

Church is More than Fellowship

Acts 2:42-47 Romans 10:9-17

Officer Tori Matthews of the Southern California Humane Society got an emergency call: a boy's pet iguana had been scared up a tree by a neighbor's dog. It then fell from the tree into a swimming pool, where it sank like a brick. Officer Matthews came with her net but she couldn't scoop up the iguana. She dived into the pool, emerging seconds later with the pet's limp body. As the Arizona Republic of February 14, 1995 reported, Tori thought, "Well, you do CPR on a person and a dog, why not an iguana?" So she locked lips with the lizard.

"Now that I look back on it," she said, "it was a pretty ugly animal to be kissing, but the last thing I wanted to do was tell this little boy that his iguana had died." The lizard responded to her efforts and is expected to make a full recovery. Tori Matthews didn't see a water logged reptile. She saw a little boy's beloved pet. We may never see the beauty in some people, but when we realize how much they mean to God, we'll do what we can to keep them from drowning.

That's one of the purposes of the church - being God's agents to save people's souls. That's what we find in the early church in our Acts passage. "And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved."

Two weeks ago we studied about the church being a family, with relationship and fellowship being a key reason for church. The church is a place where we can belong. It's a place where we invite others to belong. That's evangelism. Mission. Witnessing. It's bringing people to make decisions to live as the Creator wants them to live. It's helping people discover the best reason to live. It's one of the key purposes of the church. A church needs to evangelize as much as it needs to fellowship. The **fishing rod** is as important as the casserole dish.

Verse 9 in the Romans scripture tells us how we can be saved. It says: "If you confess with your lips and believe in your heart, that Jesus is Lord

and was raised from the dead by God, you will be saved." This simply means lip motion and belief go together. Belief in Jesus without speaking, isn't complete faith. This verse is one of the key theological verses in the Bible because it gives us the basis of the first Christian creeds.

To call Jesus, Lord, back then, was equivalent to giving Jesus the same rank as emperor. The title Lord recognized Jesus on the same level as the Greek gods. So this is a radical title we are to confess with our lips. But there is more. Jesus as Lord is so unique that he was raised from the dead. This puts him above the emperor. Above any gods. When we realize that in the Roman empire Caesar was considered the supreme god, this is a bold statement. And it's even bolder because it's to be confessed out loud. Confession in this context means acknowledge, declare. So Christianity is belief in Jesus that is spoken.

To emphasize this, **verse 10** says it again. "For one believes with the heart and so is justified and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved." What the apostle Paul seems to be doing is he's taking Deuteronomy 30, verse 14, and making it applicable to Jesus. It says: "The word is very near to you, it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe." The very person of Jesus is being focused on here. It's a recognition of who Jesus is. So Paul is saying, belief and public declaration of that belief are tied together.

Then **verse 11 through 13** says. "No one who believes in Jesus will be put to shame....Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." Paul is giving his readers assurance of the power of Jesus to give salvation - even when they are persecuted for their statement of belief in Jesus. We need to remember that the Roman Empire persecuted Christians. So Paul is going against the law. He is breaking the law by saying, to be a Christian you have to confess Jesus as Lord. The government said, Caesar is the top lord. The emperor must be worshiped. But Paul is saying, Jesus people can't worship the emperor. Jesus people can't call the emperor Lord. So the very confession, the very act of acknowledging Jesus

as Lord, is a political act. It's saying, Jesus is my boss; the reason I live. Jesus is the one who I obey first and foremost. Jesus is above Caesar.

These are dangerous words. Which is why Paul gives comfort by saying, the very lip movement about Jesus that we do, will not bring shame on us and even more, it will bring us salvation. It brings salvation to everyone - Jew and Greek. It's important to notice that the very declaration of Jesus as Lord, is both a faith statement and a statement that provides assurance. It's also a statement that can put people in danger. It was for the people who received this letter in Rome.

And even more, this confession, this declaration that Jesus is Lord, is an evangelistic statement. This was really going against emperor worship. Paul drew the line at this point. He is saying salvation through Jesus is for everyone. But the salvation comes through heart belief and verbal declaration about Jesus. Is the Bible saying, people can't be saved, unless they declare it publicly? It seems so. Most of the church creeds say this. And the very confession of Jesus as Lord, is an evangelistic witness.

Doing business without advertising is like winking at a girl in the dark. You know what you're doing. But nobody else does. A church without each member witnessing is like a light on a hill covered with a basket. It knows what it's doing. But nobody else does. This scripture tells us that Christians have to believe in their hearts and confess with their lips that Jesus is Lord. When they do so they are saved. And the same acknowledgement of Jesus as Lord is a witness. It's evangelism. It's saying, this is who I believe in. Jesus is who I will obey and follow.

Verse 14 and following moves from declaring who our hope is in, to telling others. It's a natural transition. Paul gives a list of questions. Their order is important.

But how are people to call on one in - whom they have not believed?
How are they to believe in one of - whom they have never heard?

How are they to hear without - someone to proclaim him?

How are they to proclaim him unless - they are sent?

Notice the two focuses in these four questions. One focus is that someone needs to speak about the good news. The other focus is Jesus - the good news. This is a key purpose of the church - telling others about Jesus. And it's tied to our statement of faith.

The focus of this text is in the middle of a longer scripture, chapters 9, 10 and 11, where Paul is talking about how the Jews did not fulfill their mandate. God chose Israel to be a light to the nations. But Israel disobeyed God. And even more, they rejected Jesus as God's Son. These chapters are saying that the very purpose of God for calling out the Jews to be a nation, to be a family, has not been achieved. Why? Because they have not been telling others about Jesus. Instead they have created their own holy huddle, with their own laws, and they rejected Jesus as God's Son, as the Messiah. So Israel isn't a light to the nations. But there is still hope. There is still hope for the world and hope for the Jews. The good news is, God has made a way, despite Israel's disobedience.

The good news is that God has done something new. He sent Jesus and the church has arrived. It's job is to go and tell. The church is to share and tell. It is to witness and speak about Jesus. Even though it's dangerous to call Jesus Lord, the very act of doing so, transforms one's life, gives confidence and brings salvation.

This is emphasized in **verse 15** by taking a passage from Isaiah 52:7. "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" Now feet are probably one of the ugliest parts of the human body. Baby's feet aren't but as we age our feet really get a pounding. Over time most feet become callused, bruised, and even misshaped. Gout, swollenness, stretched ligaments, bunions, and weight, take their toll. But the people who take the knowledge of Jesus to others, grow beautiful feet.

An important point in this scripture is the word sent. It echoes the word go. Our culture used to be one where we had pretty good success in inviting people to church. But fewer people today are receptive to come to church even though it's important to invite them. So Jesus has given us a time tested tactic. Go. Be sent. Sent people have beautiful feet.

Listen to Jesus' first and last words to his disciples. "And he said to them, 'Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.'" "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

That's a big sandwich. Any time a scripture passage or a period of time in the Bible, begins and ends with the same theme, we need to sit up and pay attention. Something important is being emphasized through this literary technique. Jesus' opening words and his ending words make a sandwich. His life of ministry was in between, showing us and telling us what God expects from our lives. And one of those expectations is we are to evangelize.

The story is told that during the reign of Oliver Cromwell in England, the government ran out of silver coins. Cromwell sent his men to a cathedral to see if they could find any silver. They reported: "The only silver we can find is in the statues of the Saints standing in the corners." "Good," Cromwell replied. "We'll melt down the Saints and put them into circulation!"

Some churches are so fellowship or Bible study or worship or service oriented that they forget, evangelism is a purpose of the church. A church can be so focused on in reach or up reach that it forgets out reach. Then it takes major effort to get the saints in circulation as they should be. In the book *The Rock*, we find sentences like, "Inviting others is the church's very identity." "No matter how loving a church is to its own members, if it exists only for itself, it dies."

Now I know, and Jesus knows that not all of us are public speakers. He knows that not all of us can fully empathize with everyone. He knows most of us aren't quick thinkers who can respond right away with exactly the right words. He knows that we can't do a lot of things. He knows that we fear offending people -so we are silent. It's possible many Christians don't know how to share their faith. It's possible that some believers are not eager to share their faith.

However, Jesus still expects us to witness to what he has done in our lives. It's that simple. If you want to be Biblical, this is one command that can't be avoided or side lined or excused. Not all of us have the gift of evangelism. But we are all witnesses, who according to this text, even to be saved we have to speak about Jesus.

I've noticed that about 90% or more of the conversations I have had with people about witnessing, always end up focusing on all the negative ways of witnessing, and all the negative possibilities.

"But if I tell him how Jesus can help him, he won't talk to me again."

"But people might get mad if we go to their door."

"But people will think we are aggressive and not like us."

"If we have that Christian rock concert, what will people say about us?"

"But I won't know what to say!"

Now it's true. Some people will get angry, mad, and even obnoxious. And it's not helpful to retort, "Don't wait for the hearse to bring you to church." There has always been difficulties in evangelizing. In many parts of the world it's more dangerous than ever to be a follower of Jesus, much less share the faith. And we live in a time and place where lots of people are asking, Where is God in the coronavirus?

One morning after church, parishioners discovered every car in the parking lot was ticketed with a tract announcing, "Christianity causes brain damage." That would have not happened 30 years ago. So we live in an age

where we have to go out and tell about Jesus by living and by speaking. We need to find ways to be salt and light, yeast and sweet smelling.

You know, you and I wouldn't have a Savior if Jesus had backed off at every fear and every sign of opposition. If our spiritual ancestors had just clammed up, we wouldn't be here today. If our parents had kept quiet, we probably wouldn't be here today. And if we clam up, our children, grandchildren, and our neighbors and their children, will not have salvation. We have to pray for, plan for, train, and go, reaching out to people. It doesn't happen if we are not focused on being a church of witnesses.

One of the greatest rescue operations in human history was the evacuation of British expeditionary forces from Dunkirk during World War II. Pushed to the sea and trapped by German Blitzkrieg forces, the Tommies seemed doomed. But despite bombing and shelling, the Royal Navy, using every possible size and kind of ship, got 338,000 soldiers off the beaches and back to England.

Among the rescue vessels used was the Oriole, an ancient paddle steamer. A serious problem developed because of the slope of the beaches. Troops could not wade out to the ships, and the ships could not reach the trapped soldiers. The Oriole, however, had a shallow draft. The Captain drove it hard aground, and it became a pier. Troops would wade out, climb aboard the bow, and walk to the stern, where they were picked up by other ships. Before the incoming tide refloated it, the Oriole had served as a lifesaving bridge for 2,500 men.

Calvary's cross is the bridge. Sin alienated humanity from our Creator. Sinners, are helpless to span the chasm between God and humans. The Almighty, in his infinite mercy, put himself over the chasm. "Christ died for our sins, so we can be rescued." For those 2,500 British soldiers, the grounded Oriole was the only bridge to safety. Many of them nearly missed the bridge. Exhausted from combat, hampered by

water logged uniforms and boots, they stumbled and sank trying to reach the Oriole.

Naval officer, Rutherford Crosby plunged into the sea again and again to pull them out and help them aboard the bridge, the Oriole. That's our job as Christians. To help people reach the bridge. We must go diving again and again to rescue people from misery, and confusion, helping them to trust Jesus and find deliverance. We are not the bridge, but we can be lifeguards. We as individuals are called to go fish for people, and that's what the church is for. A bridge, a boat, of hope.

Verse 16 says, "But not all have obeyed the good news." Evangelism is simply being obedient. It's providing the opportunity so that faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ. Witnessing.

It is one of the very important purposes of a church. Many Christians say, it's the main reason for the church. Let us be obedient, faithful witnesses about what Jesus has done in our lives. Church is not just programs. Or the pastor's job. Or the best facility. Or wonderful worship. Church is more than just fellowship.

Verse 17. "So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ."

Romans 10:9-17 Because^[b] if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. ¹¹ The scripture says, “No one who believes in him will be put to shame.” ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. ¹³ For, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

¹⁴ But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed?

And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard?

And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?

¹⁵ And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent?

As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

¹⁶ But not all have obeyed the good news;^[c] for Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?” ¹⁷ So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.^[d]

Acts 2:42-47 ⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Life among the Believers

⁴³ Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵ they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds^[a] to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home^[b] and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.