

The *What* of Evangelism

It was New Year's Eve a few years ago when I made a big mistake.
We were having a family gathering and I decided to do the catering.

I had a plan:
I'd cook a couple of different curries and people could have their choice.
I'd cooked curry before—once—and it was easy,
you just cut up the meat and vegies, toss in curry from a jar.

So off I went to the store and picked out my two jars of Pataks.
The guy at the check out actually said
'You're not going to buy cream or coconut milk?' I said "*Nah I'm right!*"
And so I got home, people arrived, I'm cooking up a storm,
and then right at the last moment I tasted my handiwork,
only to spit it out because it was way too sour!

I don't know what kind of curry I used the first time when it worked,
obviously one that didn't need any extra ingredients.
There was no cream or similar type ingredient available in the pantry,
the shops had closed for the night,
we survived on entrées for the rest of the evening.
You might call this a first world problem
but it was embarrassing nonetheless.
For some dishes you really do need every ingredient.

There are lots of ingredients when it comes to church life, aren't there?
We have all the elements that go into our Sunday services,
we have Growth Groups that meet during the week,
we have ministries that seek to serve people in our community,
But there is one ingredient that we cannot overlook, and that's *evangelism*.
For the next three weeks we're going to think a bit more about evangelism
because despite its importance
evangelism is an ingredient we can easily overlook.

An early Christian mentor of mine once said
that unless you plan to do evangelism
then it's probably not going to happen.
My experience is that this is true.

A remember hearing the pastor of one of my old churches admit
that he couldn't remember the last time
someone at that church became Christian.

I remember attending a training event for young pastors

and the trainer was interested in what evangelism we ourselves were doing,
and all of a sudden it became very uncomfortable
because we didn't have much to report on when it came to our own practice.

It's an ingredient that's easily left out
and so we need to spend some time thinking about
what this ingredient is, how to use it,
and how it blends in with the other ingredients
in this dish we're cooking,
a dish called the Christian life.

And so the first question is the *what* question. What is evangelism?

The word evangelism comes from an ancient Greek word: *euangelion*
which translated into English means *gospel*.
And the gospel is the message about Jesus:
Who Jesus is, what he's done for us, and what he'll do when he returns.
Evangelism is the work of delivering this message about Jesus.

Now building on this word we have a bunch of other words
that you may hear spoken about in church from time to time.

Sometimes you may hear someone described as an *evangelist*:
someone who brings this message of Jesus to others.
David Loke runs a Bible study after our English Conversation Classes,
he does this with the aim of passing on the message about Jesus,
by doing so David is acting as an *evangelist*.

You might hear something described as *evangelistic*:
something which is designed to bring this message to others.
evangelistic preaching is aimed especially at introducing people to this gospel.
David Loke's Bible study is an *evangelistic* Bible study.

You might hear a church described as an *evangelical* church.
The word *evangelical* has been defined differently from time to time,
but at the heart of the definition is a concern for the gospel.
If something or someone is an *evangelical* then for them the gospel matters.
Evangelicals believe the Gospel message needs to be spoken and believed.

So Evangelism is when we deliver this message about Jesus,
when we deliver the gospel.

Our 2nd Bible reading today is one place
where the Apostle Paul speaks about the gospel:
what it is, how it works, how it gets delivered.

Paul begins this passage by speaking about his own people,
the Jews of the ancient world.

And he shares with the Romans how his *deepest desire* is that his own people
might come to know God properly and therefore be saved.

And then he explains how the only way for them to know God in a saving way
is for them to place their trust in Jesus. Romans 10 v 9 If you declare with your
mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will
be saved. ¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your
mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. ¹¹ As Scripture says, “Anyone who believes
in him will never be put to shame.” ¹² For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—
the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, ¹³ for, “Everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

So that’s what Paul’s Jewish friends need to do.

—it’s what *our* friends need to do if we want them to be saved—

Call on the Name of Jesus, place their trust, place their faith in Jesus.

It begs the question: how does someone get to the point of trusting in Jesus?

Paul continues in verse 14: How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed
in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they
hear without someone preaching to them? ¹⁵ And how can anyone preach unless they are
sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

Paul says they won’t believe unless someone brings them the message.

Belief in Jesus isn’t something that people ordinarily discover on their own,
It’s something that is preached, heard, and then believed.

Verse 17 gives us a good summary of Paul’s point: Consequently, faith comes from
hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.

That’s evangelism: the word about Christ, delivered in a message which,
when it is heard, can lead to faith in the hearer.

That’s why evangelism is so central;

it’s the means God chooses to lead people to saving faith.

What do you do when you’re cooking and you don’t have a key ingredient?

Have you ever googled “replacement for malt vinegar” or

“alternatives to molasses”? Maybe you cover up for the missing ingredient
by putting in more of something else!

Can we cover up for a lack of evangelism? Is there an alternative?

Some Christians have thought so.

St Francis of Assisi once said

“Preach the gospel, and if necessary use words”

We have a modern day equivalent of that saying:

“Actions speak louder than words”.

Applied to evangelism this idea might say *Just show love to people;*
If you demonstrate Christ by your actions, that's enough!
Let me be clear: representing Jesus through our actions is a non-negotiable—
we *must* demonstrate the gospel as well as speak the gospel—
But doing good works is not evangelism,
because they lack the *verbal activity* which defines evangelism.
Good works *help* evangelism, they partner *with* evangelism,
but at some point the message needs to be spelt out
so that people can hear and place their faith in Jesus.

If as a church, we were to say
“Our evangelistic strategy is simply about caring for people’s needs”, or
“our evangelistic strategy is to simply pray”.
then that’s a bit like baking a cake, discovering you have no butter,
but then saying “That’s OK, I’ll just add more flour.” Flour is important,
but you cant remove the butter and think its going to work.
In the same way, there are many necessary things we do as Christians,
but to include everything except evangelism is to miss something vital.

Why it’s so vital we will discover after our musicians lead us in a song.

The *Why* of Evangelism

Cooking isn't the only task where a missing ingredient is problematic
Have you ever spent an afternoon putting together a chair from Ikea,
only to stand back and spot a large weight-bearing screw
that's somehow been leftover?
You think to yourself "There's no way I'm going to sit on that thing!"

When important bits are left out it can lead to disaster!
And friends it's the same when it comes to evangelism.
A big reason why we evangelize
is because to *not* evangelize leads to disaster.

It's a disaster when God is not honored.
This is the first reason why we send out this message about Jesus,
because it's a message that brings God honour.

Every week we say the Lord's prayer, and how does the Lord's Prayer begin?
"Our Father in Heaven, *hallowed* be your name".
What does it mean for God's name to be *hallowed*?
It means for God's name to be respected, honored.
And how is God's name as Father going to be honored
unless people believe in the message about his Son?

And then we pray *your Kingdom come*.
How is God going to reign as King
unless men, women and children believe in and obey Jesus,
the one who has been made Lord by his resurrection from the dead.
Evangelism is the way that the Lord's Prayer is answered,
we can't pray this week in and week out
without expecting evangelism to be part of the answer.

And it *is* disastrous when God is not honored.
In 2002 a Chinese economist published a paper
arguing that the success of western economies was due in large part
to the success of Christianity in the West.
As an outsider he observed that Christianity and prosperity are linked.
When a society honours God then blessings follow.

And the Bible tells us that the God we worship will one day judge these societies,
and that *will be* a disastrous day for those who are unforgiven.

If we go back to our second bible reading,
You'll notice Paul speaks a lot about the need for people to be saved.
His wish is for his fellow Jews to know God and be saved,

and the way they can be saved is through hearing and believing the gospel.
Saved from what? We might ask.

Well, Paul tells us earlier in Romans.

In Ch 5:9 he writes about being saved from God's wrath through Jesus;

being saved from the coming judgment of God

which will fall upon all those

who haven't been purified on account of Christ's blood.

We say the Lord's Prayer every week,

sometimes we also say the Apostles Creed,

and in that creed we say Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead.

This is why we need to evangelize,

because to survive that judgment people need to be saved.

The judgment of God is often described as a destructive force –

2 Peter speaks of it like a fire.

We know about destructive fires in this country, don't we?

This year's fire season has already started

and I heard a story on the radio a few weeks back

about a woman whose father had a house near a fire.

He said on the phone "don't worry about me, I'll hide in the aluminium shed!"

She said "ok" and they hung up. But she felt uncomfortable with that plan,

and so she tried to ring back—no answer.

She rung the fire brigade and they said "We're going to get him!"

They went and found him hiding in the shed and they took him to safety

He went back the next day and the shed had been reduced to nothing.

This is the thing with fire isn't it, we think we know how to stay safe,

but there are others who know better.

And so it is with the coming judgment of God; people think that they're safe!

My Grandmother went to church! I've never killed anyone!

But the only path to safety is belief in Jesus Christ.

He's the one who bore the wrath that was due for sin,

He's the one who provides the only path away from judgment,

and people need to know this!

While it's true that God is judge,

It's also true that God is compassionate and merciful,

and the fact that he provides a path *away* from judgment

is evidence of his great love for humanity.

Evangelism is a key way this love is expressed to others;

out of *love* the path of salvation is made known.

For our OT readings in this series I've set the book of Jonah;

a great story about a man
who was sent to preach to the city of Nineveh, a city in need of salvation.
At the very end of the book God explains that he was *concerned* for the great city
of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people.
And so out of his *concern* he sent a preacher to lead the Ninevites to safety.

We'll speak a bit more about this next week
when we look at the *who* of evangelism,
but it's worth noting that this concern for humanity
leads God to recruit others into this gospel work.
He sent Jonah, and in Romans Paul also speaks about people being sent.
And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? ¹⁵ And how can anyone preach
unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good
news!
God's loving plan to save involves people being recruited as evangelists.

And so a final question for us all this: Are you available?
Are you available to be used to bring this message about Jesus to others?
The world needs God, people need salvation, our loving God wants to use us.
How we can get involved we'll speak about next week,
but it starts by making yourself available. So how available are you?

I'll lead us in prayer.
Father we praise you that the judgment due for sins was taken by your Son,
and because of this loving action a path of salvation was opened up for us.
We pray that this message, this good news, might be understood by each one of us,
and not only understood, but that it might be upon our lips, ready to be passed on.
May your name be hallowed, may your Kingdom be established,
and may you use each one of us to do so. In Jesus name, Amen.

