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Athelstone Uniting Church #71

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Text: Luke 10:1-11, 16-20 NIV

Let's pray

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight,

O Lord, our strength and our redeemer.

Amen.

This morning I want to share with you some thoughts about evangelism.

Before I go any further, I invite you to choose one person next to you. Give them a gentle nudge and ask them how they feel when they hear the word, "evangelism".

Video: [Tell.Show.Be](#)

Play video: [Tell. Show. Be \(1:50\)](#)¹

I wonder how you felt at the beginning of that video, confronted with that word, "evangelism"?

Christians and non-Christians alike struggle with the word. A word that has become associated with negative images over the years...

A while ago, I polled a range of people, asking them what emotions or thoughts came to mind when I said "evangelism".

Here are some of their responses – and as you listen, note that some of these people (who I won't name) are ministry colleagues:

So, when I mentioned the word "evangelism", here are some of the responses:

- Something that is very poorly done. It seems often to be done for the comfort and needs of the evangelist rather than the needs of the recipient or victim

¹ <https://vimeo.com/27531792>

- Discomfort at the methods that others may use to share faith.
- The forgotten dimension of mission
- ... do I really have to? ... ok, if I really must!
- A feeling of mistrust
- A misunderstood spiritual discipline
- I think of the people who push religion (of different kinds) down your throat.
- I sort of groan inside.

I wonder if that's how you feel?

The video we just saw, expressed well the fears and other negative feelings we have towards evangelism.

But it did continue on to offer hope, to offer another perspective to this spiritual discipline.

In my poll, there were a few positive responses, which was encouraging: one person said, evangelism is "... relationships caring ... being Christ to the community ... sharing about our purpose in life...."

And that's really what I'm on about today.

So, what is evangelism? Here are a few dictionary definitions:

(Macquarie)

To evangelise:

1. to preach the gospel to
2. To convert to christianity

(Google dictionary)

1. The spreading of the Christian gospel by public preaching or personal witness
2. Zealous advocacy of a cause

I think it's this final definition that makes us cringe: zealous advocacy of a cause. Most Australians are easy-going people. We don't like to feel uncomfortable, or make others feel uncomfortable. Zealous behaviour is treated with suspicion and usually avoided.

And, like the disciples who were sent by Jesus, we live in a multi faith / multi cultural world. We live in a world today where Christianity is often mocked in the media and is for many, a new idea!

Yet we have this good news to share:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

(John 3:16)

This is the good news of God's saving act in Jesus Christ, and we have been commissioned by Christ himself to go and spread this news, and so, join in on Christ's mission, to make disciples and to bring transformation and liberation.

Evangelism is central to the mission of the church. Jesus said:

"...All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. 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, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)

The Uniting Church sees evangelism as integral to its life. The Basis of Union, our denomination's founding document.....

- Calls the members of the churches to, "hear anew the commission of the Risen Lord to make disciples of all nations." (para 1)
- ... states that through human witness in word and action, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ reaches out to command people's attention and awaken faith. (para 4)

We have this good news to share and we want others to know...

When we chat to friends and family, it is normal and effortless to speak about the things we love:

...our passion for a particular football team and how they played in the latest Showdown, or for music, or our children and grandchildren..,

When it comes to this thing that is so integral to who we are, our faith that gives us eternal hope and joy, if we are being really honest with ourselves, we do not find it as easy to talk about.

We have this good news to share and we want others to know, yet we can find it hard to talk about...

As we engage more with our community through activities like Threads, Spirited Sundays, Stay and Play, and even through community service, how can we think differently and with more confidence about evangelism?

We heard the good news on the video:

You don't need a qualification and there is no exam to pass, a uniform is not required and you do not need to know all the answers!

(Perhaps this is what Jesus was saying when he said: Do not take a purse or bag or sandals – or as Eugene Peterson says, "Travel light!").

It is quite simply about passing on a message, one we already know through our own faith journey as disciples. It is the good news: love, compassion, forgiveness, hope... Jesus. It is not complicated.

I'd like to suggest that when you think of evangelism, you think of it in terms of relationships.

Relational evangelism... Evangelism that is intentional about bringing the good news to someone in the context of a relationship.

A relationship that serves the other's needs, that shows grace, that is natural, practical, welcoming and most importantly, communicates God's love in various ways. ...Relationships based on love.

Mike Pilavachi (in his book *Worship Evangelism Justice*) says

"Using Jesus as our example, sometimes we forget that while being the son of God, he also lived many elements of his life in a very normal fashion. Jesus built relationships with people, he was sociable, choosing to have dinner with those he called to follow him, to go to parties and meet people, not staying in a 'holy huddle' with a few 'safe' friends. The best thing we can do is to follow Jesus' example; to see people as people and not as potential converts; to care for individuals and not worry about getting our numbers up."

We need to remember that it is our job is to love, and to build relationships, and the Spirit's is to bring about transformation!

Lenard Sweet, provides this helpful metaphor for relational evangelism: nudging

Len says:

"nudge evangelism is based on a simple premise: in everyone you meet, leave an impression – a Jesus impression, a Jesus dent. Instead of trying to impress everyone with ourselves, Nudge evangelism shows us how to impress everyone you meet with the goodness, truth and beauty of Jesus.

To nudge is to impress on someone how special they are and how much God loves them. The nudge can be as simple as a smile, as profound as a prayer, as complex as a meal, as subtle as a story, as venturous as a witness, as ambitious as an altar call.

Too many Christians are leaving an 'impress' of hate and condemnation, not of love and salvation. Jesus did not come to 'condemn' but to 'save' the world. In everyone you meet, leave a dent. A Jesus nudge leaves a Jesus impression that reminds people that God is up to something big in their life. Everyone you meet is a divine appointment for nudging."

A nudge only really works when you have a relationship with someone!

So, who is Jesus calling you to share the good news with?

Whoever that is for you, wherever Jesus sends you:

Consider Jesus's teaching to the disciples – to offer peace, to accept hospitality, to offer healing and to let them know that God is near!.

By offering peace:

We seek the wellbeing, shalom for others, we find common ground,

by accepting the hospitality of others:

by sharing meals, and time, and being willing to learn about what is important to others

offer healing:

whether this is through prayer, or listening, or helping resolve issues, or providing the means for healing – perhaps by helping with access to medical assistance

and find ways to gently nudge and show that God is near – help others see signs of God's love and activity in their life.

And do all this grounded in prayer:

Verse 2 in the Message goes like this:

He gave them this charge:

"What a huge harvest! And how few the harvest hands. So on your knees; ask the God of the Harvest to send harvest hands.

On your knees! Pray! Ask God for strength, for helpers, for the right words, for compassion, for empathy, and for love for the other.

Trust Jesus to be present through the Spirit, guiding you, protecting you, even nudging you with what to say and do.

And then later, return to Jesus in prayer and tell him how things went – how the relationships are growing – giving thanks for where you saw signs of God at work. Celebrate! Tell others here in your church family. Celebrate and encourage each other!

And if things don't go so well, and if you are not welcomed, shake the dust off your feet – let it go – don't take it to heart - shake it off – and move on.

As Christian disciples we are all called to share the good news of God's saving love through Jesus – and we can do this through sharing peace, hospitality and healing in the places Jesus sends us.

At the beginning of the service you received a paper foot print. Pick it up now.

I want to give you a few minutes to reflect on today's message.

Where is Jesus sending you?

Are you being called to go out and build new relationships somewhere?

Are you called to invest in a current relationship?

Is it time to shake the dust off and let go of something?

As you reflect, you might like to write something down – something that comes to you - a word, a sentence, a prayer, or you might like to draw something. Or you might simply like to hold your foot print.

Perhaps you have a word of encouragement for someone else?

Use this time to be aware of the gentle nudge of the Spirit

Let's have a time of quiet and stillness before our God.

Linda to indicate to the musicians to start playing quietly.

Then Linda to invite people to sing when they're ready.