

Personal Evangelism

[Lake Lutheran Teachers' Conference, Immanuel
Lutheran School, Waukegan, Illinois, February 27, 1975]

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I. What is evangelism?

Check the correct statements:

1. // Evangelism is the public preaching of the Gospel.
2. / / Evangelism is telling someone where you go to church.
3. // Evangelism is inviting someone to go to church with you.
4. // Evangelism is mowing the church lawn.
5. // Evangelism is the weekly church times in the newspaper.
6. // Evangelism is having a roadside church sign.
7. // Evangelism is a tent revival meeting.
8. // Evangelism is the pastor visiting a shut-in.
9. // Evangelism is the pastor visiting a non-member.
10. // Evangelism is a child talking about his faith.
11. // Evangelism is bringing someone to church.
12. // Evangelism is handing out Bible portions.
13. // Evangelism is "laying down" the law to someone.
14. // Evangelism is feeding the poor.
15. // Evangelism is building a church.
16. // Evangelism is a prayer service.
17. // Evangelism is handing out religious tracts.
18. // Evangelism is teaching arithmetic.
19. // Evangelism is teaching a Bible story.
20. // Evangelism is only the pastor's job.
21. // Evangelism is a bumper sticker saying, "Sin is expensive; heaven is free."

22. // Evangelism is carrying a sign that reads, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”
23. // Evangelism is stopping a stranger on the street and asking, “Brother, are you saved?”
24. // Evangelism is radio and TV church broadcasts.
25. // Evangelism is inspiring people at a teachers’ conference.

Had enough? So have I! I’ve heard and read enough wrong or half true definitions of evangelism. It’s time we had a proper understanding of evangelism. What does Scripture say? It never uses the word! That does not mean that Scripture doesn’t talk about the subject. It does—fifty passages have the verb, *euangelidzo*, which let us say, could be translated “to evangelize.” Then there is the noun *euangelion*, which we have almost transliterated as evangelical, and which is translated “Gospel.” Three passages also mention an *euangelistes*, “evangelist.”

Our noun evangelism is derived from the verb, which pictures a messenger having the good news of the Gospel to tell. Thus there are two concepts combined: the action of telling and the content of the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ which is the power of God unto salvation. While it would be permissible for the church to define evangelism in a variety of ways because we have no biblical definition, the Synod Commission on Evangelism favors the following: Evangelism is the preaching from the pulpit and the teaching in the classroom of the Law and the Gospel as an inseparable unit, in particular the speaking of the Law and the Gospel by a Christian to his neighbor, specifically speaking that portion of Scripture which brings comfort to sin-sick hearts. To put it simply, evangelism is the Gospel conveyed to another soul, for without believing the message of redemption through Jesus no one can be saved.

A number of our activities provide a favorable setting for the Gospel and may wet people’s appetites to find out why we act as we do. For instance, chaste language, hope in the face of trouble, regular church attendance, well-manicured church property, and the like certainly glorify God and may encourage unbelievers to ask about our faith. However, I prefer to call those activities pre-evangelism. No amount of my church attendance ever is going to indicate to my neighbor that Jesus is his Savior. Good works don’t save me or my neighbor.

The topic of this paper, however, is not just evangelism, but Personal Evangelism. The thrust, therefore, is on a sharing the Gospel on a more intimate level than from a pulpit or lectern. From personal experience I know this to be more difficult than standing safely behind the three sides of a pulpit without the possibility of interrupting questions and distracting side issues and events. To sit in a relative’s living room (or a member’s or a comparative stranger’s) a few feet from each other with only a coffee table to hide your suddenly ungainly feet and to speak of your beautiful Savior and to seek to draw out meaningful responses from your host, with perhaps a sincere confession of sin and a confession of faith in Christ, somehow is terrifying for many to contemplate. Nevertheless, it is also most joyful!

II. Why are there so few personal evangelists?

We’ve touched on this above. Fear is one reason, whether we wish to admit it openly or not. Let us examine our question, therefore, and provide some solutions.

The Problem

Unclean consciences. Strangely enough, with all our exposure to God’s Holy Word, some of us feel unqualified to share our faith personally with another soul because we are not sure of the forgiveness of our own sins. Our conscience accuses us of failure to follow the whole of God’s Law. We listen to Satan lying to us that we are damned sinners. We ask ourselves who we think we are, talking religion with someone who probably doesn’t sin anymore than we

The Remedy

“Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not Thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee. Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy

do. So we put off our good intention until some uncertain future date, when we will be “better Christians.”

Uncertainty of results. While we all in thoughtful moments will agree that we cannot measure the affect the Gospel will have on individuals, yet we look for positive results. In fact, we are disappointed when we don't see much that we'd call positive. This is one of the constant problems that we face as evangelists. It even keeps some of us from getting started, for we may know that active evangelism committees elsewhere have little to show for their efforts.

Fear of not knowing what to say. It's easy enough to affirm that we who are leaders in the church should not be at a loss for words, especially about the way to eternal life. But how to present God's Law in all its severity so that our host appreciates it, and how to apply the Gospel so that we are not detracting from its beauty—these may convince us to leave the task to someone else.

Fear of what the prospect will say. We can imagine all sorts of replies to which a prospect might wish answers: scouting, disbelief in Scripture, the narrow-mindedness of the Wisconsin Synod, etc. We can visualize the prospect becoming angry with us, refusing to listen, arguing.

Fear of those “superior” to us. It's relatively easy to evangelize children, old ladies, those behind prison bars, the uneducated, the poor. But it is quite another matter to address yourself with confidence to tall, strong men, executives, the wealthy, those with university degrees.

Limited knowledge. Some of us may feel well qualified in some areas, but limited in others. For instance, you're trained to teach in a grade school and don't have the ability to evangelize adults. Some of us may even doubt our talent for evangelizing children.

Misconception of prospects regarding their interest in heaven. Because people don't go to church, don't have their children baptized, don't send their children to Sunday School, or in general act as heathen, we may be inclined to think they are not

righteousness.” (Ps.51:9-14)

God's promises. “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). “So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it” (Is. 55:11).

God's command, “Go and make disciples of all nations” (Mt.28:19)

Our Synod Commission on Evangelism has prepared a manual with actual sample conversations, questions, illustrations, Bible passages, and explanations. The Talk About the Savior (TAS) manual provides a method which has been used by many to help them overcome their fears. The TAS manual also suggests a detailed training procedure to make the learning easier and practical.

The on-the-job training which you receive from an experienced evangelist will go a long way toward overcoming this fear. Few prospects are uncouth. There are simple ways of answering every objection which a prospect may advance. A thorough acquaintance with God's Word is beneficial.

The “all nations” Jesus referred to include both our “inferiors” and “superiors.” Full conviction that God wants us to do this work and that He will assist us with His Spirit provides the remedy. Personal experience with a trained evangelist will also help us see that it can be done. Basically, all people are alike.

Education. Since the introduction of the TAS manual hundreds of pastors and others have increased their knowledge of how to evangelize. Actually, there is no more to it than applying the appropriate truths of God's Word.

The Gospel alone is the power of God unto salvation—even to stimulate interest in learning more about it. Why should people be interested in going to church, if we haven't shared the Gospel with them? Many also are interested (from books or other media),

interested in eternal life.

Misconception of prospects regarding their spiritual death. Sad to say, some of us may forget that all who do not believe in Jesus as their Savior will be damned.

Misunderstanding of evangelism. Some may feel evangelism is unscriptural, unlutheran, sheep-stealing, or condemning.

but have little correct information and therefore lack motivation.

“The soul that sinneth, it shall die...” (Ez.18:20). “Jesus answered, ‘I am the way—the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me’” (Jn.14:6).

The early Christians shared their faith (cf. Acts 8:1&4). Lutheran doctrine is scriptural. Sheep-stealing is sinful, sharing your faith with those who have no spiritual shepherd is commendable. It is vital to demonstrate what sin is—using the first person does away with personal insult.

III. Why do we need more personal evangelism?

It’s the best way to share our faith. If we think of Jesus as an evangelist, we realize that He concentrated on a few. Jesus brought many to faith in Himself; it is true, however, the majority of His public ministry was also a lengthy instruction class for His disciples. Even with the masses it was personal exposure to the Son of God which, through the Spirit, worked faith. The disciples were the ones who by their personal contacts and public preaching spread the church. In turn, the converts themselves told others of Christ.

There are numerous methods of evangelizing. We might distribute tracts or marked New Testaments, sponsor newspaper articles, place copies of *Meditations* in hospitals, preach daily, erect signs outside the church or along the highways with scriptural messages, support radio and TV broadcasts, or hold rallies. However, direct application of the Law and Gospel to a soul is still the best way. If understood correctly, the give and take of a person to person relationship is most effective in helping a sinner to realize his helplessness and to believe in Jesus as his Savior.

The need for personal evangelism is quite apparent when we consider the unchristian population around us. We know it will always be there, but all were still redeemed by the precious life and death of Christ, and we don’t want to be guilty of not sharing our faith in Him. If the figures are still accurate which I heard a few years ago, a soul goes to hell every second. That means that in the last ten minutes six hundred have gone to hell! The figures become astronomical in a life-time.

Consider the startling information that if in all the world there were only one Christian this year, and during the whole next year he only gained one (making two), and during the following year they each only brought one to faith in Christ (making four), and if only this minimum of each one winning one a year continued—in less years than our Savior lived there would not be one unbeliever in the whole world! Somewhere along the line we Christians have been failing. Few Christians ever bring one soul to the Savior in their life, to say nothing of the comparatively easy figure of one a year. In fact, it took an average of eighty-three communicants in 1973 in our Synod to gain one new adult.

Where we ever got the idea that a pastor is the only one who is supposed to evangelize is hard to imagine. It’s not scriptural. It’s not even logical. To “hire a professional” to do all our evangelizing is tantamount to hiring a general and expecting him to do all the fighting of the war, in addition to holding regular motivation sessions for the troops so they keep up their morale in the face of his small successes—and still expecting the general ultimately to win the war for everyone. To use another parallel, it’s similar to hiring a coach for a football team, telling him to conduct practices in which he only can relate the victories of other coaches, and expecting him to keep all his players on the bench cheering him on as he alone goes on the field to play the game. Our pastors are to be coaches (player-coaches) training their members and taking the field of battle with them against Satan and all his hosts. You teachers are among the first who are to be trained. You, in turn, are invaluable assistants.

We have long known that a Christian can witness to the grace of God by his conduct. Many times his actions will speak even louder than his words. (Some Christians maybe would be more effective witnesses, if they kept their mouths shut.) There are numerous Bible passages which encourage good works. “Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Mt.5:16). “I want you to stress these things so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone” (Titus 3:8). “Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us” (1 Pet.2:12). “Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without talk by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives” (1 Pet.3:1,2). However, we know from other passages (e.g. Rom.3:20; Gal.2:16; Eph.2:8,9) that good works do not save. Even the last passage quoted above does not say that—without constantly harping on religion a Christian wife can win over her heathen husband by her life so that *he asks her to tell him* why she acts as she does.

The old Lutheran dogmatician David Hollaz defines good works by saying, “Good works are free acts of justified persons, performed through the renewing grace of the Holy Spirit according to the prescription of the divine Law, true faith in Christ preceding, to the honor of God and the edification of men.” The good works of the believers may cause the unregenerate to glorify God, but only in so far as the good works convict the unregenerate of sin and force them to flee to God for help. For, good works are not means of grace. The Gospel alone is the power of God unto salvation, and to share the Gospel is the purpose of evangelism.

Without belaboring this point about good works much further, for some will feel that there is little misunderstanding of it, I wish to mention that too often we church leaders have allowed those entrusted to our spiritual care to believe that sanctified lives are all that God expects from us. We may not have said or meant it so brazenly, however, we have given the impression or not corrected the false impression that only “a few, chosen individuals” can talk about the Savior, thus we’ve encouraged spreading the Gospel by works. Some maybe cannot talk to others about the way to salvation, but more can than we may want to believe—and I would hasten to add, more do share portions of their faith than we may know about.

Getting back to our question, why do we need more personal evangelism, if many already do “talk religion”? Because God tells us that all Christians should share their faith, to the best of their ability. Because we are often hesitant to say what really ought to be said. Because we may not train our people to use all their abilities. Because there is too much general talk about religion and the Gospel not enough talk of it. Because it is the best way (as explained above). Because of the numbers of people dying without saving faith, and because good works are not sufficient.

IV. What are the blessings of evangelism?

The most obvious and chief blessing is in obedience to Christ’s commission so that heathen will learn the meaning of His vicarious atonement and will inherit eternal life. If we do evangelism work for any other primary reason, we are wrong. We may produce the same blessed result, however, our motivation is unscriptural, selfish, and based on the Law.

If, in obedience to the Great Commission, we do bring others to saving faith, a number of secondary blessings follow. We receive the personal joy and satisfaction of having brought another to his Savior. While it is true that it is the Holy Spirit through God’s Word which worked faith, yet we were the speakers of the Word and were instruments (by the grace of God) in sharing that Word. To see an individual for the first time in his life honestly confessing his sins and hearing him confess his faith, that is a joy which does not only belong to pastors. It can be yours.

Those who hear the pure doctrine of Scripture from your lips will be interested in hearing more. So another blessing is that a basis has been provided for more instruction. We might think of the pastor’s Bible Information Class. However, we dare not overlook the possibilities of children being instructed in Sunday Schools, Vacation Bible schools, and Christian grade schools. Evangelism can be the tool to increase our numbers of adults baptized and confirmed, or to increase our school enrollments—bringing blood-bought souls

under the continuing umbrella of God's Word. Therein also lies the additional blessing of larger congregations and missions growing.

One is tempted not to list the next blessing, for fear that it will be misrepresented, misused, or mistaken. Nevertheless, more money will become available. A by-product of learning of the gracious Gift of God and of attending Worship Services to hear more about Him is that there will be greater offerings of appreciation. People cannot but wish to thank the Lord with their earthly goods for all He has done for them. Far from costing a congregation or a school some budget expenditures for TAS manuals, tracts, postage, and so on, evangelism will pay for itself, and then some. The Gospel always motivates people to share what they have.

Finally, evangelism will produce the blessing of more evangelists. As individuals hear the good news of salvation from the lips of "ordinary people" they will be encouraged to become involved in this joyous work themselves. In fact, making an evangelism call on a fellow member is one of the ways of recruiting him to share in the task. Evangelism is, therefore, somewhat self-perpetuating.

V. What can we do?

Train yourself or become trained by someone else. Buy the TAS manual, borrow a copy, learn another outline, write your own procedure to follow—but train yourself. Develop confidence in your ability to share your faith so that it becomes a part of your life, natural, and not a terrible ordeal to be endured, as if it were a part of the Christian's cross. Or, have someone train you by accompanying them on calls, allowing you gradually to enlarge your talents. Ask questions, observe what is taking place, consider why certain things are done or sequences are followed, and assimilate them.

The greatest hurdle is the first one—beginning. Once that first visit is made, once you really understand that the Lord is with you and that He wants you to share your faith, the rest is easier. So, begin. Don't put it off until next year. "As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. For he says, "At the time of my favor I heard you, and on the day of salvation I helped you.' I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:1,2).

The Outline

Talk About the Savior

Introduce Yourself

- I. Trainer's greeting
- II. Question of intrusion

Get Acquainted

- I. Show interest in your host
- II. Lead to key questions
 - "If you died today, do you know for sure where you'd be?"
 - "If you died today and God asked you, 'Why should I let you into heaven?' What would you say?"

Present Sin and Grace

- I. No everlasting life by works
 - A. God demands perfection
 - B. All are sinners
 - C. All deserve punishment
- II. God provided everlasting life
 - A. God's justice in Christ
 - B. God's love in Christ
 - C. God's gift in Christ
- III. By faith everlasting life is ours

- A. The call to faith
- B. The meaning of faith

Seek Responses

- I. Encourage the prospect to express the faith God works
- II. Encourage the prospect to promise specific action

Close the Visit

- I. Possible closing prayer
- II. Expression of thanks, gift, and parting greeting