

Sharing God's Word: Get Radical

Psalm 66
Acts 9:26-31

December 9, 2018
Faith Community

There are four key words in our mission statement that're displayed symbolically in our logo, and then briefly described on the back of the bulletin. The four words are:

Hearing
Trusting
Acting
Sharing

We're spending two weeks on each one, starting at the top and working our way down, knowing that in reality a lifetime wouldn't be enough.

All this is designed to help you pray for your Pastor Nominating Committee and the eventual arrival of your new pastor. Hopefully he or she will see that you have a firm grasp on who you've been called to be and what you've been called to do.

Today is the first of our two week look at the fourth word, 'sharing.' Your mission statement says,

"Our church will reach outward as a friendly, warm and open blend of peoples. It is important that we share our hopes and beliefs and grow to become a larger family. Avoiding judgments about the faith of others, we will seek to communicate the Good News not only in words, but through our whole life as a church."

I've become convinced, over the years, that the way to pull this off is to get radical; hence the title for today's sermon.

Unfortunately, this word has been redefined to speak of wild haired crazy people who stop at nothing in order to get their points across, especially points that are thought to be wild haired and crazy themselves. Instead, the word radical comes from the Latin word 'radix,' which means 'rooted.' It's where we get our word for radish, so rightly understood it refers to someone who is rooted. So a radical Christ follower is someone who is rooted, grounded in the life and teaching of Jesus. It's where such a person finds his or her identity and reason for being, and who is, in fact, becoming more like Christ in their character and in their emotional and spiritual maturity.

Our New Testament reading comes immediately after Saul's dramatic conversion experience. Prior to this he was one of the primary persecutors of any and all Christ followers. His life had been consumed with ridding the earth of however many of them he could track down. Now, thanks to supernatural intervention, this Christ persecutor has himself become a Christ follower. So he tries to join forces with the very people he was trying to rid the earth of. The problem, of course, is that no one will have a thing to do with him, and for good reason. The passage reads,

When he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. (Acts 9:28)

Immediately after this come the most important four words that could be written about him:

But Barnabas took him....(v. 29)

Barnabas took him to the leaders and told them Paul's story. And because of that radical action on the part of Barnabas, Paul gained entry into the community of believers and the rest, as they say, is history.

Friends, I want to be a Barnabas. His original name was Joseph but it was changed to Barnabas which means, 'Son of Encouragement.' I want to be part of a faith community that nurtures that level of discipleship. And when the time comes to celebrate the life change that comes with it, I want to be part of a group that can claim, like it says in Psalm 66,

Come and listen, all you who fear God; let me tell you what he's done for me. (Psalm 66:16)

Most of you know by now, that mental illness has played a big role in my family and in my wife's family as well. It goes back multiple generations and continues to this day. My son David has struggled with it lifelong. Not long ago he went through genetic testing to try to determine the best course of treatment, and even with that is now in the midst of his third hospitalization in the past two months up in Traverse City.

I spent most of this past week up there. On Wednesday, I was heading to a local deli to get lunch, and the state funeral for President Bush was on the radio. I was so moved by it that when I got back to my hotel room I watched what was left.

I knew the Scriptures that were read. I knew the promises of hope and resurrection that were expressed. I was thrilled with the majestic hymns of faith that were sung. And all the while I was caring for my suicidal son.

Friends, don't ever take any of that for granted. We're surrounded by riches that're truly life affirming sources of hope. And you will not understand that until your life hangs in the balance.

I could be there thanks to the kindness of so many of you who covered for me in various meetings and obligations. I was encouraged by the expressions of support, some of you sharing your own experiences, others of you coming alongside with offers that were above and beyond anything I'd even dreamed of.

One of the great names of Christ that we affirm every year during this season of Advent is Emanuel, or 'God with us.' It was God's ultimate and unconditional expression of love to come and live among us in the person of Christ. You might say it was the heavenly version of Barnabas.

Cultivate that, friends. And in that way the world will beat a path to our door because they'll know that hope lives here.