

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA

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Scripture: Various

"True Discipleship: the Call to Evangelize" (part 10)

THE "E" WORD

We have looked at the characteristics of "True Discipleship" for a few months now. And while we have talked about the use of our time and money in light of being a follower of Jesus Christ, as well as our focusing our energy on our relationships with the Lord and others, we have yet to speak of an important aspect of Christian discipleship and that is the "E" word. Do you know what the "E" word is? It is probably one of the most challenging calls our Lord puts on us. Evangelism. Jesus tells us to go and make disciples – remember that is part and parcel the Great Commission. Evangelism is the English word for the first step in making disciples. Taken from the Greek word, *euangelion*, which means good message or good news (the corresponding word in English is "gospel" from the Anglo-Saxon, "God's or good spell" (ie. God's or good Word), evangelism is the process and action of spreading the gospel, or "good news" of Jesus Christ to others and sharing the message of salvation in a way that people can understand.

And one can say it probably is the most unpopular activity of Christians in our world. Christians may be tolerated but not if they share their faith. The Communists didn't like it, the Hindus in India don't like it, the Moslems, when in control, forbid it, the Jews in Jerusalem welcome Christian tourists but not if they share Christ's Word. And certainly, our secular culture doesn't want to hear it, either.

And yet, that is what our Lord calls us to do. And it is only logical, isn't it?

Listen (note that the words in caps are quotes from the Hebrew Bible), for a moment, to the Apostle Paul from **Romans 10:8-17**: *But what does it say? "THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART"—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, "WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED."*

How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, "HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!"

However, they did not all heed the good news; for Isaiah says, "LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT?" So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

Now notice in the underlined verse, the three essential components to evangelism - the word of Christ (the message), the messenger, and the hearer. And then hopefully faith. That seals the message of salvation.

TO REVEAL THE TRUTH AND DEMONSTRATE THE LOVE

We are told that Jesus Christ reveals this truth and love of God to our world. To reveal means to uncover. That means unless someone uncovers it, you will not know it. The only way someone is going to know about God is if someone tells them. And the primary way God wants us to let people know is by us telling them. Oh yes, God can use dreams and vision, angelic messengers to wake people up. He did so with the Apostle Paul and others, but the primary way is through other people.

Jesus modeled this through the calling of His disciples. An example we find in today's Gospel lesson from **John 1**. Jesus called Nathaniel (most likely Bartholomew) and Philip, and called them to follow. Isn't evangelism in a nutshell? To call people to follow Jesus.

What is significant about this passage from the Gospel is the fact that Moses and the Prophets are mentioned (a reference to the Hebrew Bible - our Old Testament), Jesus is referred to by three titles - *Son of God*, *King of Israel*, and *Son of Man* - which are all prophetic references. He is the *Son of God* (second person of the Trinity), the *King of Israel* (the fulfillment of the prophecy that David's throne would be eternal), and the *Son of Man* - He is pre-eminent over all humanity. No one like him who has ever walked in the flesh. Also a fulfillment of **Daniel 7:13-14** where **Daniel** sees a human like figure (*one like a son of man*) whom the Ancient of Days would give rule over all the nations of the earth forever. So evangelism is all about letting people know not just about the Living God, but Jesus Christ.

So we know it is a call to being a disciple. How do we do it?

ENEMIES TO EVANGELISM

Before I speak of the how, we need to look at what prevents us from sharing the gospel personally with others. The number one reason believers don't share their faith is fear: fear of failure, fear of not knowing what to say, fear of rejection, fear of what others will think. That is the number one reason we don't share our faith.

And we need to realize that fear is a great tool of Satan. It keeps people locked in their insecure worlds. It keeps people from standing up or speaking out for what is right, it keeps people from taking a first step. And fear's bedfellows are anxiety and worry.

And yet, the Word says, Jesus says, over and over again "Fear not!" The Apostle Paul tells us in **2 Timothy 1:7** that *"God has not given us a spirit of fear, but one of power, and love, and a sound mind."*

The second reason believers don't share their faith is due to laziness. They just don't think about it, or care about it, or just don't take the time to let others know about their faith. Recall Jesus' words against the servant who buried his talents given by his master in the parable found in **Matthew 25**. The master rebukes him with the words *"you wicked and lazy servant."*

So how do we overcome this fear and this laziness?

THE EXAMPLE OF THE FIRST DISCIPLES

We need to look at what happened to the disciples after they saw the Risen Lord. In **Acts 1:4-8**, Jesus told them to go and pray and wait for the promise of the Father which is the Holy Spirit. They obeyed the Lord and we are told in **Acts 1:14** they *"were all with one mind continually devoting themselves to prayer."* As a result, the Holy Spirit came upon them and they not only spoke in other languages that the people from all over the Roman Empire who were in Jerusalem could hear and understand, but we are told that they had boldness. Another example is found in **Acts 4:31**: *"And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness."*

I don't know about you, but boldness is the opposite of fear isn't it?

So what is the first step? To first is to understand evangelism's importance. We evangelize because Jesus told us to. We are all called to evangelize. And before we are able to evangelize we need to be walking with the Lord – seeking to obey him, and then we are to spend time in prayer. We can't do it without the Holy Spirit. That's what the disciples did, isn't it? We are to pray for boldness, to pray for wisdom, to pray for sensitivity, to pray that God would give you the opportunity to bear witness to Christ's truth and love. All of this comes from the Holy Spirit.

And as you are doing so, continue to grow in your relationship with Christ and think of those things in which Christ has made a difference in your life. Why are you a Christian? Why is Jesus important to you? Can you answer those questions? If you can't then you won't be able to share the why with others.

Something else to keep in mind – don't force the issue. In other words, don't think that you always have to say something or do something. Let the Lord guide you. Listen to what the Lord is trying to tell you and don't worry.

If God wants a person to hear the good news, He will make a way! I don't find it helpful when pastors and others say that if you don't share the faith, people will be going to hell. Since when is someone

else's salvation solely dependent on us. And yet, we do have a responsibility to bear witness. But what is most important is for us to clearly demonstrate the truth and love of Christ. So the challenge is making sure the message is right and doing it in a way that reflects the love of God.

1 Peter 3:15 tells us, "*But sanctify Christ as Lord of your hearts, always being ready to give a defense for the hope that is within you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence.*"

You don't want to turn others away because of the way you share the faith.

Remember our motivation for what we do as a disciple must always be love!

Recall our church mission statement - "*To proclaim the truth and love of the Lord Jesus Christ in word and deed by the power of the Holy Spirit and to the glory of God the Father.*"

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Here at St. Bartholomew's we are going to play a central role in preparing for the Franklin Graham Festival this September 22 and 23 at Coca-Cola Field in downtown Buffalo. I am on the Executive Team and one of the opportunities we will have is to host the CLW (Christian Life and Witness) classes that will be offered for the members of our church. These four classes will be held in April and will be classes on how and when to share your faith. Opportunities like this only come once in a great while so my hope is that many here will attend the classes.

A second opportunity we will all have is to have small business type cards made up that have our church name, the fact that we are Bible believing and Christ centered, our address, website, phone number and service times as well as a Scripture on the back and/or other ministries that are available at the church.

Then all our members will be able to take a number of cards to have on hand when you are out and about to let people know that you belong to St. Bart's and if they don't have a church home to come and visit. This is an easy and more personal way to get the message out.

While it is true that not everyone is called to be an evangelist - that is for a minority of Christians who have been given the gift of evangelism - ALL are called to support the work of evangelism and to bear testimony of Christ in their lives - in word and deed.

This is one of the major characteristics that mark a true disciple. This is the call to evangelize. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!