

What would you say is the scariest word in Christianity? And out of the membership vows of the United Methodist Church, promising to participate in the church's ministry by prayers, presences, gifts, service, and witness, which frightens a person the most? Which one is the toughest for you? Which of these would you say is one the Christians today are least successful with?

As we began this sermon series on the vision of our church, why we need to refocus on our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world and how we as a church are going to "shift" how we are going to be the church, we were faced with the reality of the decline of church attendance like most churches nationwide, the number of people professing their faith have declined tremendously, and the increase of people claiming to be "nones", those with no religious affiliations. Maybe these facts allude to that which Christians are scared of, have not been successful with, and/or have not done enough of. The big "E" word. Evangelism.

What images rise within you as you hear the word "evangelism"? These days, probably politics? Some may see the images of Billy Graham crusades? Maybe the image of John Wesley in the marketplace preaching to a crowd where he experienced people running him out of town?

Personally, I remember in youth group several times we were dropped off at the train station in Chicago on Kimball, sent out two by two to experience the blessings of "street evangelism", asking people on the street blindly, "Do you know Jesus?" or to hand out the small tracts, small booklets containing the story of Jesus at a busy street or at the entrance of a grocery store. Could you imagine the fright on the faces of the youth? Yes, that was me...

The simple definition of Evangelism I found on Google says, "The spreading of the Christian gospel by public preaching or personal witness." The United Methodist discipleship website defines it as the most vital ministry of the church which involves telling the good news, announcing the kingdom of God, and bearing witness. The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church which holds the "laws" of the UMC suggests that churches have an Evangelism committee to help the church focus on it and to always remember to engage in it. And in search of the definition, I also found several articles titled "Evangelism, a dirty word", "how evangelism became a dirty word", "is evangelism a dirty word" and so on.

With the knowledge that "evangelism" is so vital to the church and the practice of spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ and witnessing of Jesus is essential to being a disciple of Jesus Christ, why is it so hard and why is it so complicated?

We can probably talk about it for months, as there are seminary classes devoted to it for semesters on end but for today, I want to look at it from the scripture readings from today informed by the book “Shift” by the ministry coach and consultant Phil Maynard. Could it be that we complicated “Evangelism” a little too much?

As we are talking about making the shift from Fellowship to Hospitality as a church, we learned about 4 components to hospitality in the church. #1 Interpersonal hospitality refers to the level and quality of relational connections within the congregation, the people we know. This is our fellowship with those we see weekly at church, this part is a bit easier than the rest. #2 Intentional hospitality refers to the practice of members and congregation in making relational connections with people they don’t know who are visiting and/or returning. We shared that we did well in this area that we had 2 people join our congregation officially last week. They felt welcome from the first day they came to visit. We can still improve in this area. #3 Invitational Hospitality refers to the connections made by the congregation with people they don’t know who are out in the community. And Pastor Rich last week told us the story of his parents being invited to the church by a member of a church when they did not have a connection to the church. They were personally invited! Without that happening, we would not have Pastor Rich here with us today.

#4 and final one we are talking about today is called Incarnational Hospitality which refers to the personal engagement by regular participants in the congregation in building relationships with those we know outside the church in order to be Christ to the unchurched. As the Philippians text tells us today (Philippians 2:5-8) Jesus incarnate humbled himself and became vulnerable, living among us. Incarnational Hospitality refers to us humbling ourselves and becoming vulnerable to the world, sharing ourselves with others. Phil Maynard says that this Incarnational Hospitality is closely tied to what we call Evangelism, in that it is about the congregation taking the responsibility as a disciple of Jesus to help others discover the fulfilling relationship with Jesus as they experienced it. It is to connect with people in times when they are most open to an expression of God’s love for them.

We see this in the gospel stories which were read to us this morning. In the story we know well of the Samaritan woman, we learn that Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well where he asked her for the water from the well. From that simple encounter, Jesus and the Samaritan woman engaged in a heart to heart conversation. We read the ending of that story where she shared her experience of meeting Jesus with the people in town and they believed in Jesus. Then Jesus came

and the people met Jesus for themselves, they were truly convinced. They said, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and we know that this is truly the savior of the world.” Verse 39 said, “many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “he told me everything I have ever done”. That was not a complicated message...

In the same way, we heard in John 1 that Philip had met Jesus and went to Nathanael to share that news. When Nathanael wanted to talk to Philip, philosophically, maybe of history and theologically, Philip’s reply was simple, “Come and see”. That’s a pretty simple message but because of the trusting relationship between Philip and Nathanael, Nathanael took Philip’s word. Nathanael met Jesus for himself and it ended with him professing, “You are the son of God!”

William Barclay commentary on our gospel reading of John 1:43-51 says,

“Not very many people have ever been argued into Christianity. Often our arguments do more harm than good. The only way to convince a person of the supremacy of Christ is to confront the person with Christ. On the whole it is true to say that it is not argumentative and philosophical preaching and teaching which have won people for Christ; it is the presentation of the story of the Cross.

There is a story which tells how, towards the end of the nineteenth century, Huxley, the great agnostic, was a member of a house party at a country house. Sunday came round, and most of the members prepared to go to church; but, very naturally, Huxley did not propose to go. Huxley approached a man known to have a simple and radiant Christian faith. He said to him, “Suppose you don’t go to church today. Suppose you stay at home and you tell me quite simply what your Christian faith means to you and why you are a Christian.” “But” said the man, “you could demolish my arguments in an instant. I’m not clever enough to argue with you.” Huxley said gently; “I don’t want to argue with you; I just want you to tell me simply what this Christ means to you.” The man stayed at home and told Huxley most simply of his faith. When he had finished there were tears in the great agnostic’s eyes. “I would give my right hand,” he said, “if only I could believe that.” (Thomas Henry Huxley, agnostic)

It was not a clever argument that touched Huxley’s heart. He could have dealt efficiently and devastatingly with any argument that that simple Christian was likely to have produced, but the simple presentation of Christ caught him by the heart. The best argument is to say to people; “come and see”. Of course, we have

to know Christ ourselves before we can invite others to come to him. The true evangelist must him or herself have met Christ first.”

As a closing, to give you something practical to take home and to try to implement, the pastors, given permission from Phil are giving you a way to work on your story, a way to share your story with others (included in the insert). As an example, I’m giving you what I worked on. A work in progress but an example for you. As you listen to my story, I hope you’d hear some ways to connect with me deeper. Maybe you will find some things in common with me so that you and I can deepen our relationship. Maybe you might want to know more about the Jesus I met. Maybe you want to meet this Jesus whom you didn’t meet just yet.

(See insert with pictures titled “Symbol timeline”)

- My family and I came to the United States from South Korea in 1990.
- I was taught that church was very important. Through Sunday school and my parents at home, I learned that God created all things and that Jesus, his son died for all people. Going to summer camp was a ritual, however in 6<sup>th</sup> grade my youth pastor asked us all to pray that God would “show himself” to us in a real way. Praying sincerely, I did receive an answer from God by a warm sense in my heart which proved to me by experience that God was real.
- In 7<sup>th</sup> grade, my family and I decided to move from the city of Chicago to the north suburbs. With a huge culture change of growing up with African American and Hispanic kids to having to adapt to a very culturally diverse surrounding, I started to struggle fitting in again. This caused my “A++” grades in all areas of academics which defined me and gave me worth and value in life started to struggle, making me question my identity and self-worth. This pushed me into thinking about taking my own life, that no one cared about me because I was worthless because I was not able to achieve and caused people I love disappointment.
- On the day I took a moment to contemplate jumping out of the third story window of the school, a classmate reached out to me to invite me to a Christian gathering after school. In the last effort to not disappoint at least 1 person in the world before ending life, I accepted her invitation. As I sat at the gathering after school, they started the meeting with prayer and worship where I closed my eyes as a habit but heard the voice of God in my heart saying, “How dare you question my intent to create you? I made you exactly the way I wanted to make you and I love you. I sent my son to die on the

cross for YOU. His life I gave up for yours and his death on the cross makes you perfect in my eyes. I love you!” I had heard the best news in the world and I had to share it not knowing what that meant.

- I went to the University of Illinois at Chicago where I engaged in my studies to be an elementary school teacher but also was very active in my spiritual growth. Being heavily involved with a Christian ministry on campus called InterVarsity, I learned how to lead Bible studies, lead small groups, led worship and prayer meetings.
- After teaching for a year after college and not finding fulfillment, as I was working at a bank to make ends meet, I heard another calling from God to pursue seminary education during the toughest time in my family’s life. My brother was still in college and my parents had lost their job. With no way to pay for a seminary education, I heard the calling from God. When it was unheard of to receive a full scholarship to seminary, I was offered a full scholarship for the 3 year MDIV program at Garrett Evangelical Seminary and found fulfillment in pastoral ministry where I get to share how God loves all people and that Jesus died for all.
- I still struggle with self-worth, self-doubt, and perfectionism within myself, wanting to achieve perfection in all areas of my life. I continue to remember the voice I heard clearly back in high school of that amazing news from God to share with the world that God loves me with the life of Jesus and that all are loved just the same. (End of insert)

My prayer is that the relationships you have built or that you will build with those around you will bring you to an opportunity to share the story you write, that those who hear your story will hear about how amazing Jesus is and that they would want that same Jesus for themselves.