

YeGoing with Good News
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Matt 28:18-20 ¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Acts 1:8 ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Romans 1:16¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.

GOING with Good News

In the last few weeks, we’ve looked at worshipping so that people can see why they should care about God and finding what you’re good at and doing that for the church. Leading on from that, today we’re looking at Going with the Good News or – to use a church term – evangelism or – to use a normal word – telling people.

Which makes me think of street preachers, of people handing out bibles in Rundle Mall. And that’s not really a good image to me. They’re those people who stop you and detain you when all you want to do is escape them and go about your day.

Similarly, when people phone my house right on dinnertime, fervently assuring me that they’re not trying to sell me anything but that I may be entitled to a new mobile phone, or can I spare some time for a quick survey which will only take twenty minutes, I don’t jump for joy. I groan a little and try to make them go away.

And I have the same reaction when people I don’t know try to tell me about Jesus, because it’s like they’re trying to sell me something. Like they’re trying to weasel their way in. And I assume they’re wasting my time.

Because people who cold call you or turn up on your doorstep don’t know you. They’re not interested in you beyond the sell. And I don’t think that’s how we should present God: like He’s a product and like the customer don’t matter. “If we can’t sell God to you, we’ll sell Him to someone else. Plenty more fish in the sea. It’s not like you’re special or unique. It’s not like God cares for you individually, or knows your name, or the number of hairs on your head or anything.”

So given I’m not comfortable invading people’s privacy or intruding on their time or treating them like they don’t matter, how am I supposed to tell people about God?

Since this is a church, let's look at what the bible says.

First, don't be afraid.

Jesus says "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." Everyone and everything is under his control, so what is there to fear? Well, that might work okay for Jesus because he's the son of God, but what about us? Well, Acts tells us that "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes". So Jesus had all power and control, and he's given at least some of that power to us? Cool. Not so much to be afraid of now. Whatever happens, Jesus has it in hand.

Which, as we all know, doesn't magically (or even miraculously) solve all our problems, but hopefully it gives us courage that even our stuff-ups could be God's message to someone we know.

Second, "you will be my witnesses".

Well, what are witnesses? People who have witnessed something – an act, or criminal event, or such. Something they saw first-hand. So if *we're* witnesses, we're not expected to talk about anything we haven't seen first-hand. If you haven't had personal experience with, say, God healing people then don't make that part of your witness. Tell people what *you've* seen God do, and what He's done in *your* life, and trust that that will be enough.

Because witnesses don't go around telling everyone everything they saw. They tell the relevant parts to the people who ask them. You don't stop every person you pass in the street and tell them that you saw someone break into your neighbour's house. You tell the police or the lawyers. The people who ask you about it. The interested parties.

Likewise, we don't have to cold-ask people we know. We can wait for them to start asking questions. Evangelism – telling them about God – needn't be forceful; it's just being there with what answers we have when they start asking questions.

Third, Paul tells us that he is not ashamed of the gospel.

And neither should we be. This tends to be more the sort of problem I have – that I don't take opportunities to talk about God. But we talk about the other things that are going on in our lives – we tell them what's happening in our jobs or our friends or our children, but we refrain from telling them about God for the fear that it'll sour the conversation. We don't want to ruin the friendship or get all preachy, but here Paul tells us that the gospel "is the power of God that brings salvation". We shouldn't be afraid of what could – and should – have the greatest impact on their lives.

That said, of course, remember what we talked about with witnesses. Don't be *afraid* to talk about God, but don't try to shoe-horn Him into every conversation or you'll stop being a friend and start being a salesman again.

Fourth, let's look at where we are to do this.

In Acts, it's "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth", and in Romans it's "First to the Jew and then to the gentile". It's always to those who are near us first, then those of other cultures or religions.

In other words, first to those we can relate to. Those we have much in common with. Our friends and family. After that, we move to those nearby – acquaintances, friends-of-friends, workmates, our wider community. After this, we move onto those farther away – sending missionaries out to other countries or sending money to overseas missions if not going ourselves.

We are called not to go into the world alone and assault people with the gospel well out of our comfort zones. We are called to tell those nearest us about what we know of God when they ask or are in need. We are called to be their friends, in other words, and do what friends do – to help each other in times of need. And the help we have is to bear the message that God is with us, always, until the end of the age.

If that's still too daunting, or if your friends all already know God, don't worry. We have something for you to do as well: any way that you strengthen the church – such as in worship or ministry discussed in weeks past – is also part of evangelism.

Showing God to someone takes a long time; it's not an instant process. Maybe you tell them about God after knowing them a couple of months, and after another few months they come to church. (And even that's quick.) What they first see when they step through the doors, what they hear – both from the pulpit and over morning tea – what we sing or pray are all acts of evangelism. They're showing God to anyone who looks. So we need to ensure that they're as strong as they can be.

Whatever your strengths, God will use them to reach new people. Which means that we, as a church, need to be encouraging each other all the time, and we need to keep in our minds at all times, "How can we be more open to outsiders being invited in?"