

Telling It Like It Is

The Rev. Glenda
Simpkins Hoffman

Acts 2:37-42

Sermon Series:
Gospel in Life

What is the most important thing in the universe? Putting our confidence in Jesus and living with him in the present kingdom.

This summer, I realized I needed to get a new phone and calendar system. I spent months thinking about it, doing some research, talking to others about what might be helpful to me in my life and work. In the process, I discovered that iPhone users are extremely effective and enthusiastic salespeople. Many were eager to share with me about how easy it is to use an iPhone, how it makes life so much simpler, communication more accessible, and how useful the many features truly are.

I know that Pastor Pete shared a few weeks ago how a phone can become idolatrous if it becomes an excessive desire or takes the place of God in our lives, and you may think I have crossed that line, but I want you to see the pattern here. I got an iPhone because I believed it would help me with my life and work. But here's the thing—getting the phone wasn't the end but only the beginning. Even though I have a phone, there is still more to learn to really utilize and enjoy this interactive device. And I am now a part of the fellowship of the phone. There are others who enjoy the phone and can show me how to use it. But that doesn't change the fact that I

still have to know what it can do so I can utilize it effectively; nobody can do that for me. Many feel my experience is incomplete until I download Angry Birds or Fruit Ninjas, but I'm pretty sure I personally won't be making use of those. And to my surprise, I recently had the joy of sharing some of what I know with others and helping them learn how to use their phone, even though I have had the phone and been a part of the fellowship of the phone for only a month.

I have to admit, I like my new phone, but I have to tell you like it is. I've been thinking about how many people think the iPhone is the most important thing in the universe. Many spend a lot of time and money learning about and using their iPhones. They are eager and enthusiastic about inviting others into the fun and fellowship of the phone.

But friends, the iPhone is not the most important thing in the universe. It could be any other device or experience. What is the most important thing in the universe? Putting our confidence in Jesus and living with him in the present kingdom. This is the good news, and it is so much better than anything we could have or

***“You are a never-ceasing spiritual being with an eternal destiny in God’s great universe.”
- Dallas Willard***

experience in life. The good news in Jesus Christ is truly life changing. But how many of us really recognize the need for the good news; believe in the beauty, goodness and love of God in Jesus Christ; know and live this good news in the course of our everyday lives; and are truly willing to share this good news by inviting people into the most important thing going on in the universe? I am going to tell you like it is: we won’t share the good news with others until we have come to recognize, believe, know and live this good news in Jesus Christ ourselves. So let’s explore what this means.

In order to tell it like it is, we have to recognize the need for the good news. If someone asked us, “Who are you?”, I suspect that most of us would answer that we are a spouse, parent, banker, secretary, an American or resident of Northern Virginia. These may all be true and are not insignificant, but the truth is our view of ourselves is influenced more by a worldly perspective than a Christian one. Our true identity is that we are children of God, citizens of the kingdom, and image bearers of God and messengers of His love. Dallas Willard says, “You are a never-ceasing spiritual being with an eternal destiny in God’s great universe.”

C.S. Lewis has a wonderful essay entitled *The Weight of*

Glory, He concludes his essay with this thought:

It may be possible for each to think too much of his own potential glory hereafter; it is hardly possible for him to think too often or too deeply about that of his neighbor. The load, or weight, or burden of my neighbor’s glory should be laid daily on my back, a load so heavy that only humility can carry it, and the backs of the proud will be broken. It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no *ordinary* people.

Do you see people that way? Learning to see people for who they really are has a dramatic effect on how we respond in many situations. We will not be as impatient with sales clerks or

This is the good news: Put your confidence in Jesus and live with him as his disciple now in the present kingdom of God.

other drivers on the road. We will be more kind and loving to everyone we encounter because they are people who are loved by God, made in His image, and with the potential to reflect His glory. People matter to God—so much so that He “sent his only Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.”

Peter and the other disciples we read about in Acts 2 recognized the need for the gospel, and that is why they preached and ministered with the passion that they did, and the impact was that 3,000 people believed in the person of Jesus Christ and were baptized. That’s amazing!

In order to tell it like it is, we also have to believe the good news. That doesn’t just mean they gave some kind of intellectual assent to a propositional truth. Nor does it mean they were merely dipped in water. They put their confidence in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord—the one who created and redeemed them. And they became immersed in the Trinitarian reality of God by becoming immersed in the physical expression of the kingdom of God on earth—the church—the fellowship of believers.

There is a misunderstanding about salvation. Some people believe salvation is obtaining forgiveness of sins and getting

their ticket to heaven. Others think salvation is believing the right doctrine, living a good life, or caring for the oppressed. These are all important things, but they are not the essence of the good news. Salvation is about deliverance from being an enemy of God to being a friend and follower of Christ. This is the good news: Put your confidence in Jesus and live with him as his disciple now in the present kingdom of God. That’s what the people we read about in Acts did, and their lives were never the same.

Do you ever think about how your life is different because of your belief in Jesus? I have recently been reflecting on my own journey of faith, and it’s amazing to think how much my life has changed. I was a shy, fearful, anxiety-ridden person, driven beyond words. There was an underlying insecurity that drove me to prove myself to me, other people, even God. I was driven to try to be good enough to measure up to my own expectations and even those I thought God had of me. And to tell you the truth, though I had every reason to be happy, I really wasn’t. I know that if Christ had not come into my life and continued his faithful work on me, I would have been relationally and spiritually bankrupt—lonely, isolated, cynical, and even depressed.

But faith is meant to be a living and growing interactive relationship with the God who created and redeemed us for Himself.

Now I'm still a work in progress, but God in His grace and mercy reached down and changed me and the trajectory of my life. I recognized the need and I believed—put my confidence in Jesus do to for me what only he could do—and he did it.

Do you *really* believe the good news? Have you *really* put your confidence in Jesus to live with him as his disciple now in the present kingdom of God? How is your life changing and reflecting your confidence in Jesus?

In order to tell it like it is, we also have to know and live the good news in the midst of our everyday, ordinary lives. Faith is giving as much of yourself as you know to as much of God as you know, and there is a starting point. But faith is meant to be a living and growing interactive relationship with the God who created and redeemed us for Himself. Acts 2 gives a dynamic picture of what it means to know and live the good news: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." These young believers were disciples who were seeking to learn all that Jesus had commanded. So they listened to those who knew the Scripture and could teach because they wanted to learn how to live in obedience to Christ.

I'm so grateful to be a church that gives Bibles to our third graders, and especially today because my son is one of those receiving this gift of grace. But that Bible will be no good if it merely sits on a shelf. This interactive relationship with God needs to be nurtured through time spent with God in study and prayer and learning from others who know more than we do. And that's not just for third graders but for all of us. And it's not just for Sunday School or weekly worship services. Discipleship is a way of life in which we intentionally arrange our lives to know and live the good news. Discipleship is learning to live my life as Jesus would live it if he were I. We never stop growing in knowing and living the good news.

Acts 2:44 goes on to say, "All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need." They knew this was not an individual faith but a community endeavor, and so they hung around in small house groups to see what it looked like and prayed together. They wanted to live this good news of God's generosity together and share it with others.

These disciples truly loved each other and cared for each other. It wasn't something they

*We are called
to live in
Christ
together for
the world.*

had to do. Their faith in Christ was so real, so radiant, so renewing, they wanted to share with each other because this good news—this joyful, abundant life in Christ—is contagious. Others saw the love and kindness and generosity pouring out of this community, and they wanted to be a part of it. This community was witnessing an alternative lifestyle that was so contrary, so radical and remarkable that “day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.”

The unity and generosity that was theirs is not something we have to conjure up. It is ours, too, because we have been immersed in the love, unity and generosity of our Triune God. We can and are called to reflect that reality as we learn, grow, and live the good news of our faith. As we reflect on an alternative reality, many will be attracted to faith in Christ.

I hope this is beginning to sound familiar. We are called to live in Christ together for the world. We have to believe and know and grow in the good news ourselves in order to live in Christ, but we also live the good news together with others, which serves as a witness to others until the whole world knows.

Finally, in order to tell it like it is, we are called to share the good news. Of course, we can only do that as we our-

selves believe, know and live the good news. I want to give you a very simple way of thinking about witnessing that everyone can do and reflects the essence of Acts 2. It is simply three words: Prayer—Care—Share. I recognize that many people feel anxiety about sharing the good news because they don’t think they know enough or they are afraid of imposing on people. To be a witness simply means we share what we have seen and heard and experienced and invite people into the abundant kingdom life that is found only in Christ. We don’t have to push anything on people or convince them. We simply share the joy and love and peace that we have found in Christ. People who have known Christ only a day can share what they know and have experienced.

As in everything we do, we must begin with prayer. I urge you to begin praying regularly for those around you who do not know Christ. Those who are going through the study guide connected with our sermon series have already been challenged to identify five people in your sphere of influence or web of relationships held in common: perhaps the neighbors—the people who live in the five or ten dwellings next to yours and across the street or hallway, your coworkers, schoolmates, those you share interests with, or simply friends or family.

At the very least, every one of us can practice the 1-1-1 principle. That is pray, for one person who does not know Christ once a day for one minute.

Some people tell me they don't have any friends who are not Christians, but we all have someone we see on a regular basis whether that is a hair-dresser, mechanic, or store clerk that we know and could pray for. At the very least, every one of us can practice the 1-1-1 principle. That is, pray for one person who does not know Christ once a day for one minute.

Second, the best way to attract people to Jesus is to care for them. God will show you ways to cultivate kindness through warm-hearted acts of hospitality and friendliness that convey the love and care of God through you. First and foremost, this will mean we will have to make time. We are busy people with places to go and things to do, but there is nothing more important than loving and caring for the people around us. So, eliminate hurry from your life, because it is impossible to love and care for others when we are in a hurry. This is a hard one, and I confess I am still working on it myself, but it is important to make time to get to know people, pray for them and care for them. You can build personal relationships and even get people together for coffee or a meal. Many of us have the opportunity to cultivate community in our neighborhoods by participating in block parties, hanging out on the

corner with neighbors waiting for the bus, or taking a meal to someone. It's not possible to care for everyone, so ask God to help you identify a few that he wants you to make time to care for on a regular basis.

And finally, as natural opportunities arise, you can share the good news with others. In 1 Peter 3:15 we read, "Always be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence." Each of us can think through how we came to know Christ and how he has changed our lives and so be ready to share when a door opens. Each of us can invite others to join us for worship or some fellowship activity or upcoming event at the church like a Bridgepoint lunch or Great Banquet weekend. The Advent and Christmas season is just around the corner, and opportunities abound, and people are often more open. I encourage you to plan in advance in order to invite others. Or you may want to plan an event in your home or with a small group.

These are just some ideas, but God will give you ideas to share your faith in ways that are natural and unique and creative. But the point is that as we embrace and live the good news in our own lives and in community, the light of God's love and presence will shine in through

***Believing,
knowing,
living and
sharing the
good news is
what life is all
about.***

our words and deeds and be a witness to others. And we'll see how the love of Christ can transform the world around us!

Telling it like it is is not a burden, it's a joy. Believing, knowing, living and sharing the good news is what life is all about. Telling it like it is simply means asking people this simple question: Aren't you worried about missing out on the most important thing that is happening in human history? What's that? Putting your confidence in Jesus Christ and living with him as his disciple in his kingdom now and for all eternity. Now *that* is worth telling it like it is.