

Living His Story – Week 5

How the Spirit guides us

Welcome to week five.

Last week –

- Relate differently to different people c.f.

1 Cor 9:19 *For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. 20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews... 21 To those outside the law I became as one outside the law... so that I might win those outside the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, so that I might by any means save some.*

- Engage from a place of love
- Listen, be interrupted, be patient

A week 'late' I know, I came across this video which I think it a helpful idea about what we looked at:

Video: <https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/face-cream-evangelism>

This week it's – well, let me tell you a story to introduce this week's theme:

There's an old BT ad in which Maureen Lipman rings her grandson to congratulate him on his exams results, only thing is that he's failed most of them and is thoroughly depressed. Trying to be the positive and encouraging Jewish gran she asks if he has passed *anything* and he says he passed pottery. 'Oh', she says, 'Well people will always need plates.' And then he says he's also passed Sociology, to which she replies, 'An ology, he gets an ology and he says he's failed. You get an ology and you're a scientist!'

There are a lot of 'ologies' in the Christian world

- Ecclesiology – study of the church
- Theology – study of God
- Christology – study of Jesus
- Pneumatology – study of the Spirit – the subject for today 'pneuma' as pneumatic tyres - in air/spirit. Today we look at how the Spirit, how he helps us share faith. Look at some general, foundational points, then some specifics.

Prayer

There is a phrase I heard some years ago which I found both troubling and challenging. The phrase was a judgement by a Christian about what Christians can be. The phrase was that **Christians can be both professing believers and practical atheists.**

What I think is meant by that phrase or judgement is that as Christians we can at times testify faith in Jesus, yet the testimony of lives is that there is no God. We don't pray, we

don't trust, we are not obedient... our lives simply don't tell the same story as the one we speak: professing believers and practical atheists.

I think one way that means we slide towards this, is in our acknowledgement of and engagement with the Spirit.

Holy Spirit timeline...

Good Friday – Easter Day = 3 days in the grave

Easter Day to Jesus' Ascension = 40 days

Ascension to Pentecost = 10 days (or 50 'Pente' from Easter Day)

This year ascension day 13th May, Pentecost ten days later on 23rd May

A precious 40 days of meeting and eating with Jesus again had turned them from the frightened individuals who fled at the crucifixion into courageous followers of the one who had triumphed over the grave.

Evangelism is impossible without the Holy Spirit.

Look at in-depth – the work of the Holy Spirit in how we witness and share faith.

Here are some stories about the Spirit being at work in evangelism in Lockdown

Hannah tells the story of her friend Sarah who volunteered in a church food bank. Sarah's job was to allocate the food parcels to the deliverers – matching parcels with drivers and addresses.

This Sarah was hugely diligent in her task – checking the numbers not once but twice and then getting another person to check that she had the right numbers of parcels.

On this particular day she went through this whole rigmarole with three drivers who were sent out to deliver. They went round every address and completed the drops. Thing was, their boots were still, strangely full. So before returning back to the church the three drivers all went round the houses a second time and to the delight of each household dropped off a second food parcel – a double portion if you like – of what they needed.

(Perhaps that parallels the feeding of the three and five thousands in the Gospels)

Another story involves a young woman who logged on to a church service even though she wasn't a Christian. The reason she did so was because her brother had a part in the service and she really missed seeing him, so just wanted to see him online. In logging on she heard about faith and decided to explore in further.

(Perhaps that parallels the conversion of the Ethiopian who Philip catches up. The Ethiopian in the chariot didn't know about faith, but in a divine coincidence got to hear an explanation through Philip.)

This reminds me of the great story told by Mark Greene a Christian who worked in advertising and wanted to share faith with a colleague, but wasn't sure how to start the conversation. He met his colleague and a client at a meeting and thought that perhaps on

the train journey home he would have a chance to share faith. But he seemed to be foiled in this when the client said, 'I'm taking the same train, perhaps we can sit together.'

Mark was frustrated that the moment seemed to be lost, but when they sat down the client said to Mark, 'I hear you are a Christian – what's that all about then?' And with his colleague sitting next to him and listening to every word, Mark told the client why he was a Christian.

Q1: How do you acknowledge and engage with the Spirit in sharing faith?

(A little clue here; if you don't think you do then you are not thinking hard enough, because you will be.)

The move from 'set-thing' to 'dynamic encounter'

I can't emphasise enough the shift from thinking that we have this thing – this box - which it is our responsibility to deliver, to understanding that God is already there, the Spirit is already working we are sensitive to the Spirit attentive to the person and adapt and work with

The Gospel message doesn't change, but how we say it and show it does change.

'Mission is often described as if it were the planned extension of an old building. But in fact it has usually been more like an unexpected explosion... we should have had the modesty to recognise that the breath of God has always played a far more decisive part than our human strategy.'

Acts 10

Purple passages in Acts

- Acts 1 – Ascension of Jesus.
- Acts 2 – Day of Pentecost
- Acts 7 – Martyrdom of Stephen
- Acts 9 - Conversion of Saul
- Acts 10 – Peter and Cornelius

'34 Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, 35 but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.'

This is an extraordinary penny-dropping moment when the first believers grasp that the scope of the Gospel is bigger than they had dared imagine, the love of God more extraordinary than they had thought and that the missionary call upon them was far bolder and more extensive than they had realised.

Five chapters later we discover that this radical reworking of their understanding of who is acceptable to God, gets discussed in this big pow-wow (Council of Jerusalem) and is then fully adopted into the life of the early church.

Hannah writes:

‘The first disciples are not in control of the mission of the Church; the Spirit is. And it is the Spirit who urges the church onto new places, new people and new locations, so that the Gospel will go out to all nations. The story of Cornelius reminds us that the love of God and the reach of the Gospel are always bigger than we imagine.’

And so the question then remains for us; where is the Spirit drawing us *today*? Where is the new place, the new destination, to which we are being drawn in witness? Where is the Spirit already at work urging us to make the journey – literal or metaphorical – so that the gospel can find its way through us to the ends of the earth?

Evangelism now

Hannah writes:

We are surrounded by grief and many of the inequalities that exist in our society have been brought uncomfortably into light. In this unfamiliar place, the good news of the extraordinary love of God needs to be spoken with compassion, sensitivity and boldness by ordinary people who are living this situation too. The good news of Jesus has not suddenly become more powerful or relevant, but our sharing of it needs to be.

**Q2: What does evangelism in the UK look like in the coming year? (8mins)
Approach, hallmarks, values, what will it *look like* - rather than specifics
(Feedback – compare to what Hannah suggests).**

1. Risk-taking not comfort-seeking

We live in a risk-averse culture, yet there is something fundamentally risky about evangelism, when we are called to proclaim afresh the Christian faith in each generation. We learn by trying out new ideas and finding out what works and what doesn't and so perhaps 'success' in evangelism should be measured not in how many come to us, our courses and events, but in how far we have been willing to go to reach the lonely, the lost and the broken with the good news of God's grace.

Advent trail – Phil Young and I put together was a risk

- Public space.
- Art, visual
- What about the signs/explanations

Easter trail idea

- It bombed – they didn't want to do it.

It reminded me of a story that Chris Lane from Langworthy Community Church told us at the church weekend a couple of years back – his family took in a young man to live with them, but after initial positive signs the venture took a slide as he stole from them, continued to take drugs and eventually was asked to leave.

Bishop Ric Thorpe (the church of England Bishop for church-planting) once said that we needed more stories or failure. Not because they show us what is right, but they show that we took risks and tried.

2. Variety, not one –size fits all

I finally came to faith at a church service. Everyone there heard the same message, by the same preacher and as I was visiting the church there was no way he could have known about me and written what he said with me in mind. We all got the same message and I (and my brother) happened to respond.

But one size does not fit all. Hannah writes:

‘The simple fact is we will limit our reach if we put all our eggs in one basket and invest in one form of outreach.’

3. Relational, not confrontational

It seems to be that a cup of tea and conversation across the kitchen table is more effective than standing on a soapbox at speaker’s corner... we need to be better at starting the conversation with people across a coffee, while walking the dog in the park, while sitting in the waiting room.

4. Seeking God, not taking God

The disciple’s experience as they move into these new and different territories is that God is already at work; they are simply catching up with him.

Hannah tells the following story

My friend Kate asked me what to do about an experience her eight year old daughter had. Kate is not a Christian and is actually very sceptical about religion, but her daughter is intrigued about Christian faith.

Kate said that her daughter woke in the middle of the night to find Jesus standing at the end of her bed talking to her. Kate didn’t know what to do with this, but was concerned about it and considered that it was a figment of her imagination.

Hannah asked Kate whether her daughter had been frightened by this, to which Kate replied, ‘Not in the least, it made her feel really safe.’

Hannah then said, ‘Well there’s nothing to worry about. Kate, I know you don’t believe in God but just imagine for a minute that God does exist and that Jesus is his son. It wouldn’t be completely unthinkable would it for God to make himself known to someone and make them feel loved and safe?’

Although Kate couldn’t join the dots of faith herself, what Hannah was able to do was to present a logical alternative to Kate’s worldview. A plausible alternative. Much of what I have read about evangelism in recent years has this theme – the idea of presenting an alternative to the worldview of most, a logic, coherent, compelling alternative to the way people general see life, and having described that alternative – invite people to accept it.

Hannah again:

This means that on our everyday witness we need to adopt a posture of humility, recognising that the results are not down to us and that we need to develop the ability to listen so that we can sense and discern how God might already be at work.

5. Out there *and* not in here

This obviously addresses the faulty assumption that the job of evangelism is to get people 'in here' – to our buildings and our church services.

If we remain unconvinced by this take a read through the book of Acts and discover how much, or rather how little evangelism actually takes place inside the synagogue.

Of if you remain unconvinced by that, then have a think about ABC's witness and evangelism over the past year.

How have we reached people?

- Online
- Food bank
- On the phone – well being
- Prayers – by email
- In the park – advent trail
- Bubby Walking

The pandemic has really stretched our understanding of this – the tension between 'in here' and 'out there'.

6. Together and not alone

The whole church can play a role in evangelism.

The One Show on BBC1. Each Friday they go to the same street in Leeds where the neighbours sit in camping chairs in the street and chat. I know the street well – it's just along from where we used to live and one of the regular contributors Dave is a friend and member of the church I was at in Leeds.

Dave has two friends Nick (Nicola) and her Indian husband Jit. They had two young boys and thought they would had one more child and Nick had – triplets. (Two to five in one easy step!)

Churches are great at doing cooking rotas for families with new-borns, so Dave got us, his housegroup to set up a rota for Nick and Jit. I remember delivering food to a home and people I had never met – and having his Indian parents come to the door to receive it – we were both a bit nervous and confused, but it was a powerful witness of God's love to others.

There is a phrase that gets bandied around in books on this topic which goes, 'the church is the hermeneutic of the Gospel'. Which in everyday language means that the church lives out the story of Jesus. People may not read the Bible anymore, but they do see the story through how the church acts. Hannah comments:

People are more likely to be attracted by a community that authentically lives out the good news of the kingdom in the world around them. The message of the Gospel might be something that is seen in practice before it gets understood.

Michael Green – **Evangelism Through the Local Church** – evangelism happens in a church which is hot with the love of Jesus Christ - acknowledges and engages the Spirit.

Prayer