

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: Matthew 10:24-39

²⁴ "A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; ²⁵ it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!

²⁶ "So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. ²⁷ What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. ²⁸ Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰ And even the hairs of your head are all counted. ³¹ So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

³² "Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; ³³ but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

³⁴ "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

³⁵ For I have come to set a man against his father,
and a daughter against her mother,
and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;

³⁶ and one's foes will be members of one's own household.

³⁷ Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; ³⁸ and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

As you may have noticed, today's sermon title is, "Oh No...It's the "E" Word"—the "E" word being evangelism. It's a topic that makes many Christians squirm in their seats. Why is that, I wonder?

There is a "Peanuts" comic strip in which Linus is listening carefully as his sister, Lucy, boasts about her religious faith and her potential as an evangelist.

She says to Linus: "I could be a terrific evangelist. Do you know that kid who sits behind me in school? I convinced him that my religion is better than his religion."

Linus asks: "How did you do that?"

Lucy replies: "I hit him with my lunch box."

I am sure that is not the kind of attitude and behavior Jesus taught his disciples use as they took his message into the world. It is definitely not the example Jesus set for us to follow. Jesus was a preacher and teacher. He was a people person—a loving caring, down-to-earth people person. Jesus was straightforward and faithful to the message he shared with those he met. He never hit people with a lunch box, but he did not shy away from sharing the truth.

As we find here in the Matthew text that was read for us this morning, Jesus was also truthful about what his disciples would face as they ventured out to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. In the beginning of chapter ten which we did not read, he tells his disciples that they should expect to experience persecution for their faithfulness to share the message.

They should have been aware of that reality already because they saw what Jesus endured as he communicated God's message to the world. He was run out of town, threatened with stoning, ridiculed for caring for those ostracized by the rest of the community, harassed for challenging the ridiculous laws the Pharisees determined were necessary to keep God's law, and in the end he was killed. Jesus was even accused by the Pharisees of acquiring his power to drive out demons from Beelzebul, the lord of the flies and the prince of demons. Let's face it—not everyone liked Jesus.

The disciples watched as Jesus did not back down in sharing the message of God; and for that endured persecution. And then, here in Matthew 10:24 and 25, Jesus tells the disciples that they should expect the same. He tells them to not be naive to think that what happened to Jesus, their teacher and mentor, could never possibly happen to them...because it will in some way.

Is that what makes many of us feel uncomfortable about evangelism? Maybe without even thinking about what Jesus endured, we're afraid of how our lives might be negatively affected if we begin talking about and living out our faith in places other than where we feel comfortable doing it. It's comfortable talking about and living our faith when we are with other Christians. But why is it more challenging at other times?

Are we afraid we may lose friends? Are we afraid it will cause tension and division in family relationships? Jesus tells us that by the very nature of humanity, that could happen. Are we afraid we will be ridiculed and embarrassed if we cannot answer questions that may arise about God, Jesus, the bible? Are we afraid it may make things difficult and uncomfortable for us at our place of employment?

The story is told of an old Scottish woman who went from home to home across the countryside selling thread, buttons, and shoestrings. When she came to an unmarked crossroad, she would toss a stick into the air and go in the direction the stick pointed when it landed.

One day, however, she was seen tossing the stick up several times. "Why do you toss the stick more than once?" someone asked.

"Because," replied the woman, "it keeps pointing to the left, and I want to take the road on the right." She then dutifully kept throwing the stick into the air until it pointed the way she wanted to go.

Many people keep throwing the stick in the air because they are afraid to do the will of God.

Jesus tells us that we should not be afraid. Sometimes when Jesus tells us not to be afraid, he makes it sound like it should be easy for us to do that; but we all know, it's not always easy to feel unafraid. Jesus never said that faithfulness to God—following Jesus—was going to be an easy ride. Did you ever think about this? Any stand or message that people take and share in life is going to result in others criticizing, ridiculing, and excluding them for a group. It's what we do as humans.

If that's true, wouldn't you want to be enduring hardship for God rather than for something that is empty meaningless—something made into a god or idol? Jesus said in today's text: if you're going to fear something, fear God. The Message Bible puts it this way, "Don't be bluffed into silence by the threats of bullies. There's nothing they can do to your soul, your core being. Save your fear for God, who holds your entire life—body and soul—in his hands."

The God who created you, who knows everything about you, who cares for you more than anything else, who sent Jesus to us so we can know God and the way to spend a living eternity with him. The fear of God is not an exercise in trying to avoid him. It is an experience and feeling of awe for this one and only Almighty and Loving God, inspiring us to do all we can

to please him, including helping to build his kingdom so others can also know and love our amazing and awesome God. Jesus warns us that we should put God first in our lives—that means putting God above everything else in our lives, including the fear of telling others about him and being examples of how to live.

Remember, Jesus said, "Whoever finds their life will lose, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it." In my Living Bible it explains this verse this way: "Clinging to this life may cause us to forfeit the best from Christ in this world and in the next. The more we love this life's rewards (leisure, power, popularity, financial security), the more we will discover how empty they really are. The best way to enjoy life, therefore, is to loosen our greedy grasp on earthly rewards, so that we can be free to follow Christ. In doing so, we will inherit eternal life and begin at once to experience the benefits of following Christ."

So, the "E" word—evangelism, is something that Jesus commanded all of us to do when he said, "Go!" and spread the Good News to everyone. Still it conjures up for us images that are less than attractive Christian behaviors. It also is something some of us feel we lack the knowledge and ability to do. We hear that word and we usually think of words—preaching words.

But what Jesus teaches us to do through word and example is not that. Jesus shows us how to live missionally, which involves more than just words, and programs, and money. Being missional is a way of living. It is words and actions that invite people to have a personal encounter with Christ. All of us are called to live missionally. It's not just for those who have money to support mission projects. It's not just for church leadership who dreams up and organizes programs; it not just for the preacher who shares God's message from the pulpit. Living missionally is what is expected of all of us.

Living missionally means we need to always be working on our relationship, knowing him, what he teaches and expects from us, getting so close to him that we become like him and people hear and see that through all that we say and do, every day and everywhere we go, no matter who we may be spending time with. It's not necessarily something we plan or schedule into our day. It's a way of living 24/7. Living missionally invites people to experience another way of living. It introduces Jesus to others. It opens doors to talk more openly about Jesus. All of us can and should be doing this.

There is so much more to say about living missionally. And quite honestly, if you are reading your bible, listening to Jesus' teachings, even listening to the sermons, you've been taught all about living missionally. Count on hearing more from me.

I want to close by sharing this true story with you. Some of you have already heard me tell this story, but it made such a powerful impact on me about what it means to be fulfilling the command to "Go" and tell others the Good News, that it bears telling the story again.

As some of you know already, three other pastors and I did a study on the missional church. We traveled to New Zealand and Australia to meet with authors who have written on the subject. In Manly, Australia, we met the author Michael Frost who started a missional church called Small Boat, Big Sea. We attended one of their services. There is a lot more I could say about the service, but I want to talk about one particular practice they did at the end of the service, the part they called the sending. I thought the sending was going to be the benediction, but it was more than that.

The week before every service, someone is assigned to be prepared to share the following week the events of their week. They are not supposed to share specifically about the things we

may want church people to hear like things they did for the church and church programs. They were supposed share about their everyday happenings in life.

A young woman shared that morning. She shared about things like her job. She was a nanny for a well to do family. She told us about taking care of the children, packing their lunches, taking them to school and playing with them. She told us about the kinds of things she did to take care of the house. She told us she went grocery shopping, which included picking up cigarettes for the man of the house.

After she finished sharing, the congregation shared with her where they saw Jesus living through her as she did all that she did. They lifted up things like the care and love she shared with the children, loving them, and honoring them just as Jesus did. Her dedication and obedience to fulfill the "to-do" list prepared for her by her employers. They even pointed out her lack of judgement on the man for smoking cigarettes. Do you understand what the point that the congregation was trying to make to encourage her on her mission for Christ?

It was how she lived—her attitude toward people, her love and respect, actually the love and respect of Jesus living in and through her—that was teaching people about Jesus and opening doors for her to share more about Jesus. Through pointing out where they saw Jesus living through her in the everyday experiences and conversations of life, they were encouraging her to remain faithful to continuing the work of Jesus, every day, all the time, everywhere.

There's a passion in my soul that wants so desperately to be able to communicate to you the power of this lesson. It's not a new lesson. Jesus teaches us this lesson over and over through his example and teachings. Yet for some the lesson is a hard pill to swallow.

Fear of losing the rewards in this life is a hard battle to overcome. Overcoming the discomfort stirred in us by the negative images that come to mind when we hear the "e" word are difficult to ignore. But, are the anxieties and fears that hold us back from obeying Jesus' command to go and share the Good News worth succumbing to, thus denying us the eternal rewards God promises and the joy in Christ that we can know even now? That's a choice all of us make every day. Amen.