

Sharing God's Word: Get Contagious

Jonah 4:10-11
Acts 1:6-11

December 16, 2018
Faith Community

There are four key words in our mission statement that are 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 second 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 and 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 there are at least two ways to pull this off. The first is to get radical; that was the title for last week's sermon. The second, which is what today's sermon is about, is to get contagious.

Our Old Testament reading tells the story of Jonah who was told to go to a wicked city, preach there, and the people would be transformed. In other words, Jonah, get contagious. The problem was that he didn't want to do that. Jonah felt that 'those people' didn't deserve another chance, never mind that God told him so. He eventually goes anyway, the city is transformed, and Jonah is not pleased. He doesn't like it one bit, and the story ends with a picture of Jonah all alone under a blistering sun with his unresolved self-righteous anger turned in upon himself.

Our New Testament story shows the risen Christ telling his disciples to get contagious to where the Gospel is heard around the world. As that story unfolds we'll see that they have a hard time getting going. It took some hard times to shake them loose.

So what's up? Why is this so hard? Even today, every church wants to grow, but not many do. Most churches will tell you they're friendly, but the reality often suggests otherwise.

I can tell you that the future of this church is not in the hands of your future pastor, whoever that may be. That's an old model that never worked anyway and still doesn't. Instead, the future of this church is up to you. You need to get contagious.

In the medical sense it means that something beyond us is taking over, overcoming our defenses and taking its toll in the process, and seeking to do the same in others. We become carriers and so withdraw for a while until the danger has passed. But what if there were a good kind of contagion? And what if it were something that would attract people rather than push them away? What might that kind of contagion look like?

Way back in my junior high and high school days I was less than a prize, I guess you could say. I was painfully skinny with no athletic skill whatsoever, average or below average grades, not many friends, just getting by. So much of an introvert was I that the one and only class my parents let me drop in high school was speech class, because the last thing I ever wanted to do was to stand up in front of people and talk.

The day came when I got invited to a church youth group. The church that my family had joined was gigantic, way too big for the likes of me, or so I thought, and the youth group was equally massive. Maybe I could blend in with the wallpaper and it wouldn't be too bad, but as time went on I showed up a little more often. It gradually dawned on me that I was becoming part of that group.

Other kids took an interest in me. It mattered to them that I was there. I wasn't another face in the crowd, or a statistic, or a problem to be solved or a notch on someone's spiritual gun belt. And as I got to know them I discovered that it was because of this Jesus guy. He was actually making a difference in their lives. And I wanted what they had.

It was nothing fancy. No one gave me a prepared speech, or a list of things I had to do if I wanted to belong. They cared about me. They liked having me around. And I wanted what they had. And what they had was Jesus. And I guess, in reality it was the other way around. Jesus had them.

So how does this apply to us today?

There's a good chance we'll have visitors these next couple weeks. Some will stop in because it's a holiday custom. Others will bring heavy hearts in search of a word of encouragement and hope. Still others will come with an unspoken question: Does it matter that I'm here?

What'll they see when they get here? Will anyone go out of their way to say hello? Will we be contagious?

Maybe we'll go out of our way to welcome folks while they're here. Maybe even more crazy, we'll invite someone ahead of time who doesn't have a church home. You know a few folks like that. Offer to pick them up or meet them here. Just like what happened to me, don't make it a big deal, no prepared speech, just an offer. Be yourself. Be real. That's the most important thing you can be.

"The Skin Horse had lived longer in the nursery than any of the others. He was so old that his brown coat was bald in patches and showed the seams underneath, and most of the hairs in his tail had been pulled out to string bead necklaces. He was wise, for he had seen a long succession of mechanical toys arrive to boast and swagger, and by-and-by break their mainsprings and pass away, and he knew that they were only toys, and would never turn into anything else. For nursery magic is very strange and wonderful, and only those playthings that are old and wise and experienced like the Skin Horse understand all about it.

"What is REAL?" asked the [Velveteen] Rabbit one day, when they were lying side by side near the nursery fender, before Nana came to tidy the room. "Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?"

"Real isn't how you are made," said the Skin Horse. "It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real."

"Does it hurt?" asked the Rabbit.

"Sometimes," said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. "When you are Real you don't mind being hurt."

"Does it happen all at once, like being wound up," he asked, "or bit by bit?"

"It doesn't happen all at once," said the Skin Horse. "You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't happen often to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."¹

This Christmas season, can we be real with ourselves, each other, and especially with those who have little faith connection, who nevertheless may be looking for exactly what you and I have. Maybe they don't know that. Maybe we don't either. So as Christ is born in us, perhaps others will experience the same thing, and we will, in fact, be contagious.

¹ Margery Williams Bianco, [The Velveteen Rabbit](#)