

PASTORAL PRAYER

Gracious God of what is past and what is to come, we come to this place because we are on a journey. Sometimes that journey is smooth; other times, the walk is rough and the way is unclear. Throughout, we have the comfort and guidance of community. You give us the diversity and experience of our neighbors around us and far away to support us through the best and worst of times. Lead us to recognize always, holy God, that we are never on an island; we are never alone when we take hold fully of the Christian call for community, to be fully among one another.

However, gracious God, we must recognize that we are called to share you and your guidance in our lives individually. Help us to take the burden off of ourselves as we seek to spread the message of your great love to a world in need. Let us not focus on our efforts as the be-all and end-all of sharing but as the beginning of a journey with a friend and with the God that sees us and walks with us at all times. Walk with us to be discerning and only to offer ourselves in faithfulness and love, leaving everything else up to you. We pray all these things in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who walks with us through all the journeys of our lives, the one who taught us to pray together, saying...

SERMON

Last week, I gave a sermon about bad language. In that spirit, I'm going to drop a bad word. It's the worst word we can possibly use in the church, one that is so dirty, every time I say it, people shirk away, gasp, or tell me to stop using such language. I'm gonna say that word now, so brace yourselves: evangelism.

Indeed, I can understand why it seems like such a bad word; it has all this garbage attached that gives you a rough feeling in your stomach. You think it means you stop

people on the street and ask them if they have a few moments to hear about Jesus Christ. Or it feels like you need to go door-to-door soliciting people to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It can seem really hard and inauthentic. On the other hand, we make it out to be far too easy. I posted a picture on Facebook this week, which recounted Jesus' talk with Peter at the end of John. "Simon, Son of John, do you love me?" Jesus asks. Peter responds, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus tells Peter, "Then share that Facebook post!" This, of course, was marked as "Things Jesus Never Said," and rightly so. Evangelism is not as easy as anything on Facebook that invites us to "Share if you love Jesus" or "Like if you love God." That means absolutely nothing. But most of all, we feel that evangelism is about success, how many souls we can win for personal salvation. I'm here to tell you that all of these presuppositions are nothing more than hooey. Evangelism is not about business; it's not about getting butts in the seats. It's not making the checklists of getting done what God says we should do. That's not being real; that's trying to serve a business. I'm not good at business, and with good reason. I got my MDiv, not a MBA, so I can't help you there.

It's time to give evangelism a new face, where we are not only not afraid to hear the word "evangelism" but a new face where we take joy in being evangelists. We are in a new age where we must redefine the idea to reach all people. It's about being authentically who we are in sharing the stories of God's work in our lives. It's about being vulnerable and loving. Let's begin the journey today, as we push back against the sins of tele-evangelists and salespeople. Today's message is simple, and it will be your task to remember it this week and for this series: It's not about results. We'll say it together many times. Say it with me: "It's not about results." There ya go. And as we look at the idea of..."It's not about results" let's look at the problems of focusing on evangelism as a task that brings results in

terms of converts and numbers, and let us focus instead on the proper fruits of a life of faithful evangelism.

As you can probably surmise, I'm not a fan of most tele-evangelists. Some may be meaningful, mind you, so I don't want to put them all in the same box. I fear, though, they provide us with some bad examples of the evangelizing life. The services they hold on TV seem to be little more than large productions. Many preach the so-called "prosperity gospel." I feel this is highly unfaithful take on the life and words of Jesus. This gospel puts into happy terms how God wants us to be rich, God wants us to have all the happiness and blessings we could ever ask for, and all we have to do is just worship God and pray for them. It sounds like all that is between us and riches is the desire to ask. Life proves otherwise when many extremely faithful people don't have full bank accounts or great cars.

However, they have many more interests than preaching an easy gospel. People follow them because they want to follow them. They have an attractiveness to them, charisma. Most evangelists on TV draw people in with charisma and lead people to focus on their particular mission. That mission always seems to be about gaining more money and getting more followers to the cause, more "butts in their seats." Indeed, since they are on TV, they always want to stay on the air. It may be framed as for the Glory of God, but the real focus seems to be growth of their ministry and staying on the air. The real focus is on getting those results; God becomes a rubber stamp for their missions. One tele-evangelist, Oral Roberts, started this campaign in January 1987 where he said he heard a message from God saying that he had to raise \$8 Million by March or "God would call him home." I look at this time and time again, and I'm wondering how on Earth (or heaven, for that

matter), this makes sense to us or why God would even ask for such a thing. This calling by Oral Roberts, and many others like it from his compatriots, only seem about getting more.

I don't see how the Gospel of Jesus Christ lines up with much of the ministry of tele-evangelists. God's glory is only seen in their success in the numbers game. Their sin just that: the Gospel is about results, growth in money and in people. They will say anything and preach any gospel to get those numbers, especially one that sounds so sweet like the prosperity gospel. This is unfaithful evangelism because it focused on what we get out of it and what we produce. This makes out God to be a rewards program. The true gospel of Christ did not promise us benefits. The Gospel of Christ did not promise us about how things would always be great; it simply called for our faithfulness in loving and serving the other and our God. God, in turn, promised to be with us, not to give us all riches. Faithfulness is a reward in itself. We must always remember, friends, that the Christian life is "not about results."

Tele-evangelists can quickly use God not as the director but as the rationale as they seek success. On the other hand, evangelism can quickly turn into the blatant realm of salespeople. Sales people are all about results; there is nothing else. Think about any encounter you have with a salesperson. They will love you as long as they know you are possibly interested in their product. I had a conversation the other day with a salesperson from the Colorado Rapids. He was a nice guy, and wanted to know a little bit more about me and why I like soccer. He was interested in developing a short-term rapport with me in order that he would be more able to sell me Rapids tickets. If I told him I would be interested, he'd buy more into me and see how far he could go with sales. If I was not, he'd stop and go to the next person. Contrary to our mission, his mission was not to love me as

a person; his mission was to sell me tickets. For business, this makes sense. For evangelism, that is really a sin.

Tele-evangelists have a mission, as do salespeople. They want you to feel valued and to feel respected, but they also lose interest when you are not meeting their needs. They may be courteous, they may be friendly, but the interest is in you as a consumer, not a real person. They abandon the task when there is no results. The entire emphasis is on results. But, we know, "It's not about results." The same can be the problem of the church. Every church wants to grow, and that's fine. We must always ask ourselves what we are doing and how we are doing it. We don't want to become bad tele-evangelists and use God as our rationale for our goals. We don't want to be salespeople and dismiss people when they don't do what we want them to do. Indeed, the point of evangelism and outreach should always be affecting lives for the better, not adding people. When we are living into evangelism in that way, these problems do not matter.

The Christian must have a loving and respectful mentality. Evangelism is not about using God as a tool to get results or to be a salesperson that quickly loses interest when the other person isn't going to buy our product. That's far too commercialized! I've read a fantastic book by the Rev. David Gortner called "Transforming Evangelism." We must re-craft evangelism in many ways. Let's start at the beginning by partially re-defining evangelism over these coming weeks. As he says, evangelism is not a program, it's a spiritual practice. It is not institutional, but individual. It does not presume that God is absent and that we are bringing God into the picture, but that God is present and God is already active; we are called to listen to hear how that is happening. Evangelism begins with listening, not speaking. When we begin to look at evangelism in these different ways,

we take results off the table. Yes, Jesus gave us the Great Commission, but he didn't provide us with a quota sheet to fulfill how much we are preaching and how many converts we are making. We don't have to worry about getting our heavenly paycheck for our converts when we reach our great reward. Evangelism is NOT meant to grow the church by getting butts in the seats, save souls, or change minds. That is not OUR job; that is GOD's job!

When we hear that simple message, I hope it changes your mind. We aren't called to be persuasive folks, we aren't called to learn the best of rhetoric. We're just called to be authentic loving people, not worrying about the results! The Apostle Paul put it best: we do the planting, and God gives the growth. Paul is saying that we plant the seeds. We offer our story, we offer our ear, we offer ourselves as people. It's just about being you and telling the story of how God works in your life. We don't seek our own glory, and we don't seek...what? "Results." Indeed, we do not seek results, for any results are in God's hands. They shouldn't matter to us. Our minds should be set on respect and faithfulness.

So, this is just the beginning, but we walk with an important lesson about evangelism, which is... "It's not about results." Indeed, it isn't. When we buy into that mentality, it doesn't become about God. It becomes like bad tele-evangelists, who use God as a boon for their own ends. When we are about results, we become like salespeople, who only value the consumer when they know they might have a chance for a sale. But we aren't about selling anything, and we aren't about using God for our own ends. We are about offering ourselves. We are about giving the other a deep piece of our experience and our love and allow them to discern it as they will. Share your story. Be who you are. That takes a lot of faith and a lot of trust. How we develop that is the message for next week.

Buckle up, and let's take evangelism on the course of a reboot in the coming weeks always remembering that..."It's not about results." Amen and Amen.