

Epiphany 5B – The Gospel compels us

1. A study done by the Barna Group in 2018 revealed that Christians are increasingly reluctant to share their faith with non-believers.
 - a. This was a follow-up study to a 1993 study done by the same group in cooperation with Lutheran Hour Ministries
 - i. The study in 1993 found that nine out of 10 Christians who had shared their faith agreed with the statement, “Every Christian has a responsibility to share their faith.”
 - ii. In 2018, just two-thirds who shared their faith said the same (64%)—a 25-point drop.
 - iii. Penn Jillette, the magician and self-proclaimed atheist, once asked of Christians who don’t share their faith: “How much do you have to hate somebody to believe everlasting life is possible and not tell them that?”
 - iv. What could account for that drop...why are Christians increasingly reluctant to share their faith?
 - b. Roxanne Stone, editor in chief at Barna Group had this to say, “The overarching cultural trends of secularism, relativism, pluralism and the digital age are contributing to a society that is less interested in religion and that has marginalized the place of spirituality in everyday life. As a result, Christians in America today have to live in the tension between Jesus’ commands to tell others the good news and growing cultural taboos against proselytizing.”
 - i. Like anything in life talking about our faith is not only a learned behavior it also has to be used to stay in shape.
 - ii. The more we don’t talk about our faith the less inclined we are to feel we should, we get out of practice.
 - iii. At that point fear sets in and speaking about faith becomes awkward and our sinful flesh uses all kinds of excuses for why we shouldn’t do it.
2. But the root of it all may be the answer to Penn Jillette’s questions, “How much do you have to hate somebody to believe everlasting life is possible and not tell them that?”
 - a. Do we really believe that we have the only key to everlasting life and if those we love don’t know about this key they will spend eternity in hell?
 - i. That knowledge has compelled Christians from the first day of the church.
 - ii. What else could account for Peter standing up on that first Pentecost day, just after the Holy Spirit came to the apostles in the upper room and say to the crowds that had just put Jesus to death, “**Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified,**”? (Acts 2:36)

- iii. It was the good news of the Gospel that compelled Peter that even those who put our Lord to death were not beyond salvation and he was willing to risk His life to tell them.
 - iv. Does the Gospel compel you in the same way?
 - b. The Gospel compelled Paul in our Epistle lesson today from I Cor 9, **“For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!”**
 - i. Paul talks about the “necessity” of preaching, the Lord laid on him the knowledge that his message was the key to eternal salvation
 - ii. He says later in our passage, **“I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some...I do it all for the sake of the gospel that I may share with them in its blessings.”** (I Cor 9: 22-23)
 - iii. We hear him speak with similar urgency in Romans as he talks about his anguish over his fellow Jews who reject their Messiah, **“I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.”** (Rom 9:2-3)
 - iv. Is your heart grieved for those who don’t know the Good News?
 - c. Paul is not the only one in Scripture to talk about the burden, the necessity, of bearing witness to God’s Word
 - i. We hear the same in the prophets of the OT when they begin their message as Malachi does, **“The burden of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi.”** (Mal 1:1 - KJV)
 - ii. Jeremiah elaborates on what that burden of God’s Word is like, **“If I say, “I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,” there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.”** (Jer 20:9)
 - iii. And preachers ever since have felt that same burden as CH Spurgeon said in the 19th century, **“The servants of God mean business; they do not play at preaching, but they plead with men. They do not talk for talking’s sake; but they persuade for Jesus’ sake. They are not sent into the world to tickle men’s ears, nor to make a display of elocution, nor to quote poetry: theirs is an errand of life or death to immortal souls.”**
3. Life or death to immortal souls that is what compels pastors and prophets, but it should also be what compels all Christians for our message is, “Life or death.”
 - a. If someone blithely walked out of building into certain danger from a car or falling into an open hole, I am sure that any of you would raise the alarm
 - i. In fact, if you were able to warn someone of danger and didn’t the question would rightly be asked of you, “Why didn’t you say something?”

- ii. That same question could be asked of us as Christians when we withhold the Word of the Lord from those we know who are perishing.
 - iii. Increasingly in the West the folks who don't know the Gospel aren't in deepest Asia or Africa but right here.
- b. Not everyone is a pastor, not everyone is given charge for the public proclamation of God's Word, but you have been given abilities and resources to further that mission
 - i. As Paul says in Rom 12, **"For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness."** (Rom 12:4-8)
 - ii. God puts all people together in the church to help fulfill the Great Commission of making disciples of all nations because we know that without that message people will perish.
 - iii. All work together for the good of that mission, whether you're the one proclaiming it or not, your talents and your gifts go toward furthering the message, making the message possible.
- c. Is there any greater message, any greater comfort, than knowing that the Son of God humbled Himself to become human and burdened Himself not only with my sins, but the sins of all people of all time to suffer and died that those sins would be wiped out so that we may have eternal life?
 - i. You are privileged to be a son or daughter of the King and you know that the King is gracious and loving and desires all of His children to be with Him through faith in Christ.
 - ii. Let the knowledge of the Gospel, the free gift of eternal life through faith, be what compels you to use your gifts, your time and your talents toward making disciples of all nations beginning with those around you.