



*United Presbyterian Church*

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*Harrodsburg, Kentucky*

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## **Sermon: We Are Evangelists**

Angels unaware. Isn't that a beautiful phrase? Angels unaware. How many times have we been visited by an angel and did not know? The phrase is sweet but the idea developed in Hebrews is even more beautiful, (Hebrews 13:2) "*Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that, some have entertained angels without knowing it.*"

The writer, of course, was thinking of the time Abraham and Sarah were visited by the angel of God, who told them that Sarah would bear a son. They laughed and called him Isaac or laughter. The point the writer is making is the same one that Jesus made with his disciples. The Roman culture in Jesus' day considered children to be little more than property, beasts of burden, chattel in the market place. It is amazing that Jesus would pick a child up in his arms and tell his followers, (Mk 9:37) "*Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. . .*"

### **1. Why are Christians evangelist?**

I don't know what evangelical means. My experience with evangelicals tells me that they have substituted Jesus for some sort of culturally accepted belief structure. I do know that Jesus sent his disciple out with clear instructions to "make disciples". (Matthew 28:19) That makes us all evangelists.

One Methodist church I know about, has a manual for their members. There is a poem in that manual that gives us one reason for witnessing for Jesus Christ. I don't know who wrote it but it represents basic fact.

"You are writing a Gospel, a chapter each day,  
by the deeds that you do and the words that you say.

People (men) read what you write, whether faithless or true,  
Say, what is the Gospel according to you?"

Why do we witness to Jesus Christ? Because we witness to someone or something every minute of our lives by everything we say or do. That manual reminds readers that God uses even

reluctant people to be witnesses. You remember that when God confronts Moses with a burning bush, Moses excuses himself. “But Lord,” Moses explains, “I am slow of speech.”

Jonah buys a ticket to Tarshish when God wants him to go to Ninevah. After the city repents, Jonah sulks that God has used him to save these wretched people. Isaiah says his mouth is unclean. Amos is but a sycamore pruner. And so it is with each of God’s selections for telling the good news to others. Reluctant people like you and me with wonderful excuses—“let someone else do it; it’s not my personality type; get someone else; I’m too shy; religion is a personal choice; I don’t mess with a person’s faith—we have an endless supply of inane excuses.

No one is suited for evangelism. We are called. No one is good at it. It is God’s work. Of course, faith is personal, (more personal than a Personal Computer or a dedicated word processor). But faith to be faith must be lived out in public or it isn’t faith. Of course we are all shy but if we expect people to talk to us, we must talk to them.

Aside from the fact that we can’t avoid being an evangelist, why else should we tell our story? Because we have already agreed to.

Each new member promises: (Book of Order G-5.0102) “A faithful member accepts Christ's call to be involved responsibly in the ministry of his church. Such involvement includes: A. proclaiming the good news.” There are several other reasons: Jesus asks us, (Matthew 28:19) “*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*” The Book of Order places this task first. (G-1.0200) “The great ends of the church are the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind.”

We owe it to God. Each of us here, is a result of the gracious call of God, transferred to us by a loving parent, teacher, or other saint of the church. If we are to do unto others as we would have them do to us, then we will share the message that has been shared with us.

## **2. Talking about Jesus Christ takes discipline.**

That’s why we are called disciples. We have a different way to live and a different Lord than the society as a whole.

At a lovely dinner party, a group of people were talking about the new downtown development. A woman walks up and describes the details of the walks and gardens she and her

husband have placed in her back yard. It is surprising how quickly the group dispersed. Why? Let's look at what happened with Jesus and the disciples.

The disciples are talking about who will be the greatest in the kingdom to come and conflict ensues. Why? People were talking and the discussion was personal (too personal). Why was communication interrupted? Each disciple was talking about himself. Jesus explained it by saying that the person who is the servant is the leader; if we are to lead, we are to serve.

One of the criticisms of Jewish wisdom literature is that it is so real and so very practical. Church members tell me that hearing about the perfect wife in Proverbs makes them tired. Others say that all that talk about her hard work makes them feel guilty. The same problems are often expressed with the Christian wisdom literature in James. It is almost too down to earth. In both cases there is a deep and rich discernment that we do not want to overlook.

There is a heavenly wisdom that we need and others desperately want. I'm not sure that we come upon it naturally. Jesus had to remind his disciples, and James explains it to the early church very precisely. There is earthly wisdom and there is heavenly wisdom. Earthly wisdom is what we are born with. It is quite natural for us to think of ourselves first to the point that we become narcissistic and break up groups. It is normal for us to want power to the point that we seek to be served rather than serve.

Culture teaches us very carefully to want, collect, hoard, and save. The wisdom from above (James 3:17-18) "*is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.*" That wisdom is also learned. It must be consciously taught and unconsciously experienced. One reason Bible study is so important is that we need to learn how to listen and how to speak.

### **3. All of us can tell others about Jesus Christ because we have all experienced him.**

There are still Damascus Road experiences, in which people like the Apostle Paul are knocked to their knees with the blinding light of Jesus Christ. Dan Wakefield records one in his life, in the autobiography, Returning: A Spiritual Journey. "One balmy spring morning in Hollywood, a month or so before my 48th birthday, I woke up screaming. I got out of bed, went into the next room, sat down on a couch and screamed again ... It was a response to the reality that

another morning had broken in a life I could only deal with sedated by wine, loud noise, moving images and wired to electronic games that further distracted my fragmented attention from a growing sense of blank, nameless pain, in the pit of my very being, my most essential self. ... The day I woke up screaming, I grabbed from among my books, an old Bible I hadn't opened for nearly a quarter of a century. With a desperate instinct I turned to the 23rd Psalm and read it over, several times....”

I have never woken up screaming, but I have experienced moments in life when I knew that God was attempting to get my attention. I believe that every bush in life is ablaze with the glory of God and that our task is to stop long enough to wonder. Evangelism is God's work with us and with the church. We must turn it over to him. It is his church.

When you share your faith journey with someone who seems to be asking for meaning in life, you can trust God to have been there first, with you, and with that person. That you dare to share the mystery of faith with another, is an example of pure grace.

Yes, you do need to be humble. Be especially careful of the other's feelings and their ability to express them. Encourage their talk, not yours. Be firm in your commitment to Jesus and the loving fellowship you have found here.

That someone would listen, is an example of the Holy Spirit working with that person. How that person responds at that given moment, is not as important as the fact that you are aware of the grace of God. Sharing Jesus Christ is totally dependent upon the grace of God. The outcome of what you are, what you say, how well you listened, is not really your business. Let God have his way with you and with that other person.