

The Walk: Share Sunday, 10/17/21

Last week we talked about the Christian discipline of giving, which enables God's ministry to the world and grows in us a spirit of generosity, taming our hearts that are so prone to idolize money and the things it promises to do for us. Today we conclude our series with sharing the Good News of Jesus.

The Christian Church has an interesting problem: we tend to overemphasize good deeds and underemphasize the spoken word when sharing Jesus. In other words, we're usually much more eager to do kind things for one another than we are to open our mouths and talk about our faith in Jesus, oftentimes skipping the words entirely. Why do you suppose that is? Jesus did both, using his actions to illustrate his teaching.

I think we can all agree that people are often unable or unwilling to hear words about Jesus if they don't see Jesus in the behavior of the people talking. That's very true. Our words and our deeds must agree to be credible. When they don't agree, it's called hypocrisy. Jesus had many choice words to say about that sin. But if you came looking for perfect people today, you're in the wrong place. We're all hypocrites because we're all imperfect people. The good news is that we're also all on a journey of following and becoming more like Jesus, who was perfectly consistent between his words and actions. To share Jesus effectively with others we certainly need to be walking our talk, but we also need to be willing and able to talk our walk.

Jesus taught that we are to put our lamps on lamp stands and "let [our] good deeds shine out for all to see."¹ But if we don't use words to at least describe where our light comes from- our motive for doing our good deeds- we may be just as likely to be promoting our own goodness rather than the goodness of Jesus.

We do good deeds because of the one we follow and his example and teaching that we do the same. Let's read about that as we return to the Gospel of Matthew, this time in chapter 4, beginning with verse 17. I'm reading from the New Living Translation.

{Read Matthew 4:17-25 NLT}

The Gospels are an effective antidote against the modern, idolatrous belief that our

¹ Matthew 5:16-16. New Living Translation (2nd Edition).

primary reason for being here is to accomplish good deeds. Notice how Jesus began his ministry, preaching “Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.” Loving others without acknowledging our devotion to God misses the point, which is that God wants to draw us close in relationship. Just as we’re called to get up and begin following Jesus, God wants us to invite others into the same kind of relationship. Peter and the others started following Jesus, but it wasn’t long before they themselves were inviting others to follow Jesus.

Are you making disciples for Jesus with what you share, or disciples of something else entirely? What is it that you talk with your friends about most? What do you post on social media about? Adam Hamilton compares sharing Jesus with telling a friend about a good restaurant you’ve visited or posting an online review.² When we’re telling someone about our favorite Italian restaurant, or a great movie that we just saw, our faces become animated, our voices get more modulated, and we experience an emotional surge, a burning desire to share that same joyful experience with someone else. Even writing online reviews can be an emotive experience.

I know I’ve experienced passion when sharing the North Shore, Vita Pizza in Duluth, and countless Apple Computer products. I like to think I get at least as animated when I’m sharing Jesus as I do when I’m sharing iPhone. How about you? Are you making disciples of Jesus with as much Zeal as you’re making disciples of Nike, Snapchat, or Amazon Prime?

If we’re serious about sharing Jesus, and doing so with both actions and words, that means we need to do some reading, writing, and reflecting on what we know and believe about Jesus. Each of us experiences and interprets the revelations of God a bit differently through our own life experiences. That’s why it’s so important to move beyond just sharing Scripture with others to sharing Jesus in more personal ways. Each of us has the capacity for sharing Jesus in unique ways to reach others whom God has brought into our lives.

Peter instructs us to always be ready to share the reason for our faith, writing, “if someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it.”³ That’s really not as hard as it sounds. You don’t need a seminary degree to do it, but you probably need a

² Adam Hamilton. *The Walk: Five Essential Practices of the Christian Life*, p. 114. Abingdon (2019).

³ 1Peter 3:15b. Ibid

little practice in choosing your words and boiling down your life story into an elevator speech, something you could share with someone in the short time it takes to share an elevator ride with them.

Please understand, I'm not suggesting you accost strangers in elevators with unasked-for stories of your faith. The idea of an "elevator speech" has more to do with being concise, clear, tangible, and compelling, all in the very short amount of time we typically have in conversation with other people. Remember, if someone is really interested in knowing more, they'll ask for more. Remember that Peter's instruction is prefaced with, "if anyone asks..."

I suggest you try writing some things down of various lengths, using your own words and experiences of God, and then trying sharing them with someone you know and trust for feedback. Then you'll be better prepared and more confident when an opportunity presents itself. For example, someone might ask you, "why do you go to church?" After all, you're part of a shrinking minority, so you ought to have an interesting and compelling reason for doing so.

My own witness counts for the least of anyone in this congregation, because I'm a hired hand here; Your witness is infinitely more credible to most other people because you don't get paid to show up here on Sundays. I remember quite vividly a senior from a previous congregation who was convinced I was inviting him to worship only because I was after his money! Apparently in his life experience, that's what Pastors were all about- getting money.

But I do have a testimony to give, because before I'm your pastor, I'm a part of the Body of Christ. My shortest answer to someone who asks why I belong to a church might be, "I need a church because, in my experience, I can't know and follow Jesus without being in relationship with other people trying to do the same."

A longer response might be this: "I need church because I need Jesus, and I believe that I can't know all of Jesus apart from the church, his body. I need church because I need daily practice with other people in the discipline of offering and receiving grace. I need church because I need to be reminded that it's not all about me. And I need church because I don't have the skill, time, passion, wisdom, or inclination to do everything by myself."

I like answering questions about church, because it seems like a pretty safe way to

eventually invite someone into a conversation about Jesus- maybe not right away, but eventually. While people may not be ready to talk about more personal matters of faith right away, they're very often willing to talk about church and their experiences with it.

But each of us does need to be clear about why we're following Jesus, because the whole church thing is really rather sad and futile without its center and source of power. The church does very few things as well as other competing organizations in this world. The one thing we have that they don't is Jesus. I need Jesus because I'm a hopeless, broken person who can't help but hurt myself and others without the forgiveness, power, and inspiration of Jesus to be a more loving person.

I might add to that, I need a reason to get out of bed in the morning that goes beyond getting dressed, eating, working, sleeping, and doing it all again the next day. I need Jesus because I want to live for what's real, what's going to last forever, and not just the things of this life that fall apart and get carted off to the dump.

How would you answer this question? However you do it, avoid using five-syllable words and Bible quotations. Sharing your faith isn't a debate contest or a chance to show off your Bible knowledge, it's an authentic sharing of your experience of the grace of Jesus with another person who quite possibly couldn't care less what the Bible says.

Also, remember that while monologues can be entertaining on late night TV, they're terrible conversation starters. The worst thing you can do when someone asks you about your faith is to bury them with your life story. Instead, offer them a short and interesting bite-sized reply and then invite them into the conversation. That might be as simple as saying something like, "How about you? Do you have a church?"

One easy way to witness to your faith is to invite someone to join you for worship or some other church event. We're making it easy for you today by making available invitation cards for our next worship series on Revelation. Many people are curious about Revelation, so it's a better than average opportunity for you to reach someone who might be open to exploring their faith. You'll find the invitation cards in the lobby.

Adam Hamilton suggests making use of positive social media posts.⁴ “Inspiring worship today at BUMC” or “I’m so grateful for the comfort of prayer!” Show your friends in simple ways that your faith matters to you. However you do it, do it simply, do it in your own words, and do it often. God never intended us to be secret agents for Jesus. Each of us has been blessed with a unique way to share the love of Jesus with the world, in action and in words. Don’t hide what God have given you, but share it generously and joyfully with others.

Please take some time now to reflect on how you’ll grow in sharing Jesus.



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⁴ Adam Hamilton. *The Walk: Five Essential Practices of the Christian Life*, pp. 122, 135. Abingdon (2019).