

One word that we hear a lot in church is evangelism. In my experience people have a kind of nebulous idea of what evangelism is. For many congregations the evangelism committee is the group tasked with finding ways to bring people into the church. When churches get nervous that more people aren't coming ... look to the evangelism committee! When I started here the evangelism budget consisted of one-line: our yellow pages ad. Now we don't even have a yellow pages ad! This is clearly an area we can grow in!

The dictionary defines evangelism as: the spreading of the Christian gospel by public preaching or personal witness. You may not be big on public preaching but we each make a personal witness by who we are.

Our gospel deals with evangelism. Jesus sent his disciples out 2 by 2. This was the first evangelism effort ever. But remember, this was 2,000 years ago. They didn't have yellow pages ads or newspaper ads or websites. But maybe that's ok. Did you know that less than 1/10<sup>th</sup> of 1% of Americans who are members of a church got there because of media. 80% of Americans say they got to their church through someone who was important to them.

Jesus told his disciples to take nothing but a staff. No bread, no money. They were allowed to wear sandals and take one coat.

Look at what they did. They didn't have an evangelistic revival. They didn't expect for people to start showing up in the synagogues. The Bible says, "So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick

and cured them.” That is what they did. There was no headcount. They were involving themselves in people’s lives and were dealing with their real needs.

**Evangelism is the process of applying the good news of Jesus to people’s real needs.**

It’s not pressuring people to come to church. That, in the long run, is nonproductive and basically unchristian. Evangelism is introducing people to a new way of living, a new way of relating, a new way of perceiving the meaning of existence.

Evangelism needs to deal with causes, not just symptoms. The police deal with symptoms. Welfare workers work with symptoms. Crisis intervention people deal with symptoms. When we provide food for the hungry we are dealing with symptoms. When I counsel with people who are facing crises of one kind or another, I am dealing with symptoms.

When we do evangelism, we are going beyond symptoms to causes. What causes people’s distress? What causes them to mess up their lives? What causes people to betray their values, to barter their futures?

**Evangelism takes into account that at the heart of the world’s difficulties is a broken relationship.** We call it sin. We become alienated from God, from one another, we can even become strangers to ourselves. That is what sin is.

We need to be there to strengthen one another in our walk of faith. Evangelism is when people are interested in coming to your church because they see something about you that is different. People are looking for hope. People are looking for something to count on.

Christians are like charcoal briquettes. When we are together our faith can sustain each other. But when we are off to the side, when we become disconnected, that fire can go out.

When we remain connected to the church and each other we are strengthened to live the best lives so we can know the happiness God wants us to experience.

When we are disconnected we take on the attitudes and the values of the society around us. The views of ourselves, of others and of God can become distorted. We become weighed down by the problems of the world. We don't need to accept society's distorted, broken view of reality. We need to return to the source of our lives. We need to be renewed.

**Evangelism is something all of Jesus' followers are tasked with.** Everywhere we go is an opportunity to turn the tide. Martin Luther said, "We are to be Christ to our neighbor." Evangelism is applying the good news of Jesus to people's real needs. Instead of asking yourself, who can I invite to church, ask yourself, who can I bring the hope of Jesus to by something I can do?

Finally, an important part of evangelism, but not the most important part, is the simple act of inviting a friend or family member to worship with you. That is where reconciliation between people and God often happens. You don't have to verbally assault someone with your convictions. A simple invitation with a loving and joyful heart is probably the most powerful evangelistic message of all.

May others experience the grace and love of Jesus because of who you are and what you do!

**AMEN.**