

The *Who* of Evangelism

When I was a child there was a poster in the kitchen of our family's church.

At the top of the poster was a heading: "Whose Job Is It, Anyway?"

And then the poster told a story, which went like this:

This is a story about four people named Everybody, Somebody, Anybody and Nobody. There was an important job to be done and Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry about that, because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it, but Nobody realized that Everybody wouldn't do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have.

Did you follow all that? It may be easier to follow if you read it rather than listen to it,

—just google Everybody, Somebody, Anybody and Nobody,
and you'll find it soon enough—

But it's a story that reminds us of how easy it is
for important jobs to be left undone,
especially when no-one takes responsibility.

It's not hard to imagine why someone decided to put this up
in a communal kitchen!

It strikes me that evangelism is task that's very much like this.

We all agree that evangelism is important,
we all agree that somebody should do it,
but it often gets left behind
and I think that one reason for this
is there's confusion as to whose job it actually is.
Is it Everybody's job, or only Somebody's?
Is it my job or the job of someone else?

And so today we continue on in this series on evangelism

by asking the *who* and the *how* questions.

Who is it that passes on the message about Jesus, and then after the break,
How is it that the message is passed on.

So first of all the *who* question.

The question of where responsibility for evangelism lies
is something that is often debated within Christian circles.

On one hand some argue that evangelism is everyone's equal responsibility.

No matter what your skill level, no matter what your situation,
we each have a responsibility to be proactive in our evangelism,
to speak about Jesus as often as we can.

The verse that people rely on to promote this view is 1 Corinthians 11:1,
where Paul tells the Corinthian Christians to
Follow his example, as he follows the example of Christ.
If we are to imitate Paul, the argument goes,
then surely that means imitating his preaching and evangelism.

I've never been completely satisfied by this argument,
because I've never thought the command to imitate Paul
was a command to imitate each and every aspect of his life.
We cannot imitate his role as an Apostle,
and I've never met anyone who can imitate his powers of miraculous healing.
The question you have to ask is this:
"which aspect of his life is Paul asking us to imitate?"

The answer from 1 Corinthians
is that we're being asked to imitate Paul's flexibility towards ministry,
that's what the preceding chapters are about;
they're a warning not to get caught up on irrelevant things
that might stop others hearing and respond to the gospel.
So we're to certainly imitate Paul's *concern* about evangelism,
but that doesn't mean we necessarily become evangelists in the sense he was.

On the other side of the argument
are those who look at the list of spiritual gifts in the NT,
and they see Evangelism listed alongside other gifts,
and they know that not everyone has the same gift to give,
and so they think evangelism is not everyone's job.

It's true that within the church
there are some individuals who have a special role in evangelism,
we might say that these people have a spiritual gift of evangelism.
But the Bible isn't silent about the responsibilities of everyone else.
Just because some have the gift of evangelism
doesn't mean the rest of us have the freedom to forget about it.
Remember, 1 Corinthians 11:1, the verse quoted by the other side,
one thing it *does* say is that we all need to have a concern for this task.

I want to spend a moment thinking about what *is* expected from the rest of us.
And I see three expectations that rest upon every believer.

First of all, there's the assumption that we are *on show*,
that people are looking at our lives,
that they're observing our behaviour,
watching our choices, listening to our speech.
Let your light shine before others, Jesus says in Matthew 5:16,
that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

I remember when I first applied for a passport, the document came with a brochure from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, reminding us that when travelling we act as ambassadors for our country. It's always embarrassing when we see Australians acting like clowns overseas, isn't it? And so it is with our citizenship in heaven. People watch and they make judgments and they form opinions. Our task is to help them form a positive view of our faith by our actions.

But there's also an assumption that we'll be on the lookout for opportunities to promote Christ. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders Paul says in Colossians 4:5, echoing Jesus' words to be on show before others. But then he says make the most of every opportunity. That's a bit more proactive than just being a good Christian and hoping people notice, isn't it? Maybe there's opportunity to choose to act in Christian way, maybe it's an opportunity to contribute to a discussion about God and faith.

When David Loke was in hospital we shared with our neighbor the concerns we had for David's health. But then when David recovered I thought, "Well here's an opportunity to bear witness to God's answered prayer" And so I was on the lookout for an opportunity. It came when I was walking the dog down the street and my neighbor was putting out the bins, I saw him and I said to myself "now's the time" and so I said "I have news about our friend". He said "What's that?" I said "he's walked out of hospital" I can't repeat what my neighbor said at that point—he swore in astonishment! And then I said "I put it down to God answering our prayers".

At that point my neighbor said "Well why not, why not." And then he added "What do you call it? God's Providence" that startled me, I didn't expect him to use what I know to be a theological term. I said "I guess it is." And then he said "Well here's a question for you. Where was God's providence when those French police got murdered in Paris last night?"

I said "On hold, waiting to bring those murders to justice. Sometimes God's actions are slow but they always come eventually." He said "Hmm. That's good news about your friend".

It was in interaction which demonstrates the three expectations that fall upon every believer: Christian lives on show—my neighbor learnt that I pray for people—Making the most of the opportunities that are presented,

but also being willing to give an answer.
This is the third assumption the Bible makes about believers,
that we are willing to answer when a question about faith is asked.
Paul continues in Colossians 4:6 Let your conversation be always full of grace,
seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. If someone asked
you “Where was God when...?” would you have an answer?

When we speak up about our faith it’s a little bit like learning a new language.
When Jas and I went to France on a holiday,
I spent ages learning my French phrases.
There was one I would use at our local boulangerie
“Je voudrais un croissant s’il vous plait”
But I was not ready for the shopkeeper’s follow up question.
They’d answer back in French and I was stuck.
I worked out after this happened a couple of times
that they were asking whether I wanted by croissant in a bag.

But that’s the way with language, isn’t it, you need to learn how to converse.
It’s the same when we speak of Christ.
It means knowing your Bible, it means knowing the basics of the gospel,
it means knowing a bit about theology and ethics.
It means listening to and learning from those who are excellent evangelists.
Which is why our next series is called ‘What to say at a BBQ’
which will be an attempt to think through some of these conversations.
But we mustn’t shrink back from having these conversations.

The Apostle Peter is on the same page as the apostle Paul.
In our 2nd reading he’s encouraging his friends to do the Christian thing
and live godly lives, to be gracious while enduring persecution.
And Peter expects this godliness will result in a conversation,
and when the conversation occurs, you’ve got to give an answer.
Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the
hope that you have, Peter says—1 Peter 3:15.

Friends it seems to me that if we are living genuinely Christian lives,
if we are mindful of opportunities
if we are willing to speak,
then I think it’s hard to picture a Christian who never says anything.
How can you not ever say anything?
Is it that your life isn’t that different, so no-one ever suspects you believe?
Is it that when the question is asked,
you’ve become adept at changing the conversation?
Yes, there will be others who are better than you at evangelism,
but at some points you are still required to do some things
and to say some things. We’ll speak about those things in a moment.

The *How* of Evangelism

Evangelism takes courage,
but courage needs to be matched by some level of knowing what to do.

When I was 16 I played my first season of Rugby.
Rugby is a full contact sport,
when you run out for the first time your adrenalin is really pumping
because you know you're about to run into someone
and that someone is going to try and run over the top of you.
It takes courage, but it also takes skill.

I remember my first training session.
I had no idea what I was doing and I remember the coach yelling at me,
my team-mates yelling at me, I remember making plenty of mistakes.

Once we've realized that we are going to have to take to the field,
we have to allow ourselves the space to be a learner.
We will make some mistakes but we must try and pick up a few skills.
Evangelism is something that can be learned and practiced and refined.
I think the wobbly start that many of us experience can really put us off
but I want to encourage us to persevere in pursuing the salvation of others.

So in terms of how we participate,
I suggest there are three categories of action that we can take.
I've labeled them good, better, best,
which in retrospect are probably not the best headings.
I don't want to give the impression
that the things in the *best* category are the only important things
or that it's ok to neglect the others,
or that God doesn't use all our efforts no matter how simple.
Sometimes good is all we can do.

But neither do I want us to be satisfied
with giving evangelism a minimal amount of attention,
or to withhold from stretching ourselves in this area.
That's why I went with Good Better Best.
Sharp, sharper, sharpest might be better.

But for what it's worth, we start with those good activities that support evangelism,
but fall short of actually speaking about Christ.
- *Living a genuinely Christian life*, as we've already spoken about.

- *Offering financial support to those who have given themselves over to the task of evangelism*. Many of us support Ben and Penny Carpentier with our finances. Have you read their latest update? Ben speaks about his

conversations with local shopkeepers in Namibia. They're doing the work of evangelism, and we're partners with them. Jesus said in Luke 10:7 The workers deserve their wages and he's speaking specifically about evangelists.

- *Praying for our evangelists and for the lost themselves.* When we were speaking about the *who* of evangelism, my focus was on human responsibilities; the human dimension. But of course God himself is the key evangelist. He's the one who enables belief, he's the one who empowers our speech. And so Paul asks the Colossians in Ch 4:3 to pray for him, and to pray that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should, he writes.

And how is it that God answers these prayers? The usual pattern is that it's through the work of his servants as they pass on the message about Jesus. "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few", Jesus says in Matthew 9. "Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to, what? Make people believe without any human intervention? No. "to send out workers into his harvest field." Prayers about the harvest are answered through the gospel work of men and women.

So we move from utilizing the supporting structures, it's good to do that,
to utilizing those who are doing the actual work of evangelism.
Remember from last week,
we're defining evangelism as passing on the gospel,
the spoken or written message about Jesus.
Supporting structures are necessary,
but at some point something needs to be said,
and so the next level is to bring people *to the message*.

A great Biblical example of this is the woman at the well in John 4
She has this incredible interaction with Jesus,
and so she runs off and says to her townsfolk "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?" ³⁰ They came out of the town and made their way toward him. Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony. ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. ⁴¹ And because of his words many more became believers. ⁴² They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world."

It's a story that demonstrates the power of invitation;
bringing people to hear the gospel from someone else.
We know that inviting people
is one of the most powerful ministry actions people can take.
We know from our own experience here at church;
our ministries grow when invitations are issued.
It's true that not everyone accepts, but some people do,
and when they accept, they might just meet Jesus.
Is there an invitation you can issue over the next few months? [WGC]

Finally, the sharpest contribution is to speak up ourselves.

We've already spoken about being willing to give an answer,
and about how it's a wise idea to train ourselves up to give good answers.
We also have God's promise don't we,
that the Holy Spirit will give us the words to speak.
That doesn't mean we'll sound pretty,
but it does mean God will give us something he can use.
And with practice we'll become more proficient.
Even the most gifted evangelists
are not excused from the need to develop their skills.

Do you know your testimony? The story of how God has been at work in your life?

Could you tell that story if the opportunity presented itself?

A simple testimony has three parts, just a couple of sentences in each:

1. This is what life was like before
2. Here's how I came to know Jesus and place my faith in him,
3. He's what life has been like since.

Could you tell your story along these lines? It's not hard to learn, as it's your story!

And of all the ways we can contribute, the most pointy is to be a *Capital E* Evangelist:

Someone who tries to speak to every Uber driver they are served by;
someone who falls over themselves to lead a Christianity Explored group;
someone who seeks to explain the gospel wherever and whenever they can.

My experience is that not many people identify as such,

but I suspect there are more among us than we realize,
it's just that their skills and confidence need developing.

The way to find out is to start along this path

of good, better, and best practices and see how you go.

That's how you discover your gift—

not through a course but through trial and error.

Then ask for prayer because the others need to learn from and support you.

I'll lead us in prayer now.