



Evangelise = share good news

Scripture: ‘But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. 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’ (1Pet.3:15 NIV)

1, Getting Ready – ‘be prepared’

Don’t be afraid

Evangelise – it’s a very churchy word that is not used much in general society. It is actually a Greek term, ‘eu-anj-elon’ εὐαγγέλιον) meaning “good news” or “gospel.”

It sounds ‘churchy official’ and can be a bit daunting. For those we are talking to – well, ‘it all sounds Greek to me’ as the old saying goes. That saying is a way of saying ‘yeah, I don’t get it and am not going to consider it more’.

What we are really saying is that we have good news stories to share and both the action of sharing and the content it should be both a blessing and a gentle challenge (more on the gentle challenge later).

So, I suggest we don’t make a habit of using the ‘churchy’ term of evangelise – even though it is my title! Not because it is a bad word but because it is more helpful to use terms that are a little more informal and accessible.

Sharing good news or glad tidings (often used at Christmas) is familiar to us. Alternatively, talking about something we have experienced and witnessed is another non-threatening and natural way to share.

For example, Jesus said

‘go into all the world and proclaim the gospel’ (Mk16:15 NRSVA)

And, ‘you will be my witnesses’ (Acts 1:8 NIV)

While being told to proclaim might be a barrier, being told that we are simply witnesses to who Jesus Christ is makes the blessing more accessible, both to us and those receiving from us.

Connect

Let’s hear some of Paul’s examples

When talking to the Greeks in Athens he began by using words from the people’s own culture. Explaining that God is creator and Lord of heaven and earth, he recited their own poetic and well-known phrases, ‘in him we live and move and have our being’ and ‘we are his offspring’ to make a connection for them. (Acts 17:28 NIV)

Speaking to the Galatians he used accessible language in explaining something to them saying, ‘Brothers and sisters, let me take an example from everyday life’ (Gal3:15 NIV)

And to the Corinthians, ‘I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some’ (1Cor.9:22 NIV)

So, there are our first principles,

- Don’t be afraid of the word or meaning of evangelise / evangelism. It simply means to share good news known to you.
- it is not a task only church leaders can do, because they have been taught and practice theology, but is a command of blessing to all Jesus’ followers – tell other people about me!
- How? By sharing our witness accounts. Share how Jesus has spoken to us, how he has affected our life. Tell of all the little signs or miracles that have happened along the way.
- And do it in language accessible to the hearer;
- How can we relate the persons of God with their experiences and knowledge?

...with gentleness and respect

Although Peter says that bit last, I want to cover it alongside the giving of an answer because it is part of connecting and making the good news accessible.

He anticipates that the sharing of good news will come in our interactions with other people. Some form of relationship is presupposed, whether from building a friendship or those shorter but affirming encounters as when we help someone, they help us, or someone else witnesses it. They may well ask the reason and might possibly offer to help someone we are helping.

Let’s have two more examples from Paul:

Even when Paul made his speech in Athens, it was a result of a conversational debate he was having with some philosophers. A principal reason why, when Paul was asked to share his philosophy to a larger group, he used phrases they were familiar to them when explaining the good news of Jesus Christ.

To King Agrippa, Paul began, ‘I consider myself fortunate to stand before you’ (Acts26:2 NIV) and as a result of the both the manner and content of Paul’s answer, ‘Agrippa said to Paul, ‘are you so quickly persuading me to become a Christian?’ⁱ (Acts 26:28 NRSVA) Again Paul is not rude, nor does he

tell King Agrippa what to think, but reverts to the one about whom he is sharing 'I pray to God' for you. (see Acts 26:29)

Those first principles relate to our heart and mindset, being unafraid and prepared to connect. This takes a little effort at being observant on what is going on for the other person(s) and, intimately linked with that is Peter's instruction on being gentle and respectful.

We must appreciate that this is not a 'one size fits all' but we are required to make the effort to understand the other and to respectfully connect something in their experience with the love and mercy of God's truth.

When we share good news about Jesus reconnecting us with God, we are not trying to guilt-trip the other person and are not judging them. Our efforts should gently challenge their thinking but not 'pull the rug from under them' as if their experiences and understanding are worthless. Far from it!

Let's have an example on sharing good news by connecting and being respectful:

In our congregation this morning we have some who have experienced some of the Roman Catholic traditions. In a conversation with someone of this background I may comment on their tradition of reverence to Mary (venerating her). They will know that Mary knew she'd be called blessed by future generations (see Luke 1:48) and have been taught about Mary representing the new Eve. (Mary's act of obedience in accepting the Lord's will in contrast with Eve's disobedience).

Mary does provide a great example of blessing in obedience to carrying Jesus, but do they know she is also representative of all people? The good news is that Jesus is to be 'carried' by all his followers! Jesus explained to a Jewish teacher that we must be born again and from above to enter heaven, for God is spirit and we must be born of water (natural birth) and spirit (new birth). (see John 3)

He talks in a similar way to a Samaritan woman saying we must worship in Spirit and in Truth and talks of this again when telling the disciples that God's Holy Spirit will live in his followers. (see John 4 & 15)

The good news is that we all get to be carriers of God's Spirit if we love Jesus. Mary is a sign to us, but it is Jesus who gives the blessing and is to be worshipped. The good news is that it was not only Mary who was blessed, but we too can receive Jesus' blessing and have his Spirit in us.

3. What answer?

So far, I've covered teaching on how to share good news. We also need to consider more of the content of this good news.

the reason for our Hope: relationship

There is a clear expectation here that the way we live and conduct ourselves in daily life will cause others to ask questions. Not in a negative way but in a 'the way you are looks interesting / positive / lifts my spirit / is something I would like to experience' type of way.

Since this hope comes from Jesus, we must first have a healthy relationship with him.

It is not enough to know about him, we must know him

The content of our answer to share the good news about Jesus Christ must come from both our experience and knowledge of him. The account we are telling is of a relational God whose relationship with his creation is so important that he sent 'his one and only son' (Jn1:14/3:16 NIV) to make our eternal relationship with him a reality.

What we are sharing is personal to Him and to us. If it is not personal to us, its impact is lost for it we are not exemplifying relationship, and it will become plain to see that we are not doing what we say. We would only be moralising to the other. This has some value in helping others to make good moral choices, but it risks giving the impression that God sets a bunch of moral rules and waits for us to be successful before accepting us.

That is not who God is. He makes the first move coming to us when we are not in a loving relationship with Him. He comes not to condemn but to save us into his loving kingdom. (e.g., see John 3:17 & Rom.5:6-8 explaining we were already condemned but Jesus comes to take away that condemnation.)

See, even describing the relational reason for hope is part of his good news!

The reason for our hope: His Word; 'revere Christ'

Finally, something that has been hidden in plain sight throughout my sermon.

We have a record of God's relationship with us and of his love for us in his Word, otherwise known as the scriptures or the bible.

I prefer to use the terms 'scriptures' or 'God's Word', but I get that the phrase of 'the Bible' is widely known. I just ask caution in using the term 'bible' because it sounds both impersonal and inaccessible to those for whom it is simply a book

they've never engaged with and do not understand. We are not introducing someone to a book but to the persons of God.

To do this, we need to know God the Father, Son and Spirit and his word to us.

Therefore, read or listen to scriptures and do it often, preferably every day. Get to know some key phrases of his, especially those that have meaning for you.

When sharing it is not that important to know where exactly the scripture comes from and it can be helpful to put a couple of scriptures together that are found in separate places of his word.

For example, Peter quotes two separate Psalms in one sentence, saying only that 'it is written in the Book of Psalms' (see Acts 1:20.)

and in the letter to Hebrews the writer says, 'there is a place where someone has testified' (Heb. 2:6 NIV)

(In the sermon I had us all recite 'The Lord's prayer' as an example. I explained how some of it comes from the gospels in the New Testament, but the closing sentences come from the Old Testament; Chronicles 29:11)

In fact, constant quoting of scriptures can be off-putting. I have heard sermons and witness accounts where the sharer's message is constantly interrupted by scripture quotes.

The importance is in knowing and having confidence in God's Word. There can be opportunity later, if a particular scripture has struck a chord with someone, to look up where it comes from. That moment of giving the reason for our hope should be centred on our personal experience with Jesus, who is God's Word.

What scriptures are relevant to the question or situation in that moment?

What hope have we found and held onto that have helped us express joy and get us through difficult times?

Wax lyrical about it if you like; just remember the golden rule:

'But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. 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' (1Pet. 3:15 NIV)

ⁱ NRSVA reference used because it better tells of Agrippa's present dilemma of experiencing and resisting the good news from Paul.