

Christ Church Communiqué



The Monthly Newsletter of Christ Church

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A Heart for the Lost

If there is a single quality that characterizes the Evangelical movement, it is its insistence upon evangelism. Yes, the similarity between the two words is not accidental. Evangelicals are, at root, Bible people and they are Gospel people, and they are passionately concerned for the eternal destiny of human beings. Hence, to be an Evangelical means, among other things, that one embraces a high view of Scripture and a deep concern for the lost.

Yet despite the importance of evangelism to Evangelicals, there remains considerable confusion and debate over the precise form that evangelism should take in the local church. For example, some insist that evangelism ought to be carried out by the "professional clergy." The implied assumption here is that evangelism requires a certain fund of biblical and/or theological knowledge that is learned and delivered through a practiced skill set of techniques and maneuvers, much like the polished approach of Mormon missionaries who occasionally canvass the neighborhoods.

However, the majority of contemporary Christians view evangelism as the primary task of the corporate church and look to their clergy to provide programming and events to which church members feel comfortable inviting their unsaved family and friends. Here, the implied assumption is that though each individual has a personal responsibility to witness to those unsaved persons within their sphere of influence, this responsibility may be satisfied in full if one brings people to church or church-related events who are, in turn, exposed to the Gospel through concerts, banquets, drama, retreats, conferences, pageants, special speakers, "crusades," and various other activities.

This all brings us to three central questions: 1) What is evangelism? 2) Who should evangelize? 3) How is evangelism to be carried out? It is to these questions and their answers that we turn our attention in this issue of the Christ Church Communiqué.

What is Evangelism?

Sadly, some people have confused the call to evangelism with the task of apologetics, and this confusion has erroneously led some to conclude that evangelism is a

"Declaring the preeminence of Christ in all things, to the glory of God in everything, and for the joy of all peoples everywhere."

targeted and confrontational style of argument that is directed at convincing another person that what he or she believes about God, or religion, or the like, is wrong and that Christianity is true. But that is not evangelism.

This is not to say that apologetics does not have a place in the life of the Christian church and faith—surely it does. But while every Christian ought to be an apologist of sorts (for all should be ready to provide a reason for the hope that is theirs, e.g., 1 Peter 3:15), most recognized apologists are fairly well-read concerning such matters as reasons for the Christian faith, the principles of logic, how to craft a compelling argument, and raising counterarguments to challenges. Not all Christians are called upon to be apologists in this stricter sense of the term, and it should be borne in mind that exceedingly few people will come to a saving faith through apologetic argumentation compared to Christian evangelism. Indeed, far more people are “loved into” the Kingdom than “argued into” the Kingdom. No, evangelism does not necessarily involve the kind of intellectual and philosophical jousting that frequently characterizes apologetic efforts.

In the short, evangelism is simply telling someone else about the Good News—the Gospel. Evangelism does not involve imposing a belief system on others (for the Gospel, after all, is *fact* and not belief). Nor does evangelism require that one lead people to a response, for properly understood, we don’t do this. Rather, salvation comes only as a result of the working of God’s Spirit in the life of another. Furthermore, evangelism does not even really involve extending an invitation. More accurately, the Gospel is a declaration and not an invitation. Moreover, evangelism is not dependent upon, or even enhanced by, techniques or gimmicks. Quite simply, redemption occurs as an act of God drawing people to Himself and cannot be manufactured through human strategies or manipulation. The Apostle Paul put a rather fine point on all of this:

What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. (1 Corinthians 3:5-7, ESV)

Evangelism is simply declaring the Gospel and allowing God’s Spirit to bring about the fruit of redemption in those whom He desires. Evangelism involves scattering the seed of Good News upon the hearts and minds of those with whom we share our lives and allowing God’s Spirit to root this seed and harvest its fruit in redemption, in *His* time, in *His* way, and according to *His* good pleasure and will.

And precisely *what* is involved in proclaiming the Gospel? In brief, declaring the Gospel involves telling others what Christ accomplished by dying on the cross of Calvary. Of course, this would entail explaining why Christ had to die and how one avails himself or herself of the provisions of Christ’s accomplished work on the cross. But you will please notice in this that the sharing of a “personal testimony” *may not* be sufficient for the

purposes of evangelism, for one can share of their personal experience with Christ and what He means to that person, but never actually share the Gospel. It's good to share about the significance of Christ in your life, but keep in mind that the Gospel is far more than this. The Gospel is about the reason and consequences of Christ's death on the cross.

Who Should Evangelize?

You!

The call to personal evangelism is replete throughout the New Testament, and even a casual reading of Jesus' life and ministry in Scripture can almost leave one with the impression that He viewed personal evangelism as the sole reason for His coming to earth. Of course, there was more to His life and ministry than this, but there can be no question that to faithfully walk in Jesus' footsteps one must be actively engaged in constant personal evangelism.

I use the words "personal evangelism" quite intentionally. From beginning to end, the pattern of evangelism is always personal, never corporate. Indeed, as soon as Andrew began to follow Jesus, he immediately went and found his brother, Simon, and brought him to Jesus (John 1:40-42), thereby establishing immediate, direct, and one-on-one personal evangelism as the most basic, normative, and effective means for sharing the Gospel. And such characterized evangelism throughout the Christian centuries; that is, until more recently.

Today, exceedingly few self-professed Christians share the Gospel—ever. Indeed, in one study, researchers concluded that what took the early church just one Christian to accomplish in evangelism today takes roughly 400 Christians to accomplish in evangelism. In other words, a first century disciple personally shared the Gospel with as many people as 400 Christians today. That's both shocking and sad. Today, the overwhelming majority of Christians have simply relegated evangelism to the local church and sense little, if any, personal responsibility for sharing the Gospel. Indeed, so desperate is the state of evangelism within some quarters of the Church that in response to my question concerning the personal experience of church elders in proclaiming the Gospel, not one could give evidence that they had ever done so. That, too, is both shocking and sad.

This is not to say that the church cannot, or should not, be involved in corporate evangelism. There may be certain forms of Gospel proclamation that can best be conducted by the church at large. However, let me hasten to add that this ought to be the exception in both theory and practice, and not the rule. Where corporate evangelism has become the primary (much less, sole) means of Gospel presentation, biblical evangelism is not occurring and the effectiveness of the ministry has been severely compromised. The corporate church's efforts at evangelism should serve only

as an augment to the regular, faithful, and clear presentation of the Gospel that is occurring at the individual level by every believer, regardless of age, gender, giftedness, comfortability with the task, Bible and/or theological knowledge base, or time as a Christian (e.g., Acts 5:42; 8:25; 11:19-21; 13:32; 14:7, 15, 21; 15:35; 16:10; 17:18, etc.).

In the short, personal evangelism is a mandate given by our Lord to *you!* (e.g., Matthew 28:18-20).

How is Evangelism to be Carried Out?

Having identified what evangelism is, of what it consists, and whose responsibility it is, we can now address the question of how evangelism is best carried out in our daily lives. Allow me to offer a few observations and suggestions:

- 1) Begin by sharing the Gospel within the context of established relationships. “Commando evangelism” that involves approaching people with whom you have absolutely no relationship and telling them that they are heading for hell is rarely helpful to the cause of Christ. Instead, start with those with whom you already have a relationship—family, friends, co-workers, etc.—and ask them if you could take them out for lunch or a cup of coffee. Inviting them to your home may be a good option, too. Be natural and don’t force things. You might say something like, “You know, there’s an aspect of my life that I haven’t told you much about and I would like to.” If they’re a friend, they’ll want to listen. If you find that you don’t know any unsaved people, you are living too sheltered a life. Get out there! Join a gym. Take up a hobby. Get involved with a service club. Become a Scout leader. Start building bridges with the unsaved. We are called to be salt and light in the world.
- 2) Tell them the truth about sin and its consequences. Sure, nobody wants to hear about sin, but without acknowledging the same, there can be no repentance—and conversion requires repentance, and not just faith. Sin has consequences; among which is a guilty standing before a holy God. The reality of this must be shared and can neither be edited nor minimized. Remember, you are to be sharing the Gospel—the whole unvarnished truth about why Christ died and what was accomplished on the cross—not selling encyclopedias. No, there is no need to be gruff, hard, arrogant, or condescending. Be gentle and tell the whole truth.
- 3) Tell them that conversion requires both repentance and faith. This item is closely related to the preceding. Because of our uncomfotability with discussing sin, many don’t. The result is that people are buying a false bill of goods and have come to believe that they are merely *choosing for* something, rather than *laying down* something. Conversion requires repentance from sin, including the pride that keeps many from believing that they are sinners. Repentance is not merely feeling bad about sin (that’s remorse), or wishing that one hadn’t done or said something(s) in their past (that’s regret), but experiencing *both* remorse and regret, *and* renouncing their sin as a pattern of behavior and making behavioral changes consistent with their new faith in Christ as Savior, Lord, and King.

- 4) Speak with a sense of urgency without being alarmist. Christ is *the way*, *the truth*, and *the life*—no one can be reconciled to God by any other means or through any other person (John 14:6). And if this is so, then we might well ask why someone would put off the decision to repent and believe in Christ until another day? The only reasons for delay would be: 1) The person doesn't believe it; or 2) They want to assess all of the perceived options for salvation. Help those with whom you share the Gospel to see that #2 is not an option—there is *no* other means of salvation. So, the only question that remains is: “Do you believe and will you repent?” Tell them that this is a decision that should not be put off (Luke 13:6-9; 1 Corinthians 7:29, 31; Hebrews 4:7). But remember, you are not responsible for their response—only for scattering seed. Don't be discouraged or take it personally should they not acknowledge Christ as King. That's not your job. Your job is to faithfully present the Gospel, not “save” people.
- 5) Tell them of the joy that is found in believing the Gospel and following Jesus as King. Don't present a fairytale version of conversion—life will not necessarily be easier following conversion. But the one in Christ has everything necessary for life and godliness, and the resources necessary to face every trial and temptation in life are theirs to draw upon. Yes, Christians face difficulties (see Hebrews Chapter 11), but the reward is joy—a settled assurance that God indwells the believer, that He is in control (see Hebrews Chapter 12), and that everything is working together for God's greater glory for those who love Him and are called according to His purposes (James 1:2-4).
- 6) Show them in the Bible where their need and God's provisions are found. You need not be a Bible scholar or theologian to use the scriptures in your evangelism. Rather, a familiarity with such basic passages as John Chapter 14 or Romans Chapter 8 can serve as a wonderful springboard to engage others in conversation. There is power in the Word of God—transforming power. Billy Graham well understands this, as is clear from his oft-repeated phrase, “The Bible says....” Showing people what the Bible says also helps others to realize that what you are sharing is not mere personal conviction, but the very disclosure of God in His own words.
- 7) Pray. Pray for opportunities to share the Gospel. Pray for courage to step into those opportunities. Pray for wisdom to share the Gospel with humility, clarity, and faithfulness. Pray for God's Spirit to be very present and active in the life of the other. And pray for God's will to be done in drawing to Himself those Whom He chooses.
- 8) Give immediate direction and support to those who embrace the Gospel. Help them connect with a strong Bible-teaching church. Encourage them to begin reading Scripture on their own (The Gospel of Mark is a good start). Encourage them to begin talking with God and cultivating their personal relationship with Him through prayer and devotional reading. Have them speak with a pastor or Christian leader who can provide them with additional resources and help in their new spiritual life. Conversion is the beginning of a life of discipleship and not the endpoint of your involvement with the other person. The days following

conversion can be confusing and treacherous for the new believer. Don't leave them alone and vulnerable to doubt and discouragement.

Conclusion

Evangelism is a personal responsibility given to every believer regardless of age, gender, giftedness, comfortability with the task, Bible and/or theological knowledge base, or tenure as a Christian. As the recipients of the Good News in Christ Jesus, each of us, in turn, is commanded to spread the reality and joy of the same to those within our respective spheres of influence. Evangelism is a lifestyle, not a job. Bearing witness to the transformative power of Christ and His Word ought to be as natural as breathing for the one walking with Christ.

With whom are you cultivating relationships that will lead to an open and honest presentation of the Gospel? When is the last time that you shared of the Good News of God's provision in Christ with a family member, neighbor, or co-worker? Does the joy of Christ permeate your life, and do the words of gratitude for your salvation drop easily from your lips? May I encourage you to take up your personal and individual charge to spread the Gospel with prayerful diligence and humble dependency upon the Lord? It's the most basic, natural, normative, and effective way for people to be introduced to the Person and work of Jesus. With whom are you sharing the Good News?

Grace and peace,

Robert W. Evans

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