



DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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The Big Story, Part 1

February 8, 2009

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~ Scripture: I Peter 3:15 ~

FEBRUARY IS MISSIONS MONTH

The Missions & Evangelism Cell has put together several events & experiences:

- ✚ **Faith-Sharing Class** (Feb. 8th-15th-22nd, during the 9:00 hour).
- ✚ A faith-sharing **E-mail** goes out to the whole church the first Monday of every month.
- ✚ **Displays in The Atrium** for the rest of this month.

What is the purpose of this **Missions Fair**?

- 1) To let you know all the wonderful areas of missions & evangelism we are involved in (there's more than you think).
 - 2) To give you a chance to prayerfully consider what part you want to play in helping to fulfill the Great Commission (cf. Matthew 28:19-20). In addition to *worship-ping* together each week, I urge each of you to:
 - Pick one area of *growth* (e.g.: small group, adult study, etc.)
 - And one area of *service* (e.g.: participate in one of our missions)
- ✚ When you leave (on either side of the building), be sure to check out the **BANNER**. It will remain there awhile to remind us where our mission field is (cf. "AT YOUR DOORSTEP").
 - ✚ **Mission Leader's Appreciation Dinner** on Saturday, February 21st.
 - ✚ **Italian Dinner / Silent Auction** the following Saturday, February 28th, to raise money for Habit for Humanity (100% goes toward construction of the Good News House).

TODAY WE'RE GOING TO FOCUS ON FAITH-SHARING

Faith-Sharing, contrary to popular opinion, is NOT proselytizing (i.e.: forcing your religion on somebody). It is sharing, communicating, letting somebody in on, passing on, making known.

Faith-sharing is articulating our faith—first to ourselves, then to others. We need to be clear in our own minds first. . .then be able to present it in our own words.

Sometimes we think that being a faithful witness means living it out quietly in front of others. It is! But there are going to be times when we will need / want / or be called upon to speak about what it is that we most deeply believe and are committed to. We're going to be asked about our faith as Christian believers.

You've all heard of **St. Francis of Assisi**. Once he was asked to demonstrate his preaching method. The way he did that was to go about his daily business of interacting with others in a spirit of kindness and humility. When the inquirer expressed disappointment at the lack of "preaching", St. Francis said: "*Go forth and preach the Gospel, and ~~when necessary~~ use words.*" Yes, deeds & actions are vitally important to our witness, but:

- TODAY we're going to take the "*when necessary*" out of it, because sometimes we do need to use words;

- NEXT SUNDAY we'll put it back in and talk about the non-verbal (or, beyond verbal) expressions of our faith.

OUR SCRIPTURE IS I PETER 3:15

“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.”

Some Christians believe that faith is a personal matter and is best kept to oneself—lest we offend someone. For sure, we shouldn't be pushy or obnoxious in sharing our faith. But we shouldn't hold back either. We should always be ready to give an answer, *gently & respectfully*:

- When the opportunity arises;
- When we are asked about our faith, our lifestyle, or our Christian perspective.

And people will ask! Are you prepared to tell what Christ has done in your life? Are you prepared to share the good news of the Gospel with those who are ready to hear it?

I. JUST WHAT IS THE GOOD NEWS ANYWAY?

In the Greek, there's a word *euangelion* which means “good news”. The word *gospel* means good news. So, *euangelion* gets translated by the word “*gospel*”. The Gospel is good news. And those who tell it are evangelists (or evangelists).

- Hence Matthew-Mark-Luke-John.
- Paul too was a proclaimer of “the Gospel”. In fact, he said in Acts 20:24—*“I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.”*

Wow! What a passion!

- There have been others, like Charles Finney / Dwight L. Moody.
- Further back, there was John Wesley / John Knox / John Wycliff.
- Even further back was Martin Luther / St. Augustine.
- In more recent times, there's C. S. Lewis / Ravi Zacharias / Billy Graham.

On a different level, there's Matt and me. [We're MINOR league players compared to these MAJOR league players. ☺] All pastors are preachers, heralds, proclaimers of the Gospel. AND SO ARE YOU!!!

It's an important task we have—whether it's done behind a pulpit or across the table in a coffee shop. It's important because Paul said in I Corinthians 15:2—*“By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.”*

What is this GOSPEL. . .this GOOD NEWS. . .this HOPE that is within us. . .this FAITH that we share?
What is the content of it?

- For Jesus, the message was: *“The Kingdom of God has come”* [Matt. 4:23]. By that he meant that God is with us; He reigns over us and within us (our hearts). He heals us and our world not just of physical sickness, but of our spiritual sickness.
- For Paul, it was: *“The just shall live by faith”* [Romans 5:1], not the Mosaic Law or good works. We cannot “work” our way to heaven; we receive eternal life by simply believing.
- For Peter, the message of salvation was also all about placing our trust in Christ, *“for there is no other name under heaven by which we can be saved”* [Acts 4:12].
- Paul also said: *“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved”* [Romans 10:13].
Everyone! Jew or Gentile; Jesus is the savior for everybody.

- For John the Baptist, the message was: “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” [John 1:29]. Jesus would die for the sins of the whole world. . .His death would “atone” for our sins. . .He would conquer death and be raised the 3rd day.
- Back to Jesus: In the most beloved verse in the Bible, He articulated the message. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life” [John 3:16].

All are expressions of the Good News! How can we wrap all this up and share it with our world in a way that folks will hear it and respond to it? How can we put it in our own minds and our own words—and so be “prepared to give an answer to anyone who asks us to give the reason for the hope that is within us”? In other words.

II. HOW CAN WE SHARE THIS GOOD NEWS?

I want to give you a MODEL which I think is easy to remember and in complete accord with the tenor of Scripture. It comes from a book by James Choung¹ and is entitled The Big Story. It follows the Biblical narrative:

CREATION -- FALL -- REDEMPTION -- MISSION

The model is so concise that you could share it with someone on a pad of paper or even a napkin. Let’s listen.

~ Play U-Tube Video, Part I ² ~

There you have it in a nutshell—the bigger picture of what Jesus taught, of what we confess and believe as followers of His. This is faith-sharing at its best!

I want to address the **2nd circle** for a moment. You’ll notice that’s where he began—with our common experience (i.e.: the world is NOT the way it’s supposed to be). We can all get our heads into that. There’s no finger pointing and saying, “You’re a sinner.” Rightly or wrongly, Christians are often criticized for that (even when we say “we’re all sinners”). Rather than make people recoil with what feels like a “judgment”, why not start with what we can all identify with?

We live in a broken world. Each of us has without doubt contributed to the MESS:

- Thru our *indifference* (i.e.: lack of zeal, our lack of gratitude);
- Thru being *self-centered* (i.e.: it’s all about me);
- Thru *mistreatment of others*;
- Thru *greed / lust / overindulgence*.

We’ve all been **damaged by evil** [CIRCLE 2]. And we’ve damaged our planet, our relationships (with each other and with God), and ourselves. But God loves us too much to leave us that way. So He came 2000 years ago to **restore us** [CIRCLE 3].

Another bit of this “good news” is that when Jesus issued the call, the invitation to “**Follow me**”, He didn’t require people to see the full depth of their sin. . .get their act together. . .then follow Him as perfect persons. They just needed to be willing to change. . .then start on a journey with Him that would transform their lives.

¹ James Choung’s books are: [True Story: A Christianity Worth Believing In](#) (for believers) and its companion booklet, [Based on a True Story](#) (for seekers). Both were published by InterVarsity Press in April 2008.

² This 3 minute video and its sequel, [The Big Story, Part 2](#), will be placed this week on our church website (www.dexterumc.org). Check it out.

That's the INVITATION! That's the conclusion, the culmination of faith-sharing—to ask someone to join you on a journey that will change their life and go a long way toward restoring their life to what it was originally intended to be. . .and then to join together with others to have a part in healing the planet and the people in it.

But Choung is right. You can't get to that last part (4th circle)—MISSION (which we'll deal with much more in depth next week)—until come to Jesus. You gotta go through the 3rd circle.

CREATION—FALL—REDEMPTION—MISSION. Let's hear it again. . .

~ Re-play U-Tube Video ~

CONCLUSION

Which circle are you in this morning? Which circle would you like to be in (or, move to)?
Just asking!

There's a sequel (Part 2) which we'll see next Sunday. Both will be put (and kept) on our website for you to review. What a great way for you to capture the main points of your faith and be able *“to give an answer to anyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.”*

Let's pray.