

“Do We Dare Say the “E” Word?”

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Sermon by Lisa Crismore – John Knox Presbyterian Church

Mark 6:1-13 “He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. On the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, “Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him. Then Jesus said to them, “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.” And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Then he went about among the villages teaching. He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. He said to them, “Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place.”¹¹ If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.” So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

During my 2nd year working at FedEx, I explored the idea of becoming a manager. It was a program called “LEAP” and then later they renamed it “ASPIRE”. “LEAP” required that you went through some classroom time where managers would come and talk to you about the various aspects of the business. One of the things they advised was that once you became eligible to promote to management, you should not stay within your same work group! You would have a much better chance of succeeding, if you transferred to another area within FedEx. The reason being was that the employees, who you would be leading, would have a difficult time thinking of you as their superior. These are the folks who have been your equal and now you were going to have to give them orders. It would take time for people to transition their thought process and many folks are resistant to change. You would just be better off moving on.

The same thing is going on in Nazareth as Jesus returns to his hometown. I am sure everyone is excited to go and hear the home boy in the pulpit. The memories of Jesus as a little boy come flooding back to the town folk when they hear of his return; they remember the practical joke he played on them in school and the first piece of furniture he made in his father’s woodworking shop. As he begins, they are impressed with his ability to speak with such confidence. They are amazed at his knowledge of the scriptures. But when it comes time for the meat of the sermon, there is something that is said that gets the people upset. Perhaps Jesus spoke on following the commandments, or he gives directions or maybe he told a parable. We don’t know what was in his message that day but it was not welcomed! Eugene

Peterson writes in The Message, “The people were asking, “Who does Jesus think he is?” What nerve does he have coming back to his grass roots and telling us what we need to do? Jesus says, “There is no honor when it comes to your hometown or your family.” It was like the oldest sibling being put in charge of babysitting their siblings for the first time. The people rejected him!

Jesus was amazed at their reaction. I'm sure he was disappointed and probably hurt. But before he picks up and moves on, I think it is interesting that we are told that he lays his hands on people and cures them. He shows grace even when he is faced with rejection. Amazing!

It is then time for him to send his disciples out on the road. He sends them out not as individuals but as a team of 2 people. He tells them that they will go out and have the power to heal and to teach. They will go out to help others in need and while doing so they will teach them about God's love. They didn't need to stay in the finest inns. When doing the work of the church, it doesn't matter where you stay. But keep in mind not all people will welcome you with open arms, there will be some who will reject you! He is speaking from experience. He wants to warn them of what they may encounter while out doing ministry for the church. If you meet up with rejection, you need to shake all the dust off from that place and move on. Jesus reminds them of what their ancestors were told when they returned from the Babylonian exile. Don't let that negative experience weigh you down; you need to keep looking forward to where God is taking you. You need to keep helping people and telling them about God.

This was the very first lesson in evangelism – Evangelism 101. Jesus knew from experience that there was a possibility of rejection when it came to sharing God's Word and doing God's work with others. We don't really like to hear the “E” word, do we? Is it the rejection that scares us, when it comes to evangelism? Nobody likes to be rejected. Is that why people don't like to evangelize? Or maybe we just don't want to be pushy.

What if we looked at evangelism like Jesus did? I think it is interesting that Jesus had his disciples not only teach but also heal. It was putting action with the words. It was living out their faith by words and deeds. One commentator writes, “It is clear that both Jesus' ministry in Nazareth and that of the Twelve to “the villages” has unitary, encompassing both healing “mission” and proclamation “evangelism”. . (Feasting on the Word by Michael Lindvall; Westminster John Knox Press; 2009; p. 212) Generally, people tend to gravitate toward mission. One would think it is easy to reach out to someone in need. But even that can be a risk.

Beth Moore tells the funniest story and I apologize to those who have already heard this but it is a great true story. Beth was at the airport getting ready to fly to a conference. She was in the gate area where everyone is sitting, waiting to board their flight. There was something that had gotten the attention of all the people in front of her. It was going on behind her and she was dying to know what it was. She didn't want to be rude so she waited awhile before she turned her head. Out of her peripheral vision, she could see this elderly man, who had to be at least 105, being

assisted by a flight attendant in a wheel chair. He was the most peculiar looking person as he has long finger nails and long gray hair, which reached in length half way down his back. He was clean but this guy could have been Howard Hughes' twin!

Beth tried to go back to what she was doing but God began to nudge her. She said this always scares her because she knows this means something is coming. She said, "God, please don't ask me to go and evangelize to this man. He really doesn't want to know about Jesus, today. Please don't ask me to do this!" She said there has only been a few times when God has spoken so clearly to her and this was one of those times. God said, "Oh Beth, I don't want you to go witness to this man. I want you to go brush his hair!"

Beth immediately back pedals and says, "I will go and witness. What good is brushed hair, if he doesn't know Jesus! God, I don't even have a hairbrush." God said, "Go Beth and brush his hair." So she gets up and goes over to him. He is all slumped over in the chair. She leans down and very softly says, "May I have the honor of brushing your hair." Of course, he doesn't hear her. He says in a very loud voice, little lady, if you want me to hear you, you are going to have to speak up! At that point, everyone in the gate area whips their heads around and all eyes are on her! So she shouts, "Sir, will you give me the privilege of brushing your hair?"

He agrees. But she has no hairbrush, so she has to ask where his is. It is in his suitcase on the back of his wheel chair. She goes back and on her hands and knees starts going through his undershirts and pajamas to find this beautifully crafted soft bristled brush. As she begins to brush, she notices that the hair is fine on top but as she lifts it up she notices that it is all matted and tangled. Now Beth has girls so she is a pro at managing this. As she begins to work through his hair, her focus totally is on him and she is so filled with the peace and love of Christ. It takes her awhile but she gets his hair free of the mess. It is as soft as silk!

She comes around to the front and puts her hands on his knees. She asks if he knows Jesus, he says he found his faith years ago when he met this future wife. She wouldn't marry him until he became a Christian. He thanked her because he was on his way to returning home to his wife, who he had not seen in a long time due to an extensive illness. He was worried about how he was going to look to her. Now he was ready to meet his bride! As they wheeled him on the plane, Beth saw the flight attendant, who had assisted the man in the beginning. She was in tears as she saw this scene unfold. It was then that she asked Beth about Jesus. (Website: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xtk5WgzZcYA)

Evangelism is not about pushing our beliefs on someone and forcing them to change. Evangelism is about reaching out to someone and taking a risk. It is about waiting for that opportunity to share.

One commentator shares a story about Hugh Thompson. He was one of the speakers at a graduation ceremony at Emory University. There were a lot of speakers during the course of the pomp and circumstance but the one that everyone went away talking about that day was Hugh Thompson. He did not have a PHD or a master's

degree. He had served in the Army in Vietnam. One day while flying his helicopter on surveillance he noticed gun fire below. As he studied the situation, he noticed that it was US troops shooting at unarmed, innocent civilians. It was clear that hundreds would be killed. He lowered his helicopter between the civilians and the soldiers. Hugh ordered his men on board to turn their guns on the soldiers to stop the killing. He ended up saving hundreds of innocent people. At first, he was almost court martialed. When asked why he did it, he said, "I was always raised with the golden rule, 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.'" He was later granted the Soldier's Medal. (Feasting on the Word by Michael Lindvall; Westminster John Knox Press; 2009; p. 214)

As our culture and society continues to change, I believe our evangelism is going to have to change. We are going to have to go out and share with people in a different way. This past week our General Assembly (our upper level government) met for its biannual meeting. One of the things that was not controversial and passed with a huge vote was the 1001 community meetings. It is an initiative on the PCUSA to explore how to do church differently. Their goal is to support 1001 start-up ministries that will reach out to people in a new way. What are the needs of our community? How do we help them? Where do we see God at work outside the walls of our church and how can we be a part of that? How do we share the Good News of the Gospel with them?

This coming Saturday our youth and their adult leaders will be going to West Virginia to refurbish homes for the impoverished in that area. They will be disciples going out, helping and healing those people in the community. I bet they will have an opportunity to tell their faith story. I am sure there will be a time for them to share what God is doing in their life. They will without a doubt get to hear stories of the people, who they are helping. They may or may not be Presbyterian. Probably not! They may or may not be Christian. My guess is they will learn from each other. They will be open to listening and sharing with each other. That is what Jesus commissions his disciples to do.

In a week's time, we will be opening our doors to welcome children from our community to come and hear about God and the amazing ways God teaches us with water! It will be wet and it will be fun. Those children, more than likely one hundred or so, will get to learn about the living water that Jesus has to offer. Through giggles, balloon fights, blue ice cream and sewing fishermen's nets, they will learn about the Good News. How can we reach out beyond this week?

I believe we need to go and reach out to them in our community. Jesus didn't tell his disciples here is a church, which I set-up for you, now just sit there and wait on people. He said go out into the villages. He said go out and teach, go out and heal, go out and help others, go out and share.

We must keep moving forward to see where God is leading us. Praise be to God for those brave disciples long ago who were willing to follow the one who gave up everything for us. May we be willing to go when God nudges us. May we be will to go and heal and teach. Amen.

