

TJW, HT, 5.4.09, 9.15am & 11am,

1 Peter 2-3

Our values no.5: everyone witnessing to Christ

I often ask Christians how it was that they became Christians. Not once has someone said to me: “It started when I heard a street-preacher out in town”. Never have I heard someone say: “what got me thinking was when someone pressed a Christian leaflet into my hand outside Asda - or: “I saw this Christian walking around wearing a sandwich-board that said ‘Jesus saves’, and preaching through a megaphone”.

I’m sure that there are some people who’ve been helped towards faith in Jesus Christ by people who do stuff like this - I don’t want to belittle the Christians who do these things - but I’ve never met anyone who has. At the very most, what you can say about this kind of activity is that it is ‘fringe’ evangelism. It’s nowhere near the heart of how most people in our culture come to repent and to trust in Christ.

Yet what happens when Christians hear the word ‘evangelism’, or ‘evangelist’, is that often an image pops into our minds of someone doing this kind of stuff... [first picture: *a crazy-looking guy in a “Jesus is alive” T-shirt waving a big black Bible around at Speakers’ Corner*]

or this... [second picture: a man wearing a sandwich-board that says: “study the Bible / turn from sin”.

Many of us think: “I could never do that.”

Most of us think: “I don’t want to do that.”

Many of us also think: “I’m no good at answering the questions my friends ask me about Jesus and the Bible.”

And so most of us conclude: “I’m not much of an evangelist.”

What I want to do this morning is to take those images that we have of evangelism, acknowledge that they’re there - so that we can tear them up, throw them away, and put in their place something much more true and real - because it’s much more biblical.

Here’s the effect that this sermon should have on some of us. By the end of this morning some of us should have realised that what we’re actually doing in our lives, Monday to Sunday, is evangelism. We just never realised it was, and we would never have dreamed of calling ourselves ‘evangelists’ - although that’s really what we are.

And for others of us, the effect that this sermon should have on us is this: to allow you to admit quite happily, with no embarrassment, that evangelism is not top of your personal gifts - but that doesn’t matter.

It doesn’t matter, because you’re part of a church family where evangelism is happening all the time, and your life has a vital role to play in that.

And it doesn't matter because God can equip you to do some of the work evangelism, even though he's not made you to be a top-notch evangelist.

I'm talking about evangelism this morning because it's one of the five values that we've established, which will govern and shape our life as a church-family here at Holy Trinity.

And over the last few weeks we've been looking at these values in our sermons.

The values are:

- everyone transformed by Christ
- everyone growing in Christ
- everyone praying through Christ
- everyone serving Christ
- and value number five, for this morning: everyone witnessing to Christ.

If you're a committed member of the church family, you should write these values on your heart. You should know them as well as you know your house number (although, if you don't know where you live, you need different help than I can give you!).

Right now we're handing out to you these bookmarks and these little cards, with the values on them.

Why not make this your Bible bookmark, to prompt your prayers for your church family?

And we've made this card credit-card-sized, so you can keep it in your wallet or purse with your other cards.

If someone says to you, "So you go to church a lot, do you?", you can say: "Yes, I do - it's important to me. Actually we have these cards which lay out what my church thinks is most important to us." And who knows where the conversation might lead, because the card has the name "Jesus Christ" on it seven times.

So value 5 is: everyone witnessing to Christ.

And there are two verses in one book of the Bible that are going to teach us about this value, this morning. They're from 1 Peter (as it's called - a letter written by the apostle Peter). Why not open the Bible to see it for yourself. And first of all we're looking from chapter 2, verse 11 [READ verses 11-12].

'Pagans' here means: everyone who has not made Jesus Christ their Lord and Saviour - that is, people who worship something other than the living God. And Peter says:

(1.) **Live such good lives among people**, that some of them will change from opposing Christians, or ignoring them, and will turn to God and start worshipping him for themselves.

That's what 'glorifying' God in verse 12 is about - it's about worshipping God, and putting him at the centre of your life.

And 'the day God visits us', at the end of verse 12 - that might be looking forward to the day God comes to visit judgment on the earth. Or it might just be about God coming into people's lives now in power to make them new creations who love Jesus Christ.

Either way, this is about people becoming committed Christians because they've seen how Christians live in the world, and they're impressed and attracted.

It's lives that attract.

I said that I often ask Christians how they became Christians. If the least common answer is, "a street preacher", by a mile the most common answer is: a Christian I knew. Either they say: "my parents were Christians." Or: "I had this friend who was a Christian".

That was certainly how God called me, through a friend who was a Christian. My friend, Dave, introduced me to other Christians. What I couldn't miss was the friendliness and the generosity that they showed towards me and each other. I'd never met a group of people quite like them.

I was opposed to the Christian faith - but through meeting them God turned me around.

Of course, this is not about perfection is it.

Until we die, or until Christ returns, we'll continue to sin - continue to get it wrong - to annoy each other - to get angry with each other.

And so often the real evidence of a good life lived in the power of God's Holy Spirit is this:

- is our first instinct not to justify ourselves, but to apologise?
- is our first instinct not to lash out, but to forgive?
- is our first instinct not to moan - but to praise, and be thankful?.

Your godliness - and my godliness - simply will impact on the power of our evangelism.

If we're godly, it'll boost it. If we're not, it might wreck it.

Lives that claim to be Christian - but are not transformed - repel people.

But lives that are clearly transformed - and going on being transformed - they are lives that attract people to Christ.

There's one thing I've heard several people say recently.

These are people who are in the process of coming to saving faith in Jesus Christ right now.

And they've all said that they've found themselves getting calmer.

They don't get so angry, because they're more forgiving.

They don't get so wound up, because God's love for them puts their petty annoyances into perspective.

This isn't something they've worked at. They've just found God doing it in them.

And you know, don't you, that when God makes these transformations happen in your life, people will notice.

There's one example of that at the beginning of chapter 3 of this letter - addressed to any Christian married to someone who's not. Do you see that, in chapter 3? [READ 3.1-2].

That's a real spur, and encouragement, if that's your situation.

So we want our lives to be seen by the world - not because we're proud of ourselves - but because we believe that what God is doing in us demonstrates to the world that he's real, and that he's a God to be reckoned with.

That's why we create opportunities for you to bring people you know to places where they'll meet other Christians - to Tuesday Pop-In, to quiz nights, to the recent dance night.

But of course you can do exactly the same in your own home.

The more Christians someone knows, the greater their chance of seeing the outstandingly good lives that Christians are called to live.

And this is an area we need to keep working on.

We want to do more to be seen by our local community.

We're already involved in the Street Pastors scheme, and in the voluntary hospital chaplaincy.

Plans are also being made to offer help to parents in our community, through parenting sessions.

And several people feel that we should offer whatever practical help is needed at the new Dorothy Goodman School site on Stoke Road.

Whatever we do, it is vital for our witness to Christ that we live outstandingly good lives in the world.

But we can't just act. We've also got to speak.

You can't express the gospel of Jesus in a mime, or in a painting.

You've got to speak it.

So the second part of our witness is this: **(2.) Always be prepared to speak.**

Look over at chapter 3 verse 13 [READ verses 13-15.]

I was talking to someone in the church family recently. He's been through some really tough times lately at home and at work.

He said to me: "I'm no evangelist - I can't do that. All I can do is: when someone at work asks me about my faith and all the tough times I've had, I just say: "I don't know why all this has happened to me. But I do know that God loved me enough for Jesus to die for my sins, even though I'm still a sinner, and that he's taking me to heaven no matter what rubbish comes at me in my life." 'I can't do evangelism', he said - I just tell them that."

To which I said (can you guess?): "If that's not evangelism, I don't know what is. Of course you're doing evangelism!"

Doing evangelism is not being ready to stand on a street-corner with a megaphone. It's not being prepared to bulldoze Jesus into every conversation, so that no one wants to talk to you because if they ask you if you want a coffee they might get a sermon.

Here's what real evangelism is. It's being ready to give a reason for the hope you have.

Someone says: "You've been through tough times lately". You say: "Sure, it's been hard, but God has never abandoned me through it."

Someone else says: "I didn't know you went to church so often." You don't say: Yes, I've always been. I meet my friends there.

They have nice coffee.” That’s not giving the reason for the hope that’s in you.

You say: “Well, it’s important to me. I need to go.” “Why’s that?”, they ask. “I guess I need to keep being reminded about how Jesus has rescued me from sin.”. And straight away you’re talking about the gospel.

Or someone says: “I don’t know what the world’s coming to, do you?” I might say: “Well, I’m a Christian, and I don’t want to preach at you, but I think it’s because we’re all rebelling against God.”

Christians have hope - but not because we come to church. Not because we have a vague faith in God somehow. We have hope because Jesus has solved the problem of sin. Always be prepared to give the reason for the hope that is in you.

Some Christians are afraid of doing this, because they say that they don’t know what to say.

If that’s you, that’s why you need this booklet you were given on your way in.

I’m going to show you what’s in it - it’s an outline of the gospel called “Two Ways to Live”.