

LOVE IN SHARING

Richard Hornbuckle was driving 2 friends across the Sunshine Skyway which spans Tampa Bay. It was 7:38 am on May 9th, 1980. It had started to rain and visibility was almost zero. What Mr. Hornbuckle did not know was that moments before he reached the bridge a freighter named SUMMIT VENTURE had slammed into the #2 South pier knocking out a large section of the bridge. Several cars had already gone over the edge when Mr Hornbuckle, seeing what had happened, hit his brakes stopping just 14 inches from the edge. A loaded greyhound bus was not as fortunate. It didn't see the signal to stop and went over the edge killing everyone on board. Millions in this world are heading for a terrible fate. It is our job to try to tell them before it is too late.

2 Kings 7:3-8 Now there were four men with leprosy at the entrance of the city gate. They said to each other, "Why stay here until we die? 4 If we say, 'We'll go into the city'--the famine is there, and we will die. And if we stay here, we will die. So let's go over to the camp of the Arameans and surrender. If they spare us, we live; if they kill us, then we die." 5 At dusk they got up and went to the camp of the Arameans. When they reached the edge of the camp, not a man was there, 6 for the Lord had caused the Arameans to hear the sound of chariots and horses and a great army, so that they said to one another, "Look, the king of Israel has hired the Hittite and Egyptian kings to attack us!" 7 So they got up and fled in the dusk and abandoned their tents and their horses and donkeys. They left the camp as it was and ran for their lives. 8 The men who had leprosy reached the edge of the camp and entered one of the tents. They ate and drank, and carried away silver, gold and clothes, and went off and hid them. They returned and entered another tent and took some things from it and hid them also.

Today we are concluding our series I love My Church. We have looked through this series at ways in which we can demonstrate love for one another through community, serving and giving. The last way that we demonstrate love is through sharing our faith with others who do not yet know Christ.

1. Condemned by our Sin

The context of this story is important. The nation of Syria had sent a huge army against the nation of Israel. The army had laid siege to the city of Samaria.

2 Kings 6:24-29 Some time later, Ben-Hadad king of Aram mobilized his entire army and marched up and laid siege to Samaria. 25 There was a great famine in the city; the siege lasted so long that a donkey's head sold for eighty shekels of silver, and a quarter of a cab of seed pods for five shekels. 26 As the king of Israel was passing by on the wall, a woman cried to him, "Help me, my lord the king!" 27 The king replied, "If the LORD does not help you, where can I get help for you? From the threshing floor? From the winepress?" 28 Then he asked her, "What's the matter?" She answered, "This woman said to me, 'Give up your son so we may eat him today, and tomorrow we'll eat my son.' 29 So we cooked my son and ate him. The next day I said to her, 'Give up your son so we may eat him,' but she had hidden him."

Because of the siege, there was no food in the city. The people were starving. Things had gotten so bad that the people were resorting to cannibalism. We see in this story that two women had killed and eaten one of their children. When was the last time you thought to yourself, "I think I'll cook one of my children from dinner tonight." Things have to be very bad to resort to something like that.

If things were that bad within the city, just imagine how bad the situation was for these 4 lepers that were outside the city gate.

Lepers were outcasts. They begged for food and lived off the generosity of others. If the healthy people within the city walls were starving to death, just imagine how bad it was for these 4 men.

Without Christ in our lives, we are in bad shape. The bible says that the wages of sin is death, but do you truly believe that? Do you truly believe that without Christ you would be heading for hell? Part of sharing your faith is to first understand the need. We have to be convinced that without Christ we are eternally lost.

In order to help a person find their way, you have to first convince them that they are lost. There is an old saying that you can lead a horse to water but you can't make it drink. Our job as believers is not to make people drink, it is to make them thirsty. It is helping them to understand their need.

Sometimes we don't understand the danger. Story of me and the snake. It reminds me of the story of the boy and the gasoline. The boy could not understand why his father had reacted so strongly. The father understood the danger and was so happy when the boy was safe.

Back in 1980 during the time of the Iranian Hostage Crisis, Greg Livingstone was asked to give a "missions minute" at a large church on the East Coast. Since he had only one minute to speak, he decided to ask them only two questions. The first one was, "How many of you are praying for the 52 Americans hostages being held in Iran?" 4000 hands went straight up and he said, "Praise the Lord! Now, put your hands down and let me ask you another question...How many of you are praying for the 42 million Iranians being held hostage to Islam?" This rebuke to the church by Livingstone served as a wake up call for that church and helped launch a prayer ministry for Muslims which helped birth a prayer movement during the 1990s. As a result, more Muslims are coming to Christ now in Iran than ever before.

2. Compelled by our Salvation

These 4 lepers were faced an impossible situation. They said to each other "Why stay here until we die? If we say, 'We'll go into the city'--the famine is there, and we will die. And if we stay here, we will die. So let's go over to the camp of the Arameans and surrender. If they spare us, we live; if they kill us, then we die." Their only hope was in the unknown.

What they did not know was that God has caused the enemy to flee. The enemy had run away and left all their supplies behind. When the lepers reached the edge of the camp they entered a tents and found food, silver, gold and clothes. Then they went into another tent and then another. Only then did it dawn on them what was happening.

2 Kings 7:9-10 Then they said to each other, "We're not doing right. This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves. If we wait until daylight, punishment will overtake us. Let's go at once and report this to the royal palace." 10 So they went and called out to the city gatekeepers and told them, "We went into the Aramean camp and not a man was there--not a sound of anyone--only tethered horses and donkeys, and the tents left just as they were."

To have kept all that food for themselves and not told the city would have been terrible. If you had the cure for cancer and you did not share it, you would be a monster. To let people die and not help when you are able to do so is terrible.

2 Corinthians 5:14 For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.

Christ's love compels us. I am not ashamed of the Gospel because I understand that it is the power of life over death. It rescues people. This is why I am also not ashamed to share my faith with others.

DT Niles once said "evangelism is just one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread"

We give because we have first received. Sharing your faith is not trying to push your own beliefs on others. It is not about tolerance or having a lack of respect for others. We share our faith because we know that without Christ we are lost and to NOT share our faith would be unloving.

A pastor was talking to the children about sheep. He said that sheep weren't very clever and needed lots of guidance and that a shepherd's job was to stay close to the sheep, protect them from wild animals and keep them from wandering off and doing foolish things that would get them hurt or killed. He pointed to the children in the room and said that they were the sheep and needed lots of guidance. Then the minister put a hand on his heart and said to the children, "If you are the sheep then who is the shepherd?" He was pretty obviously indicating himself. A silence of a few seconds followed. Then a young visitor said, "Jesus, Jesus is the shepherd." The young minister, obviously caught by surprise, said to the boy, "Well, then, who am I?" The little boy frowned thoughtfully and then said with a shrug "I guess you must be a sheep dog."

3. Commissioned by our Saviour

When the lepers went and told the gatekeepers of the city what they had seen, the city officials at first did not believe what they were told. It was only after they had gone and investigated the situation for themselves that they were satisfied that the enemy was gone.

2 Kings 7:14-16 So they selected two chariots with their horses, and the king sent them after the Aramean army. He commanded the drivers, "Go and find out what has happened." 15 They followed them as far as the Jordan, and they found the whole road strewn with the clothing and equipment the Arameans had thrown away in their headlong flight. So the messengers returned and reported to the king. 16 Then the people went out and plundered the camp of the Arameans...

Imagine these 4 lepers standing there. They knew the tremendous needs within the city. They also knew that the enemy had been defeated and that the food was there for the taking. How did they feel while the messengers went all the way down to the Jordan and back again? How does it feel to see people who are hurting and know that you have the answer but they refuse to accept it?

Likewise, there are many people today that have to see before they will believe. Words are often not enough. You can share the truth with people but what is most important is that they have an encounter with the living God. We need to be faithful to share the truth in love but then allow the Holy Spirit to do the work. God has commissioned us to go and sow.

2 Corinthians 5:18-20 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

We are called to go and sow. God's job is to make it grow. We need to be careful in how we present the truth. It is important that the messengers do not get in the way of the message.

A young man who drank a quart of soy sauce went into a coma and nearly died from an excess of salt in his body, according to a recent case report. The nineteen-year-old who drank the soy sauce after being dared by friends is the first person known to have deliberately overdosed on such a high amount of salt and survived with no lasting neurological problems.

Likewise, we are called to bring salt and light to our world so that they can experience the kingdom, not so that they can be blinded by the sun or OD on sodium. So the question we have to answer is: are we seasoning and shining, or are we blinding and gagging?

The story is told of a missionary to China who was in language school. The very first day of class the teacher entered the room and, without saying a word, walked down every row of students. Finally, still without saying a word, she walked around the room again. Then she came back and addressed the class. "Did you notice anything special about me?" she asked. Nobody could think of anything in particular. One student finally raised her hand. "I noticed that you had on a very lovely perfume," she said. The class chuckled. But the teacher said, "That was exactly my point.

You see, it will be a long time before any of you will be able to speak Chinese well enough to share the gospel with anyone in China. But even before you are able to do that, you can minister the sweet fragrance of Christ to these people by the quality of your lives. It is your lifestyle, lived out among the Chinese people, that will minister Christ to them long before you are able to say one word to them about personal faith in Jesus." It is like that with us as well. Though we may not be eloquent speakers, unbelievers we encounter will be ministered to by the Christ-likeness of our daily lives, if indeed we are Christ-like.

As a church our focus needs to be on the lost. That is our purpose. That is our mission. It must remain our primary focus.

Recently a leading church consultant conducted a survey. He surveyed members of nearly a thousand churches asking the question, "Why does the church exit?" The results? Of the church members surveyed, 89 percent said, "The church's purpose is to take care of my family's and my needs." For many, the role of the pastor is simply to keep the sheep who are already in the pen happy and not lose too many of them. Only 11 percent said, "The purpose of the church is to win the world for Jesus Christ." How tragic.

One of the ways that you can respond to this message is to get involved in our H2O course that is starting this week. H2O is a course designed specifically to introduce people to Jesus. Perhaps there is a friend that you know that might be interested in taking the class? The course starts this week and you can sign up at the ebooth after the service.

Maybe you've seen the famous sculpture "The Thinker." The statue was originally created in 1880 as part of Auguste Rodin's larger work 'The Gates of Hell', an ornamental door for a proposed Palace of Decorative Arts. What is the thinker thinking about? According to the artist "the Thinker" is sitting in mute amazement as he contemplates lost people in hell. When we come around the Lord's Table, we become "Thinkers" also. We contemplate the Body of Jesus that was broken for us and the blood that He shed for our forgiveness.

