

Sharing the Love of Jesus: It's Contagious
Second in a series of Three Sermons
September 20, 2020
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Philippians 1:12 - 14

I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. 14 And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

Dear Christian Friends,

Two weeks ago, our sermon focused on how sharing the love of Christ is an obligation. We examined the paradox that we are both debt-free and in debt at the same time. Debt free towards God since Jesus Christ paid it all, but obligated to spend our days loving God by loving our neighbors as much as we love ourselves. Next week, our sermon will focus on how sharing the love of Christ is a matter of life and death. Today I invite you to consider with me the contagious nature of the love of Jesus Christ.

In these days of Covid-19, the word “contagious” at first glance sounds like a dirty word - as a nation we are exerting great effort towards making preventing the passing along of this infection to a neighbor, whether that neighbor be a loved one or a complete stranger. But upon deeper examination, the word “contagious”, when applied to our Christian faith, has the opposite meaning, to pass along our Christian faith to as many neighbors as possible is to be our heart’s desire.

(Story of Randy Kuchenbecker, a youth worker at St. Martin’s Lutheran in Winona back in the 80’s / his laughter was as contagious as any I’ve ever witnessed / it was a laughter rooted in a love for Christ and for young people / there was no way you could be in his presence and not get caught up in his loud and hilarious and full of snorting and almost can’t breathe and my stomach is hurting and contagious kind of laughter)

(Story of my mom’s gentle and kind and prayerful personality / rooted in a love for Christ and for people / there was no way you could be in her presence for any length of time and want to be gentler and kinder and more prayerful). What Randy’s contagious laughter and my mom’s contagious gentle and kind and prayerful manner have in common, of course, is they were rooted in deep faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

In verse 27 of our Epistle lesson today, Paul writes from his prison cell an encouragement that the Philippians would let their manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ. He had a desire to depart this life and be with Christ in heaven, but he knew that if he remained in the flesh, his life would be for the progress of their Christian faith. Paul knew what we want to know again today, that by definition, good news is meant to be shared. The Christian

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faith is meant to be contagious. Three lessons we want to learn today from St. Paul about what a contagious Christianity looks and sounds and feels and tastes like.

Lesson #1 about a contagious Christianity is that Paul's confidence is in the power of God's love. In Romans 1:16, Paul declared that he would never be ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it was the power of God unto salvation for all who believe. In verse 12 of our text, Paul writes **"I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel."**

When Paul says that **"I want you to know, brethren,"** he is introducing a new section in this letter. He is saying, "I really want you to get this. I really need you to understand what I am about to tell you. When he calls them, brethren, he is speaking to them as brothers and sisters in the Lord. He is speaking with tender affection.

When Paul says that **"my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel,"** he is talking about his imprisonment. Paul's perspective is that the most important thing in his life was not his own personal safety or comfort, it was the advancement of the Gospel. His bucket list didn't include paying off his mortgage or taking nice vacations, it only had one item listed, that the Good News of Jesus Christ living and dying and rising again would be spread near and far.

Paul is confident that as often as he testified to the Gospel, the Holy Spirit would be working faith in the hearts of redeemed sinners. He knew that faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. He knew that the Philippians were of one mind with him. He knew they would suffer for the cause of the Gospel as surely as he suffered. He knew that the gift of God's grace would be the gift that kept on giving. He knew what I invite you to think about today, that the Gospel seems to advance the most, not during times of prosperity, but in times of adversity.

The kingdom of God is a young friend of mine who spent time in county jail much to the dismay of friends and family. On the one hand, it was in jail that he was ashamed and disgusted and feeling as though prison time was a huge waste of time, but on the other hand, it was in prison that he began to read his Bible, it was in prison that the Holy Spirit got ahold of his heart and turned him around, it was in prison that he returned to the faith he had promised in his confirmation vow, it was in prison, that he ran for refuge in the God of second chances and new beginnings.

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Lesson #2 about a contagious Christianity is that Paul's confinement is the talk of the town.

Phil. 1:13 - so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ.

For two solid years Paul was in chains. And the chains that were on him were like an extended handcuff that was about 18 inches long. It was always attached to his wrist on the one end and to a Roman guard on the other. It was calculated that several dozen Praetorium guards were rotated through his rental quarters who were connected to Paul in the closest imaginable proximity.

You should know something about these soldiers. I'm told they were like the Navy Seals, the FBI agents, and the Secret Service agents all rolled into one, and then a little bit more. They were the most elite group of Roman soldiers in the Empire. They were the personal bodyguards for Caesar, they served in his palace, they were 9000 strong and they were handpicked. They guided the directions of Nero's reign as emperor. They were given the highest honor and privileges for their service, their pay was double regular soldiers, they could only serve for 12 years because of the high demands. After they retired, they were given enormous benefits for the rest of their lives.

It's easy to see how the testimony of Paul became the talk of the town. They were chained to a preacher who wanted to know nothing except for Jesus Christ crucified, and they couldn't get away. They were chained to a missionary who couldn't stop declaring the love of Jesus who had lived and died and rose again on their behalf, and they couldn't get away.

Imagine a soldier coming on duty for the first time, 18 inches away for hours at a time, and asking, why are you in chains?

Paul could not have dreamed this up. He couldn't have planned it any better. He doesn't even have to go into the highways and byways and marketplaces, they are coming to his rented quarters, sitting 18 inches away, his sermons wouldn't have to be done in 22 minutes or less, they could go on for hours!

Dear friends, maybe you feel tied down these days. Maybe you feel tied down to your job or to your desk or to your home. Maybe you feel tied down to a schedule you don't really enjoy or to a group of people you don't really feel like you fit in or to a set of circumstances that are overwhelming. Understand that Jesus Christ is right there at your side, He is out front leading, and He is in back of you ready to pick up the pieces. He invites you to know that your past is forgiven and that your future is in his hands, leaving you with just today as

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an opportunity to be sharing the love of Christ with those near and far, or as Paul would describe it, as an ambassador in chains.

Lesson #3 about a contagious Christianity is Paul's challenge not only to live the Gospel, but to boldly speak of it.

Philippians 1:14 - And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

In this verse, Paul is challenging those in Rome who were already believing to be more bold and to be more courageous in living for Christ and in telling others about Him. I read an article that lists four fears Christians have that keep us from sharing our faith, and four truths from God's Word to dispel them.

Fear #1 - What will people think? To which Paul answers in II Timothy, **"for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.**

Fear #2 - What if I say something wrong? To which Jesus replies, **"don't worry in advance about what to say. Just say what God tells you at that time, for it is not you who will be speaking, but the Holy Spirit."**

Fear #3 - What if I stumble while people are watching? To which Jeremiah speaks, **"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning."**

Fear #4 - How do I share my faith in a way that makes sense and doesn't offend people? Peter answers, **"Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and respect."**

In 1555 two English Reformers named Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley were burned at the stake because of their faithful witness to Christ. They were martyred at the hand of Queen Mary I, also called Bloody Mary. Mary Tudor was the daughter of Henry VIII, and in her five-year reign, over 280 religious dissenters were burned at the stake.

As these two Christians were strapped to the stake, back to back, and as the flames began to burn their bodies, Latimer shouted to Ridley, "Be of good comfort, Master Ridley. Play the man. We shall this day light such a candle by God's grace in England as I trust shall never be put out." Historians tell us that as a result of that fire the cause of the Reformation in England spread like wildfire until it overtook much of the nation.

The kingdom of God is like a medium sized church in a medium sized city full of folks who know that a candle loses nothing by lighting another candle. They see every conversation as

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an opportunity to share the love of Jesus Christ by listening well, by asking good questions, by speaking truth with kindness, and by behaving in a way that attracts others to Christ. They understand that the Gospel often advances more in stormy times than it does in times of smooth sailing. They know that as often as they deal with their challenges with kindness and with patience and with self-control, the more likely they will be the talk of the town. In Jesus' Name. Amen.