

Who We Want to Be, part 2: A Proclaiming Community
August 4, 2013

I grew up in a church-going family. Both my parents were active in the church. As far back as I can remember, my dad sang in the choir and my mom played the organ. They taught children in Sunday School. At home, they taught us to pray. Their faith was real. God became real to me through their teaching and example.

When I was twelve years old I made a decision to follow Jesus with my life. Up until then I knew of God, but did not know God personally. I do not remember who was preaching or what the sermon was about. I only remember that at the end I realized that I needed to become a Christian and did so that night. I encountered the living God and placed my life in His hands.

That is my story of becoming a Christian. God gave me that story. Someone may choose not to believe that I experienced God that night, but they can't deny that I experienced something that night. They may not agree with my interpretation of the event, but they cannot deny the event itself. As a personal experience my story carries weight. It has an impact on others when I share it.

You have a story too. Yours is different from mine, but just as important. Your story too is not something anyone can deny. They may not believe you experienced God, but they have no basis for believing you did not experience something. Your story carries weight. It makes a difference. God gave you your story and wants to use your story to draw people to Him.

God uses our stories to draw people to Himself. God first used the stories of the apostles of Jesus. The word apostle means one who is sent on a task or mission. One day Jesus called His followers together and designated twelve as apostles. He trained His apostles so that when Jesus returned to heaven, the apostles would lead out in proclaiming Jesus' resurrection from the dead. He made the following prophecy about them.

Acts 1:8 (NIV) ... you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

As we continue reading the book of Acts, we see this prophecy fulfilled. We see the followers of Jesus receive the Holy Spirit. We see the apostles of Jesus receive power when they receive the Holy Spirit. They used this to powerfully announce the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. In doing this they were fulfilling the mission Jesus had given them. We read that mission in Matthew 28.

Matthew 28:18-20 (NIV) Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go 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 surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

We call these words of Jesus the Great Commission. We don't know how many of Jesus' disciples were present when He spoke those words. We don't know if He initially meant them just for the apostles or all of His followers. Certainly the apostles had a special mission. They more than anyone proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus. Those who believed their story became the first Christians and the first Christian churches.

But the apostles were not the only ones with a story. Every one of those initial followers of Jesus had a story. Every one of them knew the details of the good news for they had believed in for themselves. We THINK many Christians besides the apostles shared the good news and their stories in Jerusalem. The first church was in the city of Jerusalem. We are not told specifically that Christians other than the apostles witnessed there. However we KNOW they did so outside of Jerusalem. We read about it in Acts, chapter eight.

Acts 8:1, 4 (NIV)

... On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria...

Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.

It says the church scattered. The only ones who stayed in the city of Jerusalem were the apostles. The rest of the Christians left town. They went to Judea and Samaria. Jerusalem was in Judea. It would be like Annapolis, the city, is in Anne Arundel County. Samaria was northwest of that area, like Howard and Carroll Counties. But they took the good news of Jesus with them. They shared Jesus with people wherever they went. They did not preach sermons, but shared the good news and told their personal stories of how and why they became Jesus followers.

Acts 11:19-21 (NIV) Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

The twelve apostles of Jesus had a unique mission. They were the official testifiers of the resurrection of Jesus. They were able to do miracles. But this history shows that the Holy Spirit also led other Christians to spread the good news, sharing their own stories of how they became Jesus followers.

Historically, being witnesses for Jesus was not limited to the apostles. In the last 2,000 years we see the Holy Spirit of God moving Christians to be witnesses for Jesus. The church has seen the great commission as a command to the church at large, and not just to the twelve apostles.

So, Every Christian can tell someone the good news. This is evangelism. The word evangelism means to announce good news.

We see Jesus doing evangelism in John four. He met a woman by a well and engaged her in conversation. In that conversation, He sought to determine her interest in spiritual things. As it turns out she was very interested and brought her neighbors to Jesus.

If you are a Christian, you know how to tell someone how and why you became a follower of Jesus. You can also tell them the basic details of the good news as you understand it. They can start there. They can take the same steps you did to become a follower of Jesus. That isn't hard. You already know most of it because you did it.

You may not be able to answer in theological terms. You may not be able to answer any question or objection someone has. But you know the good news.

- You know that we are all sinners before God. (all are sinners)
- You know that the wages of sin is death. (deserving of death)
- You know that we will all stand before God to give an accounting for our lives. (Judgment Day)
- You know that without a Savior we will be found guilty of sin and condemned to hell. (condemnation to hell)
- You know that God so loved the world that He sent us a Savior from sin, Jesus. (a Savior provided)
- You know that Jesus lived a sinless life and so could be an acceptable substitute for our sin. (sinless substitute)
- You know that Jesus was crucified by His enemies. (crucified)
- You know that God accepted Jesus' death as the full penalty for all of our sins and proved this by raising Him from the dead. (resurrection)
- You know that Jesus ascended up into heaven and will return the same way to gather His followers to Him for eternity. (ascension)
- You know you had to accept these truths as fact and put your faith in them. (believe)
- You know you had to turn from your sinful living and give your life in obedience to Jesus as Lord. (repent)

Christian evangelism is telling someone THIS good news. You know all this. You can tell someone else this good news so that they can be saved from their sins.

You know the good news. You also know your own story. These are all you need to know. This is all someone needs to hear to choose to be saved. You can share what you know and let God draw people to Himself.

Today, Jesus continues to stir our hearts for evangelism because people need to hear about how and why to be saved. The apostles are dead. The early evangelists, prophets, and missionaries have all died. All those first Christians have passed on. But there are still billions of people who need to be saved. God's Good News has not reached its final destination if someone in your family, your workplace, your school, or your community has not heard the Good News about Jesus Christ.

That is why we, as Emmanuel Baptist Church, believe proclaiming the good news of Jesus is part of the reason God brought us together as a church. This is one of the objectives of our church. Let's read this aloud together.

Under God, with the help of the Holy Spirit, and in the name of Jesus, the Christ; we commit ourselves... ..IN PROCLAMATION... To spread the knowledge of God's desire for fellowship with mankind, expressed by the gift of His Son, Jesus, the Christ.

We as Emmanuel Baptist Church have made this one of our objectives as a church. We want to share the good news of Jesus with anyone we can. We do this because no one is born with this knowledge. No one is born knowing why they need to become a Christian or born knowing how to become one.

Nor is it something a person can figure out on their own. I can watch you ride a bicycle and might be able to figure out how to do it by trial and error. Becoming a Christian is not like that at all. You can't become a Christian by watching other Christians. You can't become a Christian by trial and error. It isn't that kind of thing.

Instead, you must be taught of your need for salvation. People must be told about their sinfulness and need for a Savior. And they must learn that Jesus is that Savior. They must hear it from someone they know. That is you.

As Emmanuel Baptist Church **we engage in different methods to get us to evangelism conversations.** Jesus shares some ways in the sermon on the mount. We'll look at those in a couple of weeks. But there is not just one way of getting to a conversation where we can share the good news. There are millions of ways.

Two week ago I preached about our objective of worship. I stressed that God has not given us many specifics about when, where, or how to worship. The same can be said of proclamation. Like worship, we are free to use different methods of getting to the good news with people.

There is an old story about evangelism methods. Years ago someone spoke to the famous preacher, D.L. Moody about his method. He said, Mr. Moody, I don't much like your method of evangelism. Moody answered, "I don't much like it either. What method do you use?" The man mumbled, "Well, I don't have a method." Moody came back, "I like my method better than yours."

You can use any method you want. Just make sure that the goal is evangelism. Make sure the goal is to tell someone about how and why to become a Christian. Anything short of this is not evangelism. Anything short of this cannot result in their salvation.

As Emmanuel Baptist Church we are engaged in different methods to get evangelism accomplished. We do it on different levels for different contexts.

For instance, **Emmanuel Baptist Church works for local evangelism.**

We work together locally to make sure you are equipped to share your story and the good news with the people in your life.

We work together locally as a church to draw interest to God. We used things like Vacation Bible School, the free flea markets, and our Adopt-a-School project. We are always interested in new ideas for getting us to evangelism. In the last 30 years we've used over 21 methods or variations. If there is something you would like to try, let me know what you are willing to do?

But we also look beyond our local area. **Emmanuel Baptist Church partners with others for global evangelism.**

We partner with other area Southern Baptist Churches to plant new churches in the area. This the work of the Arundel Baptist Association.

Beyond our local area we work with the Baptist Convention of Maryland and Delaware, and Southern Baptists nationwide. Through the Cooperative Program of financial giving and our special missions offerings we support missionaries from Maryland to Timbuktu.

I encourage you to be an active part of this work. I encourage you to **Respond to the need:**

- 1) Pray, making yourself available to be used by God.**
- 2) Give financially to the support of Christian evangelism around the world.**
- 3) Polish your story so that it is just a couple of minutes long.** If the person you are sharing with asks questions, then you can give them more details. But don't try to tell every person every detail. Try to give just a summary in a minute or two.
- 4) Review the points of the good news regularly so you will be ready when an opportunity presents itself.**

Emmanuel Baptist Church wants to be a proclaiming community. Join with us in this important work.

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Maybe God has stirred your heart today as we went through the details of the good news. You realize that you have not fully believed all that makes up the good news. You have not believed that you needed a Savior and so have been trying to relate to God without Jesus as your Savior and Lord. It hasn't really worked, has it?

There is only one right path to God, God's way. His way is through Jesus. Today, won't you choose to believe the good news about Jesus and become one of His followers? Pray the prayer at the end of the outline. Give yourself to Jesus this morning.