

GOOD SUNDAYS CAN CHANGE YOUR ETERNITY

This week I was at a conference and heard a Pastor named Mark Hughes from Church on the Rock in Winnipeg tell this story. He and his wife love Kayaking. This past summer they decided to go to Lake of the Woods and Kayak around the Sable Islands in the south of the lake. For Kayakers, that is paradise. The problem is that there are no roads that get you close to them. He saw a road on Google Earth that he figured would be the best route. They set off, kayaks on the roof of their car dressed in beach clothes. After driving down endless gravel roads he came to a gate. There were a number of men standing around drinking coffee and smoking. He waved to them and no one said anything so he kept going. The road was in bad shape so they had to drive slow. After a long time the road ended at the bottom of a gravel pit. He managed to turn the car around and go back the way they came. Eventually they arrived back at the gate. He rolled down the window and asked one of the workmen how to get to the Sable Islands. The workman said "you have to go back to the main road and then head 4 kms west and then take that road to the end. This road only goes to the gravel pit."

What a great description of so many in this world today. They are looking for paradise but wind up in the pit. Mark Hughes said that the thing that bothered him the most about that day was not the fact that they got lost. It is the fact that he drove past all those workmen who just stood there drinking their coffee and smoking their cigarettes. They saw where he was heading, that he was lost and going the wrong way, but not one of them said anything to help him.

Today we are continuing in our series I Love Sundays. We have looked at why going to church (corporate worship) is important. We have looked at the fact that rest is important and that good Sundays make better Mondays. We have seen that good Sundays make stronger families. Today we want to talk about the fact that good Sundays can change your eternity.

Romans 1:14-17 I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. 15 That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome. 16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. 17 For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

1. I am obligated to PEOPLE – verse 14

I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish.

Romans 1:14 Everyone I meet -- it matters little whether they're mannered or rude, smart or simple-- deepens my sense of interdependence and obligation. (The Message)

The Greek word used here means indebted. Paul is saying here that he is eager to share the gospel with the people in Rome because he owes it to them. Why? Why is he indebted to the people of Rome? He had never even met them. Why was he so compelled to go? Because he had been saved and set free by Jesus.

Philippians 3:7-9 But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8 What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ-- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

What Paul had found in Christ was far greater than anything else he had ever found in religion or education or accomplishment or relationship. Nothing compared with the salvation he had found that day when Jesus met him on the road to Damascus. Paul was obligated to the people of Rome because he was obligated to Christ and desired to share with the people of Rome the truth and love and freedom that he had found himself. Like those workmen, he could not just stand there and say nothing.

A few years ago Whitney Houston died. Many different people either sang or spoke at her funeral service at the New Hope Baptist Church in Newark, New Jersey. One of those who spoke was actor, Kevin Costner, who co-starred with her in the movie "The Bodyguard." Kevin Costner started by saying that he and Whitney were very different people. He said that she is a woman and he is a man. She is black and he is white. However, they did have one thing in common. He said that they were both raised in the Baptist Church. He went on to tell about his life as a child in the Baptist church and compared it to Whitney's life growing up.

While it is true that Kevin Costner and Whitney Houston had a common heritage in the Baptist Church, they also had something else in common. They were both human beings on planet earth. All of us, whether we are male or female, old or young, rich or poor, black or white; all of us share the experience of being human. All of us were born and live in a broken world. We are all in the same boat, and that boat is sinking. All of us have sinned and fallen short. At one point Kevin Costner did mention that Whitney had stumbled in life. I guess that was his way of saying she had problems with drugs. Whether it is drugs or something else, all of us have stumbled in life. All of us are guilty and deserve death.

The good news of the gospel is that Jesus came to pay for our sins. In Christ we have been saved and set free. The reality of our salvation should make a difference in our lives.

Just a few weeks before Whitney Houston died, the cruise ship Costa Concordia struck a rock off the western coast of Italy. The ship filled with water quickly ran aground lying on her side in shallow water. 32 people died in the accident but more than 4000 survived. One eyewitness testimony said that when the ship first hit the rock it was chaotic and terrifying. For some people it was every man, woman and child for themselves! Some people pushed and shoved their way through the crowd, with no regard for anyone else but themselves. They were going to get off that ship ASAP and no one had better get in their way! Now on the other side of the coin there were some people who were very courteous and thoughtful of others. They helped people off the ship with no regards for their own safety. What would you have done?

Are you more interested in your own salvation or the salvation of others? Do you care about other people? Do you want to see people saved and come to a knowledge of the truth? We are obligated to care for others. We are obligated to try to get people to see the light of the gospel of Christ and be saved!

2. I am eager to PREACH – verse 15

That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome.

Paul says here that, because he is obligated to the people of Rome, he was anxious to preach to them. It is one thing to care about people, it is another thing to care enough to speak up and share the truth with them. This does not necessarily mean that God wants you to preach, simply that He wants you to share the hope that you have in Christ with others.

Suppose you lived in the States and the governor of your state gave you a pardon for a man that was about to be executed. You were asked to deliver that pardon. The governor told you, "I am giving you the honor of taking this pardon to the warden to see that this man is set free." What an amazing privilege that would be. Suppose you put that pardon in your pocket and said I'm going to deliver that pardon right away. However, you decided to go shopping, you cut your grass, you went golfing, you took a family vacation. One day you pick up the newspaper and read that the man who was given a pardon has been put to death and you had the pardon in your pocket all the time. How would you feel?

One of the easiest ways to share your faith is simply to invite someone to church. Many studies have been done which show that the vast majority of people who are not presently attending church would go to church if they were asked by a friend. Many people come to Christ by going to church. This is why we believe that good Sundays can change your eternity.

In that same message Mark Hughes told this story. A few years ago there was a man out jogging on Sunday morning. An old lady pulled up in a car next to him and said "get in and I will give you a ride." Not knowing why, she was asking him this, he got into the car. She drove down the street and then pulled into a church parking lot. The man objected saying that he did not go to church but the old lady just smiled and said you can come and sit with me. He went in and attended the service. At the end of the sermon Mark Hughes asked if anyone wanted to come to Christ and the man went forward to give himself to Jesus. The man's brother was part of that church and saw him brother going forward. He had tried witnessing to him many times in the past, so he was so happy to see his brother going forward.

He went up and hugged him. The pastor asked what had happened and the jogger told the story of the little old lady that had picked him up that morning. He asked him to point her out and he pointed to her. Mark realized it was his mother. He asked her later why she had picked up that man and she said, "well, I saw him running down the road and I figured he must be late for church so I offered to give him a ride." Mark told her he was just a jogger that was out for a run. She said, "well, I guess that was why he was sweating so much!"

The church was able to do what the brother had not. It all was the result of a simple invitation.

3. I am not ashamed of God's PLAN – verse 16

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

Paul says that he is not ashamed of the Gospel because he understands that it is a message that can change lives. When you find something of great value and worth you are eager to share it with others. If you watch a movie that you loved then it is easy to recommend that movie to others.

I heard the story of a man who was a drug addict and lived on the streets. He was saved and turned his life around, but the hard life he had lived showed on his face. He got a job driving a limousine. One day He was picking up a woman. As she was getting into his limousine and felt the need to witness to her. She was appalled at his looks. She said, "You should be ashamed of yourself". He said, "Mam, I'm am ashamed of myself - I am ashamed of so many things I have done in my life. However, the one thing I am not ashamed of is the GOSPEL. I am a lot like that fellow. I am ashamed of many, many things I have done in this life but I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

I think that the reason so many Christians today are not sharing their faith is that they themselves do not understand how wonderful the salvation they have been given truly is.

It could be that the greatest hindrance to evangelism today is the poverty of our own experience. --
Billy Graham

I just mentioned about inviting people to church. One of the reason that people do not invite others to church is because they themselves do not see the value in church. If you think that church is boring and irrelevant and you hate going yourself then you are certainly not going to want to invite your friends to come. Do you enjoy coming to church? Is it a burden or a blessing to you?

As pastors we try to do everything we can to make church a very positive experience. We try to make sure we give God the very best we have. As a pastor I try to always end the service on time, because I know that not doing so breaks expectations. At the heart of everything we do, we want to preach a simple gospel, that through Jesus there a way to be forgiven and set free.

Tim Keller once said, "Here's the gospel: you're more sinful than you ever dared believe; you're more loved than you ever dared hope."

Once the great Evangelist Billy Graham sent his New Testament to a book-binder and instructed him to write on the edge of the book "The New Testament"; the book-binder after binding the New Testament felt that the edge was too little to contain the full words "The New Testament" so he wrote "TNT". When Billy Graham came to collect the book, he at first felt offended that the book-binder did not write what he said. On a second thought, he exclaimed, "Indeed, this is God's TNT!" (TNT is Tri-Nitro-Toluene" an essential ingredient in all bombs)

One of the things that is always a challenge is to maintain an invitational culture within the church. Years ago we had the Alpha program. How many people here have gone through Alpha? In recent years we have not been running that program. We did the H2O program last year which was excellent, but the problem we have seen is that people, in large, are not bringing their non-Christian friends.

Last week I was at a meeting where the head of Alpha Canada was introducing the new Alpha course. They are hoping to start a new push for it in the fall of 2017. A generous donor from Canada has given 1 million dollars to advertise this campaign. Some of you may watch that show Running Wild with Bear Grylls. Bear Grylls was saved through an Alpha course. He is going to be part of this advertising campaign.

As a church we are planning to get involved with this. However, even with 20 million in advertising, people do not come to Alpha because they see it on a billboard. That may be helpful, but it is not the most important thing. The most important thing is that people from the church invite their non-Christian friends to come. We are going to be speaking a lot about developing a culture of invitation in the coming year!

4. I am an example of God's POWER – verse 17

For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

It is difficult to see what Paul is really trying to say here. I think the Message makes it more clear;

Romans 1:17 God's way of putting people right shows up in the acts of faith, confirming what Scripture has said all along: "The person in right standing before God by trusting him really lives." (The Message)

In other words, when people truly give themselves to Jesus it is evident to everyone around them through their transformed life. People can argue theology until they are blue in the face, but you cannot argue a transformed life.

In his book, *A Ready Defense*, Josh McDowell states: "You can laugh at Christianity; you can mock and ridicule it, but it works. If you decide to trust Christ, start watching your attitudes and actions, because Jesus Christ is in the business of changing lives."

Most people in Canada know what a BBQ is. Most of us have one sitting in our back yard. Some of you may even be planning on using one today. The BBQ is an amazing thing. It is not the BBQ itself that cooks the food, it is just the box that holds the heat. BBQs are designed to be used with a tank of propane, but it is not the propane that cooks the food. It is just the fuel. What cooks the food is the fire, and that fire requires a spark.

We can have the most beautiful church building in the world, but that is just the box. We can have the most inspired worship and the Spirit of God can be powerfully manifest, that is just the fuel. What is required is the spark and that means YOU! You are the spark. It is when ordinary people just like you step out in faith and pray and share their faith, or invite someone out to church, or bring someone to an Alpha program. God is able to take that spark and use it to change the eternity of another person.

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because I know what the good news of Jesus has done in my life. I am so happy that years ago someone took the time to share it with me. I am not ashamed of the Gospel because I know that Jesus is in the business of changing lives. I know what God has done in my own heart. In some small way I know that I am an example of God's grace and power. I know that God can change your heart as well.