

Welcome

Matt's Buddhism story

Message

Today is the final Sunday of Epiphany. Epiphany celebrates the God came not just for us, but for the whole world. Appropriately, then, our Epiphany series this year is called Good News for a Change. We're talking about how to talk about Jesus... with anyone. The \$20 word for this is Evangelism, and it's a word with enough baggage to make just about anyone break out in a nervous sweat. Whether you've been preached at or sat through those classes on how to preach at people, Evangelism conjures to mind that combative, confrontational, in-your-face kind of approach, or maybe just having no idea how to talk about Jesus with people we really care about.

Throughout this series, we've explored a lot of our misconceptions about Evangelism, and found it can be a lot more fun than we would've imagined. We began by talking about what the Gospel even is - that it means "Good News". Then we spent some time asking how God is good news - both in our own lives and in the lives of people we care about. Next, we explored how to translate the good news out of our language into the world of the person we're talking to. We spent several weeks working out what it looks like to translate the Good News into the language of those in our lives, and how to avoid insider jargon. Last week, we considered how we navigate people who are resistant or even outright hostile to Jesus.

Today, at the close of this series, we're going to get to where the rubber meets the road and ask the question: What's keeping us from doing it? The reality is that we can have the best understanding of Jesus' good news possible, be fluent in however many cultural languages we want, and yet still not share Jesus' good news with those around us.

There're a lot of reasons, but mostly in my experience, it boils down to fear. We're afraid of what they'll think of us if we turn the conversation to spiritual things - we don't want to be labelled a Bible-thumper or holy roller. Or maybe we're afraid of our own limitations, afraid they'll turn the conversation to questions we're not competent to answer. They know us too well to take us seriously when we talk about faith. Or it's a personality thing - we're shy or introverted or we don't do serious.

We want to wait for a pivotal circumstance to draw that person to us - some sort of calamity or tragedy that makes them turn to faith.

Which is pretty messed up when you get right down to it, right? But the reality is that most of us are afraid to share the good news about Jesus because we're afraid it'll be too awkward.

[Scripture Slide] Turn with me in your Bibles to Luke 9. The final Sunday of Epiphany is Transfiguration Sunday, when we mark a strange story in the middle of Jesus' ministry. Luke uses it as a pivot point for Jesus. Until this point in Luke's story, Jesus and his disciples have been traveling around the Galilee - the Northern part of the country. And right before this, Jesus has asked the disciples if they've figured out

who he is yet. Peter announces that he believes Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah, and Jesus confirms he's right.

It's as though that's what Jesus has been waiting for. As soon as Peter says that, Jesus tells them they have to head for Jerusalem, and that when they get there, he's going to be crucified and raised from the dead.

Put yourselves in the shoes of Peter and his friends. That's a hard pill to swallow - that the Messiah your people have waited ages for is finally here, but that he's going to be *killed*. And then resurrected? I get their skepticism.

So I wonder if that's why the next thing that happens is the story of the transfiguration. Let's read and work through it together, beginning in verse 28:

About eight days later Jesus took Peter, John, and James up on a mountain to pray.

That 'eight days later' is a strange detail, but it's a big clue to what's going on here: early Christians celebrated Resurrection Sunday as an eighth day. A week has seven days, so by calling Easter an eighth day, they tied Jesus' resurrection to new creation. Easter is the first day of a new creation week. So when Luke says the Transfiguration happened 'eight days later', he's specifically tying what's about to happen to Jesus' resurrection. Think of this like a sneak preview of Easter.

And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was transformed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly, two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared and began talking with Jesus. They were glorious to see. And they were speaking about his exodus from this world, which was about to be fulfilled in Jerusalem.

Moses and Elijah aren't just big celebrities. They're the two prophets many Jewish folks thought were going to accompany the Messiah (in fact, a lot of people thought John the Baptizer was Elijah reborn). So resurrection, heralds of the end of the age... this is getting intense.

Peter and the others had fallen asleep. When they woke up, they saw Jesus' glory and the two men standing with him. As Moses and Elijah were starting to leave, Peter, not even knowing what he was saying, blurted out, "Master, it's wonderful for us to be here! Let's make three shelters as memorials—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

Okay full disclosure: I have no idea why the NLT translates this word here as "memorials". It's one of the worst words I can think of. The actual Greek there is 'tabernacles', which were portable temples.

What Peter is doing here is a natural religious impulse (and I love how thoughtless it is for him - he just blurts it out): he wakes up to see this amazing, sacred experience and he wants to put up some shelters, some tents. He wants to camp here, to stay a while. To bask in the holiness of the moment.

Friends, I'm not sure there's a better story to illustrate our anxiety toward evangelism than this right here. Peter and his friends are on the mountaintop with Jesus.

Safe, secure and steeped in a powerful religious experience.

At the bottom of the mountain is only Jerusalem and the Cross. Suffering, pain, death.

So of course Peter wants to stay put. To stay wrapped in the warm nest of safety with Jesus, Moses and Elijah.

But that's not the plan. Jesus didn't come to hang out in the safety of the mountaintop. Jesus came to rescue us all.

But even as he was saying this, a cloud overshadowed them, and terror gripped them as the cloud covered them. Then a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, my Chosen One. Listen to him." When the voice finished, Jesus was there alone. They didn't tell anyone at that time what they had seen. -- Luke 9:28-36

We opened this series at Jesus' baptism, where God told Jesus, "You are my beloved son." Now God speaks for Peter and the other disciples: "Jesus is my son, my Chosen. Do what he says."

What's ahead for them is going to be strange. It will stretch the limits of the faith they've known, the faith that wanted a conquering Messiah. It's going to get weird, to put it lightly.

But they can't stay on the mountain. They have to go into the world, following Jesus, to be the good news the world needs.

We're here today because Jesus left the mountain.

Who will be here tomorrow because we leave the places we're comfortable and follow Jesus into faith?

This whole series has been designed to equip us to do exactly that: to step out of our comfort zone and to risk sharing good news with our friends, family, neighbors, coworkers.

So here, in this holy place, as we prepare to leave this mountain top, let's walk through what it looks like for us to be good news.

First, we begin with prayer. We ask God who God is calling us to share good news with. This is an essential first step: God is already at work in the lives of those around us. God is already preparing them to hear the good news we have to share. So we need to begin by asking God to guide our partnership. They might be close - friends, family, coworkers. They might be acquaintances - neighbors, social media

connections, someone you see regularly at a coffee shop. It's not going to be everyone. But it is going to be someone. Do you know who they are?

Do you know the names of the people God is inviting you to share with?

The next question is, "What are their deepest needs, concerns and questions?" Again and again, we saw Jesus start where people were, whether it was turning water into wine, sharing a story about a farmer or meeting a woman coming to a well to get water.

Spirituality is the deepest, most intimate part of our lives, so most of us aren't going to just open that up. Which is fine (and good actually) - you don't want to share the deepest parts of yourself with just anyone. But, as we've seen in this series, our loves, needs and questions are a pathway to those places. So do you know those people God is calling you to well enough to know what they care about?

The next two questions are where it gets the most interesting. First, we ask, "What signal will be best to send my message?" Again, Jesus wasn't shy about using all kinds of methods to reach people. He told stories, he did miracles, he held debates. What about those friends of yours? Are they into movies? Do they prefer small group discussions? Would a setting like this be best for them?

We're all different, so our evangelism has to be different. What you're asking here is how your friend likes to learn and communicate, and you're committing to speak their language.

Which brings us to the next question: How can I better learn their language? Do you know the things they love well enough to spot how God is at work in them? Maybe that's Brony culture. Maybe it's another religion, like Matt's Buddhist friend we opened with. Maybe they're a historian or a car person. How can you translate the good news into language they speak, rather than expecting them to learn our religious jargon?

This brings us back to prayer. As you pray for those people God has laid on your spirit, pray that God would create specific chances for you to share the good news.

It is this movement that truly takes us off the mountaintop. Everything else we've done so far can be done at a distance, at arm's length. But by asking God to create these opportunities, we're committing ourselves to step into their lives and be good news with our words and our works.

The prayer can be simple: "God, please give me an opportunity to share the good news with Ted in the next few days."

Once we begin to pray, we have to be on the lookout for that chance. Because it will come. And when it does, we have to be ready.

When we feel that gentle nudge, we have to step out. That's why it's so important for us to be prayerful and practicing everything we've discussed in this series.

Because to share Jesus with people is to love them. We love them enough to care about what they care about. We love them enough to speak their language. We love them enough to pay attention to how God is present with them in their lives. We love them enough to point that out.

And we love them enough to sacrifice our comfort for their good.

We love them because all of this is how God loves us. We love because God loved us first.

Communion + Examen

[Communion Slide] Communion is how God loves us.

1. Who is God inviting me to share Jesus with?
2. What's one concrete step I can take to be prepared this week?

Assignment + Blessing

Take the risk. Share Jesus this week!