

“QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS”

Session Nine – “Why and How Should I Tell Others?”

Matthew 28:19-20 “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Acts 1:8 “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Living Faith 9.1.1 As God sent Christ to us, so Christ sends us into the world. We are here to proclaim Christ in word and deed.

Most of us know that we are called to share our faith with others – to invite others to Christ. But few of us do! There is a disconnect between the imperative to share our Christian faith, and our reluctance to do so. We are even reluctant to discuss our spiritual lives with other Christians! We readily tell others about a good restaurant, movie, sale or event, but we hesitate to speak of our faith. Why?

Six Reasons to Not Share Your Faith With Others

- 1) Religion is a private matter; 2) People have a belief of their own;
- 3) Other faiths are valid paths to God; 4) People will think you are a religious nut;
- 5) We don't have all the answers; 6) That's what the clergy are for!

1. Religion is a Private Matter

There is an old saying – “Don't talk about religion or politics in polite company.” It has been traced back at least as far as 1840 (“The Letter Bag of the Great Western”): “Never discuss religion or politics with those who hold opinions opposite to yours; they are subjects that heat in handling, until they burn your fingers.” It was reiterated in 1870 in “Hill's Manual of Social and Business Forms” – “Do not discuss politics or religion in general company. You probably would not convert your opponent, and he will not convert you. To discuss those topics is to arouse feeling without any good result.”

More recently, Linus says it in ‘The Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown’: “There are three things I have learned never to discuss with people: religion, politics, and the Great Pumpkin.” We seem to have taken Linus' advice to heart, over and above the Biblical directives to share our faith. Unfortunately, it has served to silence the church!

Solution: We need to overcome this cultural convention by taking seriously the following verses:

Colossians 4:5-6 “Be wise in the way you act toward those who are not believers, making good use of every opportunity you have. Your speech should always be pleasant and interesting, and you should know how to give the right answer to everyone.”

1 Peter 3:15 “Make sure that in your hearts you honour Christ as Lord. Always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks you about the hope you have. Be ready to give the reason for it. But do it gently and with respect.”

The Colossians verse instructs us to await the right opportunities to discuss our faith. And Peter advises us to do so “gently and with respect.”

Question: When was the last time, outside of church, that you had a discussion concerning your Christian faith? With a believer? With an unchurched person?

2. People have a belief of their own

It wasn't long ago that the majority of people in Atlantic Canada were Christians aligned with some denomination or other. To invite someone to church was to imply that their particular experience of the Christian faith was inadequate.

However, recent surveys have revealed that Atlantic Canada has experienced the sharpest decline in religious attendance in all of Canada (1988-2012) – from 57 percent attending at least once per month, to 31 percent. That decline has continued in the last 6 years. Additionally, Canadians who describe themselves as “religiously unaffiliated” has risen from 5% to over 30% today.

What does this mean? When you speak to a person about your faith, or invite them to church, you are generally speaking to someone who has no belief system, or who perhaps does, but does not practice it.

Solution: The verses from Colossians and 1 Peter apply here too. Remember that when you speak of faith, you are generally speaking to people without much of one!

Question: How many people in your “circle” attend church regularly?

3. Other faiths are valid paths to God

“It doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you don't hurt anyone.” This might be the primary Canadian virtue, also often described as “tolerance.” And it is half correct –

it is important not to do harm to others. However, it does matter what you believe! The New Testament is about this very issue – the importance of belief in Jesus, and following him as Saviour and Lord.

For many, it is an uncomfortable reality that Christianity makes exclusive claims regarding the truth. Jesus claims to be “the Way, the Truth and the Life,” the only way into relationship with God as our Father (John 14:6). Remember that when Jesus and the early Christians were inviting others to follow Christ, Secularism was unknown. Everyone to whom they were speaking were persons of faith other than Christianity. When the Roman government imprisoned and executed Christians, it was on the charge of Atheism – because Christians refused to acknowledge the other gods worshipped in the Empire as valid or true. Christians insisted that Jesus was the only way.

Solution: Read Acts 17 to see how the Apostle Paul shared the Christian faith with those of other beliefs, based on his knowledge of them. Learning about other faiths can help us to respectfully share Christianity in a meaningful way with them.

Living Faith 9.2.1: *“Some whom we encounter belong to other religions and already have a faith... we should not address others in a spirit of arrogance implying that we are better than they. But rather, in a spirit of humility, as beggars telling others where food is to be found, we point to life in Christ.”*

Question: Do you know someone of another faith? Have you spoken to them about it?

4. People will think you are a religious nut

Times have changed – it used to be that people who did not believe in God were considered to be eccentric. Now the reverse is true. However, if we share the faith in the context of our friends and family, the overall testimony of our life will assure them of our sincerity (and stability!). The powerful story in Mark 5 of the man who was healed from terrible mental and spiritual torment contains an important lesson; Jesus said to him (Mark 5:19): *“Go home to your people – your family and friends (literally, “your house and your people”). Tell them about all that the Lord did for you. Tell them how the Lord was good to you.”*

Solution: Share your faith with people who know you well. They already know you are crazy! Or not, as the case may be.

Question: Has someone spoken to you about their faith that caused you to think of them as a “religious nut?” What made you think that? How can you learn from that?

5. We don't have all the answers

However, we know where many answers to the big questions of life can be found – in the life and words and teaching of Jesus. Our job is not to answer all the hard questions. Our job is to invite people to meet Jesus, most often through the work and worship of our church. You don't have to know how to cook in order to recommend a restaurant – you just have to tell of your own experience.

Solution: Many people raise objections to the faith to divert the discussion away from themselves. But the big questions of life – is there a God? Is there a purpose to my life? Is there something beyond the reality we see? Why is there suffering? – are what Christianity is all about. In John 1:43-46, we are told how Philip simply invited Nathaniel to come and see for himself: *The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me." ...Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked. "Come and see," said Philip.*

Question: When was the last time you invited someone to church? When would be a good time to do so?

6. That's what the clergy are for!

While it is true that clergy have a special role in proclaiming and teaching the Gospel, we are all called to be witnesses. "Word of Mouth" remains the most powerful way of spreading the message, particularly in our secular age, which is often actively antagonistic to the church. We cannot assume that people will just wander into church, or come to faith on their own. Time and again, the Gospels say this (Mark 1:28): *"News about Jesus spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee."* It wasn't the disciples who were spreading this news – it was the people who saw or heard or experienced Jesus. Even the shepherds who visited the stable spread the news! The invitation or endorsement from someone known to us remains the most powerful form of advertising.

If someone has questions about the faith, invite them to ask their clergy. Or your clergy! Ministers are always happy to talk to people about their faith.

Solution: Take Jesus' advice to heart (Mark 5:19): *"Go home to your people – your family and friends. Tell them about all that the Lord did for you. Tell them how the Lord was good to you."*

Question: What are the clergy for?

Called to Mission – the “Social Gospel” – Sharing Christ in Deed

While we are called to share the Gospel in Word, we are also called to share the Gospel in Deed. When the disciples of John the Baptist were sent to ask Jesus if he really is the Messiah, Jesus responded (Luke 7:22): *“Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.”* The Gospel is accompanied by such signs.

The most famous parable Jesus tells about the characteristics of his followers is the Parable of the Sheep and Goats. Matthew tells it like this (Matthew 25:31-46):

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

The parable then describes the “goats,” who did not do such things.

The early church took this responsibility seriously, engaging in social relief to widows and orphans, a particularly neglected and needy group. They even appointed a special group of “deacons” to administer this program. This resulted in the Gospel spreading yet further.

Acts 4:32-35 - All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them.

For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

Acts 6:1-7 - In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said ... "Choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word." ... So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

We also read about Paul taking up collections for those experiencing famine, and the need for Christians to reflect the life of Christ through generosity. Paul writes to Timothy regarding those with resources in excess of their own needs (6:18): *"Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share."*

Our church participates in three primary forms of mission outreach: locally, the Upper Room Hospitality Ministry (Soup Kitchen and Food Bank); provincially, Camp Keir (an outreach to children and youth); internationally, through Canadian Food Grains Bank.

Living Faith:

8.1.2 Life in Christ is formed in a believing community, and expressed in daily living. We are to bring Christ's healing presence to the world for which he died, his peace to its pain and anguish.

8.4.1 God is always calling the church to seek that justice in the world which reflects the divine righteousness revealed in the Bible.

8.4.4 Justice requires concern for the poor of the world. It seeks the best way to create well-being in every society. It is concerned about employment, education, and health, as well as rights and responsibilities.

9.1.1 As God sent Christ to us, so Christ sends us into the world. We are here to proclaim Christ in word and deed.

9.1.2 Mission is evangelism, the offer of salvation to all people in the power of the Holy Spirit, to be received through faith in Christ. It asks people to repent of their sins, to trust Christ, to be baptized, and to enter a life honouring Jesus as Lord.

9.1.3 Mission is service, a call to help people in need and to permeate all of life with the compassion of God.