

October 6, 2019

“Finding Trouble: Sharing Good News”

Romans 10:9-17, 1 Peter 3:15-16, Acts 1:8

Our fall sermon series presupposes something we all know is true: **we grow most when we are stretched.** When we find ourselves in over our heads we are quicker to cry out to God for His presence, power, and saving hand. Put another way, we will never learn to walk on water like Peter if we don't get out of the safety and comfort of our proverbial boats. We need God's Word and God's Spirit to help us Find[ing] Trouble; the good kind of trouble God has for those who dare to follow Jesus to places and people that make us feel vulnerable, unable, and incapable.

Last week Jason encouraged us to pray dangerous prayers, including “Here I am, Lord, send me.” (Isaiah 6:8) He also gave us a prayer asking God to disturb us. I'd like to use it again as we prepare to hear what God has to say to us about the dangerous act of sharing Good News.

**Disturb Us, Lord (A Prayer by Sir Francis Drake)**

Disturb us, Lord, when  
We are too pleased with ourselves,  
When our dreams have come true  
Because we dreamed too little,  
When we arrived safely  
Because we sailed too close to the shore.

Disturb us, Lord, when  
With the abundance of things we possess  
We have lost our thirst For the waters of life;  
Having fallen in love with life,  
We have ceased to dream of eternity  
And in our efforts to build a new earth,  
We have allowed our vision  
Of the new Heaven to dim.

Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly,  
To venture on wilder seas  
Where storms will show Your mastery;  
Where losing sight of land,  
We shall find the stars.

We ask you to push back  
The horizons of our hopes;  
And to push back the future

In strength, courage, hope, and love.  
This we ask in the name of our Captain,  
Who is Jesus Christ. Amen.

We all love to share Good News. *I aced my test. I got the promotion. She said "Yes!" We're going to Disneyland. My father and I reconciled. The car only needed new spark plugs. My doctor said it was benign.* Do you want to hear some real Good News? We have raised over \$32,000 toward our Freedom Sunday matching gift of \$50,000. And we still have other churches and CMU students participating, and more FPC gifts coming in! Good News feels so good!

I still remember getting the letter from the Lilly Foundation informing me about our sabbatical grant. It was a Friday and the church was pretty empty. I went into the kitchen and opened the letter. We got it! I shouted it out loud. I called Shelly. I called and texted the Sabbatical Writing Team. Good News! We love to share Good News . . . until it's time to share THE GOOD NEWS (about Jesus). And then we're suddenly quiet, reserved . . . comfortable.

Why is that? Why can we go on and on about everything GOOD, and then go silent about the incredible news that God has provided a life in this world that is out-of-this-world? Jason named the big reason last week (and we'll probably keep naming it): **we love comfort; we have a bent toward a trouble-free life.**

When it comes to sharing Good News we also face a couple other struggles. 1) We are confused about what the Good News is; and how to share it. [We'll address those two issues in a moment.] 2) Our culture appears to be disinterested and, in some cases, hostile toward the Church. So we don't share anything. We keep the best news ever to ourselves.

Paul seemed to be okay finding himself in trouble, and we looked at his long list of troubled moments a few weeks ago. Paul was also crystal clear on what the Good News was and how to best communicate it. And he also didn't care that the surrounding culture was hostile and disinterested. He loved sharing the Good News and wanted to remind the Church in Rome, and all of us, what Isaiah had declared hundreds of years earlier: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring Good News!" (Romans 10:15, Isaiah 52:7)

So WHAT is the Good News, and HOW do we share it?

To be clear, the Good News is NOT an ethical guideline, a list of rules, a means of making us more loveable to God, a bunch of information to answer all our questions, or a story to motivate us to live more positively. Does any of that really sound like Good News? Doesn't it sound like more work, more effort, more grit-your-teeth-and-try-harder? The world is full of advice and

motivational resources and moral codes of conduct. And some of it leads to good outcomes, but none of these set people free.

Paul is reminding us that the Good News is about a **Person** who actually lived, died, rose again, and stands before God, making a case for each one of us since we really cannot make a case for ourselves. The Good News isn't about what we hopefully get around to doing, but about what this Person has done for us. And Paul says, "If you confess with your lips that [this Person] Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." (Romans 10:9) Paul is even more emphatic that this Good News is for everyone. "No one who believes in Jesus will be put to shame." (Romans 10:11) Paul wants to make sure we know the Good News puts everyone on the same playing field and that "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." (Romans 10:13) If we're clear on what the Good News is, we might find it less difficult to move our feet and bring it to someone we know and love.

Okay, but HOW do I share it?

This is where we tend to get tripped up as well by a million voices that tell us: "I've got to know the Bible inside and out before I talk to anyone about Jesus." "Nobody will buy this far-fetched story." "They don't want to hear it." "I don't want to be pushy or labeled or disliked or lumped in with all the judgmental fanatics." "I'm not very eloquent and I don't think on my feet very well."

What did Jesus say about the How? "You will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8) He didn't say we have to have all the answers or have our lives figured out. He didn't say we had to get in and win arguments and debates. He said we were supposed to be witnesses.

In one of my favorite sermons ever, Craig Barnes reminds us that we've got the word "Witness" all mixed up, as if it's up to us to make things happen. He said all a witness does is talk about what they saw and heard. A witness doesn't have to come up with any of their own material. Barnes jokes, "Ask any courtroom judge and he or she will tell you the last thing they're looking for is a creative witness." We are asked to point people to Jesus.

I read an article by a campus pastor from Canada who pointed out, "The Church doesn't own truth as much as it witnesses to truth – above all, truth revealed in Jesus Christ . . . What would happen if we were to think of ourselves less as sitting on the truth and more as pointing to it? We would invite non-believers to join us as learners of the way of Jesus, journeying deeper into God's truth. This is a humble stance from which to share our faith with others. We'd talk and listen to them with Christlike traits of empathy, patience, and kindness, all while open to the Spirit's challenge that in the encounter, we too may have something to learn." (*Is It Arrogant for*

*Christians to Claim the Truth?* by Todd Statham in *The Banner*, January 2019) Jesus said, “Be My witnesses.”

What did Peter say about the HOW? This is really helpful stuff. “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.” (1 Peter 3:15-16) There’s no targeting and attacking necessary. As we live hope-filled lives, as the Good News gets inside of us, shapes our thoughts and words and actions in ways wonderfully peculiar to those around us, as what Jesus did for us keeps us humble and grateful before God and others . . . people will want to know why we are the way we are. And notice HOW Peter says we are to give our reason? With gentleness and respect. Nobody wants to be somebody’s disrespected and forced project.

How can we share the GOOD NEWS in a way that is gentle and respectful?

A few summers ago we did a whole series on sharing the Good News. We talked about The E-Word; evangelism. I think it was Janet Young who came across the **BLESS** acronym. How do we go about sharing the Good News with a person we care about and love deeply? Begin With Prayer for the individual. Before you say a word to him or her about Jesus, talk to God about them. Ask God to open up doors to deeper relationship and trust-building. Spend time Listening to him or her and what’s really going on in their lives without an agenda or some kind of forced time table. Eat Together and do life with them. Serve them as real needs and concerns emerge, and then – when we’ve won the right to be heard and are living a transformed and hope-filled life before their very eyes – Share your Story as it connects with the story of Christ.

Two weeks ago, on Freedom Sunday, Brian Nasala told us about the work of International Justice Mission in Uganda and how they work to restore land wrongly taken from widows and orphans. Brian was sharing with me that some of the Muslim women whom they represent and fight for are often puzzled that IJM would do this for them, knowing they are Christians. They spend an enormous amount of energy practicing this BLESS approach to sharing the Good News and, inevitably, are asked why they do what they do, live the way they live, and hope the way they hope.

Who is God calling you to BLESS? It might be a little scary. You might feel inadequate. You might even get yourself in a little trouble along the way and find yourself having to fully lean on God. What a perfect place to be!