

Closing the Deal

or

Proclaiming the Gospel

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN JESUS AND SHAM-WOW? That might sound like a silly question, but it raises some important issues we need to think about when sharing the Gospel in a way which is shaped by the witness of Scripture, our formation through worship, and our calling as Christians. We can boil it down to several simple phrases: Are we selling or sharing? Are we manipulating or proclaiming? Can we be forthright without being pushy? There is not a Lutheran “method” for evangelism. There *is* what might be called a Lutheran shape to evangelism which is an expression of what we have discussed on previous evenings. Salvation by grace alone, faith alone, Christ alone; the centrality of the Cross of Christ; Christ ministering to us through Word and Sacrament; the overwhelming awe and embracing comfort of the Good News which fills our worship; the confidence and humility of knowing ourselves to be called by God — all this shapes how we share the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

GOD IS IN CHARGE OF CONVERSIONS. The word, *sharing*, is key to keeping evangelism focused on the Evangel, the Good News. God’s grace in Christ is so abundant so totally a gift, that selling the Gospel would so change the message that it would no longer be the Gospel. Several things come into play when evangelism becomes selling rather than sharing. In selling the focus shifts from the

gift to the seller. The skills and methods of the seller determine whether the deal is closed. The simple Biblical truth is that it is God who converts. It is God who turns hearts and minds around. We have neither the means nor power or knowledge to penetrate the sinfulness which corrupts us and our fellow sinners. It is the Holy Spirit through the Word Who converts. We simply offer what we have received.

GET OUT OF GOD’S WAY. When selling becomes the focus, motivations subtly change. We begin selling, not because someone else needs the Gospel, but because we need to sell it. The focus shifts from Christ to us, even when the verbiage remains the same. When the selling model is used even our Sunday services subtly change. Rather than proclaiming the Gospel being the focus, getting people in so they can be sold is the focus. In the 1960s and 1970s, McLuhan’s adage, “the medium is the message”, was all the rage. Though misunderstood by many, it gives us a basic insight that is helpful when talking spreading the Gospel. Selling affects even worship, transforming it into a matter of selling. Entertainment sells. That’s why people advertize during the Super Bowl™. If worship is about entertainment, the Gospel becomes entertainment — something other than the Gospel. If following the methods or steps prescribed by experts shapes evangelism, evangelism is in danger of becoming an end or purpose in itself. God’s “medium” and message is the Cross of Christ. When other things take its place, what is offered is no longer the Word of Life, but a program, a gimmick, a personality, a fad. A Lutheran approach to evangelism is to get out

of God’s way. We speak with John the Baptist, “I must decrease that He might increase.”

TRANSPARENCY. What shape does evangelism take in the lives of everyday Christians? Perhaps the best analogy is a window. We are to be windows so that others can catch a glimpse of the hope which is within us and Christ Who is our hope and salvation. That means that living cross-shaped, grace-shaped, faith-shaped, Christ-shaped lives inevitably causes people around us to ask about that hope. Knowing that we are all beggars, not sellers, we can offer (not force) what we have freely received. Being aware of our calling, we don’t have to claim to be experts or to have all the answers. We are comfortable with encouraging others to join us at services or Bible studies where we ourselves encounter the Gospel. We simply say, “Come and see.”

WHO? ME NERVOUS? What about when I’m put on the spot and have to give an answer? “I’m not good with words. I believe in Jesus Christ; I even know my catechism, but I never find the right words.” Jesus says, “And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit.” *Mark 13:11 ESV*

HONORABLE BEGGARS. We always keep in mind that we are beggars. Honorable beggars freely share what they have freely received. Honorable beggars are not afraid to let other beggars know where the Bread of Life is to be found. We remember we are beggars, not bakers.

Sharing the Gospel

Being Honorable Beggars

June 4, 2009

7:00 Early Evening Prayer

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Reading:

1 Peter 3:13 – 17

Hymn:

O Christ, Our True and
Only Light

LSB 839

7:10 Presentation:

Sharing the Gospel:
Being Honorable Beggars

7:55 Questions and Answers

8:15 Compline

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Psalm 1

Office Hymn:

God, Who Made the Earth
and Heaven

LSB 877

I will also speak of
your testimonies
before kings and
shall not be put to
shame. Psalm 119:46

In the sight of God
and all
Christendom, we
want to testify to
those now living
and those who will
come after us.

Formula of Concord, Solid
Declaration, Conclusion

Being Lutheran –
Nothing to Be
Ashamed Of!

Sharing the Gospel
Being Honorable Beggars



St. John's Riverside
Lutheran Church

LC-MS

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Gillett, Wisconsin

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