grant that it may take deep root and bring forth fruit to thy glory. Christ our Lord.

Amen. Okay, well that's what it's all about. If anybody wants to know what it's all about, there it is in a sentence.

Efforts are being made to prepare people in this parish to bring them to sincere repentance and a more lively faith. Well, Jesus answers that question in this passage in Luke 8, 11 to the end when he says, when he describes how this process works forth, this parable, how this process works out.

[12 : 43] This parable, which appears in all four of the Gospels, says simply that the function is to hear the word of God and the word is the ultimate source of our life.

Man doesn't live by bread alone, but he lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. The most important form of sustenance on which each of us depends at the most basic level of our life is hearing and receiving the word of God.

That's what our life is based on. And so, that's the central thing. And the word of God comes to us through the prophets, it comes to us in the scriptures, it comes to us in the person of Jesus, it comes to us by the Holy Spirit working among us in our groups and study groups.

So it's to hear it and then to hold it fast. Most of our lives are so, most of our hearts are so hardened by the excess of information which is hammered at us every day, that instead of being open and receptive like this so that if we hear something that's of value we can grab it, we are already like this.

And there is no way that the seed is going to come into our lives or that we can take hold of it because our hearts are already closed. And it's only as you begin, somebody begins to help you to open up your heart a little to receive this word that there's any possibility that this could take place.

[14 : 19] It was beautiful to hear Bruce describe how a friend came alongside of him when he was like that and over a period of time so encouraged and nurtured him that a point came where he was like that so that when hearing the word of God he could say, yes, that's what I want to take and hold fast to.

Well, that's, we're to hear it, we're to hold it fast, not lose our grip, not suffer from heart failure.

There is essentially an offense to the gospel, a deep offense to the gospel because it attacks the citadel of your self-centeredness. And the resistance to the gospel is not in the questions which I've listed.

The ultimate resistance to the gospel is in the hardness of our own hearts, the unwillingness to give way in the citadel of our lives to someone else as Lord.

That's why we find it difficult. But in an honest and good heart we are to hold fast and then we are to bring forth fruit with patience.

[15 : 34] God has an eternal plan for your life. That is, it's not a matter of God is going to zap you and you're going to stop drinking or stop misbehaving or stop doing whatever you shouldn't be doing that you think you ought to be doing and that you feel guilty about doing.

That may happen but the process is a process whereby the word of God takes deep root in your life and brings forth fruit with patience.

God's work is going to take all your time, seven days a week and every day of every year and every year of your life. And God is going to do that work in bringing forth fruit from your life in accordance with the word of God which has been planted in your life.

Well, that's what, that's what this week is all about. You all know and I don't need to repeat what comes before in verse 11.

I'm going to repeat it but just briefly that the three things that can happen otherwise are first that the devil is so strong that when the seed is in your heart that he snatches it away right away.

[16 : 45] It's just like water off a duck's back or seed on a concrete sidewalk. It just doesn't hold. There's no way it can take root in your life and more work needs to be done and you need to be loved a lot until there's some good soil there that that seed can take hold.

The second thing that happens is that you turn out to be one of these religious types who responds with great excitement and great joy and everything changes and all the world is turned upside down for you and then you have to take your faith to work with you and you can't do it.

And under the test what you thought was the new beginning breaks down and crumbles. And Jesus says that happens. The third thing he says is that there's the seed the seed is good it gets into your life you get hold of it.

But then and he gives that that lovely catalog of things that go wrong which sounds terribly terribly contemporary when he says the cares and riches and pleasures of life are such that that seed though it's there and though it takes root it only brings forth hard little green apples because nothing comes to maturity spiritually in your life.

you suffer from permanent immaturity spiritually. And he says those are the three things that can go wrong. So what the mission is is what the week the time of your life is all about is simply that you will receive that word of God and that you will hold it fast in a good and honest heart and that your life the whole of your life will be bringing forth fruit with patience on the basis of what God has done in nourishing you and bringing you to life through his word.

[18 : 44] Bruce described how for him it was at the Billy Graham crusade and I have found in my experience and Bruce's word was a help to me again that most people need a point in their life where the decision is made where they actually do it and one of the functions of a mission week is to provide a point in our lives a point that we can say yes that was the time when by God's grace I was able to open my heart to receive the word of God the healing and the forgiveness which comes through Christ that was the point and when you're praying prayer on page 44 just pray for one another that for people who have never come to that point in their lives that this week may provide the opportunity for them to come to that point so we need to pray we need to pray just this this simple prayer that's in the prayer book and that prayer should be that our hearts will be prepared and the hearts of those to whom with whom we seek to share this faith that their hearts may be prepared as well following the service today there's an epilogue in the chapel which

Steve is going to share with you the simple steps by which God works in our lives to bring us to faith and trust in him it may be a help you to stay for that may not but if it is that will begin 10 minutes after the after the service is over Amen Amen Thank you.