

Everyday Church

Reflection

Take time together to read Revelation 7v9-17.

As you read reflect on who Christ is and the salvation we have received through him. Respond by praising and giving thanks to God.

Everyday Evangelism

Read 1 Peter 3v15-16

Evangelism Experienced

Evangelism is like an extreme sport for most of us: It sounds a great idea, but we don't really have the stomach for it! We admire gifted evangelists who can 'start up' conversations about Jesus as they wait in the check-out queue, or 'turn' conversations to spiritual matters with their friends. Any attempts on our part seem forced and leave both parties feeling awkward and uncomfortable. In fact the whole notion of evangelism makes us feel useless and guilty. We try and fail. Give up and feel guilty. Only to try again, fail again, give up again and feel guilty again.

Fear Factor

But perhaps the most common struggle with evangelism is fear. We fear what people will think and we fear what we will say. And so we do nothing.

Fear is what paralysed the early Christians: *'Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear do not be frightened.'* 1 Peter 3v13-14

Being a minority and living life on the margins left the Christians afraid of what people would do and what they would think. Fear was driving them underground. Instead they are encouraged to *'live life among the pagans'* (2v12) and *'always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that you have'* (3v15) That's easier said than done, so how do we deal with our problem of fear?

Loving Jesus as Saviour.

Enthusiasm for evangelism doesn't begin with evangelism at all. It begins with an enthusiasm for Jesus. My willingness to speak about Jesus arises from my delight in Jesus. (Timmis & Chester) What ever you love the most you will talk about the most so it makes sense that if we love Jesus we will talk about Jesus in everyday conversations. But that does not come naturally – our natural desire is to love everything but Jesus, so we need to remind ourselves of the gospel each and everyday. That's how Peter starts his letter, (1v3-9) he reminds them of Jesus and their salvation – new birth, living hope, resurrection, inheritance, shielded by faith in trials, refined in suffering, Jesus return and eternal salvation. As we spend time looking back to the cross and looking forward to eternity we are enthused about Jesus and will love him more.

Living with Jesus as Lord.

'Do not fear what they fear, do not be frightened. But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord.' (3v14b-15a). Our hearts are not just organs for pumping blood around the body. In the bible the heart represents the totality of our inner selves. We think, feel, fear, desire and love with our hearts. So it's important that our hearts are ruled rightly. If Jesus rules our heart then our desires will be his desires and his love will be our love. To set apart Christ as Lord is to live under his rule and authority and be motivated by his priorities, such as speaking about the greatness and goodness of Jesus. We need to do this each day as

we exercise repentance and faith. Repenting of where we ignore Jesus rule in our lives and trusting that living under Jesus is what's best for us in our lives.

Loving Jesus as saviour and living with Jesus as Lord, is the way to deal with the fear we all have about evangelism.

Question:

How do you feel about evangelism generally? How can we practise loving Jesus as Saviour and living with Jesus as Lord?

Evangelism Today

Ireland is fast becoming a secular culture which means we can no longer assume that people understand a Christian culture. People are biblically illiterate and are confused by concepts like sin, guilt, faith and salvation. In fact with an ever decreasing attendance at church (>50%) people will understand God in very different ways. In response we need to adjust our approach from invitation and presentation to one of story telling.

First most evangelism is done on the assumption that people understand Christianity as we do, so we invite people to special services or make a four point gospel presentation and invite them to pray the sinners prayer. While the content may be right, the means or method does not always relate. Evangelism is not about a decision it is more like a process and so we need to give people time to think and reflect. Rather than get people to cross the bridge in one go we need to help people towards the bridge a step at a time.

Second evangelism is often about answering questions people are not always asking. There are not too many people coming up and asking 'How can I be saved?' or 'How can I deal with my problem of sin?' These are great questions but people are much more likely to ask, 'How am I going to cope without a job?' or 'What can I do with my son he always wants to be out at night?' or 'Why am I always ending up in a bad relationship?'

They might not be very spiritual questions but this is what everyday life looks like. We must learn to speak the unchanging gospel into these everyday life situations.

Speaking Hope

'Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have' (3v15). As Christians we do have a great hope. Peter introduced this theme in chapter one. *'In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead' (1v3).* Because of the gospel our hope is not some dream but a living reality, something we can experience today in the midst of life's frustrations and struggles. Our hope is anchored in the past: Jesus died. Our hope remains in the present: Jesus rose. Our hope is guaranteed: Jesus will return.

So we do have a *Hope* we can speak into the lives of those we engage with everyday. Rather than give them answers to questions they are not asking we can give them *Hope* in the midst of their daily life. That *Hope* is the gospel story.

When it says *'always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks...'* it does not mean we remain silent until someone asks us a direct question about our faith. It means we speak the hope of Christ as people ask questions about their own lives and the world in which they live – and everyone has these kind of questions.

Question:

What are the kinds of questions people are asking or dealing with? In what way do they lack hope?

The Gospel Story

To speak hope into people's lives we must speak the gospel story. The gospel story can be described in four parts. Creation. Fall. Redemption. New Creation. Timmis and Chester point out that these four parts of the gospel story intersect with our own life's story. People will talk about who they are and what they are meant to be (creation). They will talk about what is wrong with them or what is wrong with the world: somebody or something will be blamed (fall). They will also have a sense of what needs to happen for things to be put right (redemption) and they will have a dream of what their ideal life and world should be like (new creation).

Suppose your friend has just lost their job. The underlying question whether expressed or not is: 'How am I going to cope without a job?' Their concern is security, provision for their family, paying bills and a sense of self worth. The last thing on their mind is sin, guilt judgement, Jesus and faith. In fact to start talking about these things would show a complete lack of understanding on your part and would make Jesus sound totally irrelevant to their crisis. But we still want to speak the hope of the gospel into their lives. Using the four categories above (creation, fall, redemption, new creation) we can better understand their situation which will in turn help us speak the gospel of hope to them.

Example:

I want a job, so that I will be like everyone else, happy and content. (Creation)
The government and the greedy bankers are to blame for all this mess. (Fall)
We need to tax the rich, have new leaders and create job opportunities. (Redemption)
My family are safe and secure and I have something for my retirement. (New creation)

Now consider the Gospel story.

God made us in his image to know him, to be like him and to love him. This is where I find true happiness and contentment. Even without a job in Jesus I am treasured loved and valued. (Creation)

We are all to blame for the mess in our lives and in the world for rejecting God's loving rule over us. We are all greedy and have misused what we have. Rather than obey God's rule we want everyone to follow our rules. (Fall)

God restores his rule by sending his son Jesus and graciously enables us to live under his rule by paying the price of our judgement on the cross. New leaders and governments will not change anything significantly – people and systems will always fail us. (Redemption)

God will recreate this broken world ending all injustice bringing health and wealth to all who have faith in Christ. A time will come when we can't work, our children will leave and we will get sick and die. (New creation)

Of course even with the gospel story our friend is still without a job, however by speaking the gospel story into their lives we have brought 'living hope', even in the midst of unemployment. We may not tell the whole gospel story at once, we might not even get it in order, the important point is we are beginning to speak the gospel of hope in a way that relates to ordinary people in everyday life. We must also remember that if God's has provided us with work we should be compassionate and help our friend who is in need. Who knows such loving compassion might result in a question about why we would do such a thing! The answer of course is the gospel story.

Question:

Using your own questions above think through how the gospel story might relate?

Evangelism in Love

'Do not fear what they fear, do not be frightened. But in your hearts set apart 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.' (3v15)

What ever opportunities arise and what ever questions are asked all our speaking must be done with gentleness and respect. We are not trying to crush people with our clever arguments or look down on them as inferior. Our goal is to love those we are speaking to. To be gentle is to get along side the other person and help them to understand. This may take a long time and may mean many conversations before the penny drops. To be respectful is to speak humbly even if we do not agree or think they are wrong. Remember our role is to speak the gospel story into the lives of others as they ask questions about life and the world. God's role is to convince them and change them through the truth of his gospel.

'Trust the holy Spirit, the ultimate evangelist, to work on their hearts. He alone persuades people of truth, convicting of sin, righteousness and judgement. He opens blind eyes, melts hard hearts. While you are silent the Holy Spirit is at work and he will gently but surely accomplish what God purposes in a persons life.' (Timmis and Chester)

Response.

Pray through what we have learned and pray that our friends and community will come to Christ.