

Proper 9C – We Are the Voice of Jesus

1. Witnessing to our faith is something that seems to have fallen on hard times
 - a. An article by the Barna group (a Christian polling organization) reads, **“When was the last time you had a conversation about God? For most people, the unfortunate and surprising answer to that question is...not very often. Spiritual conversations are exceedingly rare for most Americans, and even for Christians, who are at best reluctant to have them.”**ⁱ
 - i. The article further compares data from when it began asking that question in 1993 with today.
 - ii. In 1993, Barna partnered with our own Lutheran Hour Ministries to research reasons why people did and did not engage in intentional outreach.
 - iii. In the same article they found that in 1993, 9 out of 10 Christians who shared their faith agreed with the statement, **“Every Christian has a responsibility to share their faith,”** whereas today just two-thirds say so (64%)—a 25-point drop.”
 - iv. Perhaps that’s because in our increasingly pluralistic world we feel that the two things you shouldn’t talk about in polite society are “religion and politics”.
 - b. Even though the numbers look like a precipitous decline the Church has always sought to energize her people to share the good news.
 - i. In the past that led to the development of “programs” to help people see the need to share their faith and feel more prepared to do so.
 - ii. Programs like D. James Kennedy’s “Evangelism Explosion” and even the LCMS’ “Everyone His Witness”
 - c. But I wonder if we make much ado over little – we are natural-born evangelists. Don’t think so? Let me give you a couple of examples
 - i. When you’ve had a really great meal and experience at a restaurant are you hesitant to share that experience with others?
 - ii. When you’ve seen a great movie or performance do you have difficulty talking about it and inviting others to “see it” if they get the chance?
 - iii. When you’ve just come back from a great vacation are you embarrassed to say where you’ve been?
 - iv. Do you have an agenda for the restaurant, vacation spot, movie company – are you perceived to be working for them by those you tell?
 - d. No in all of these and so many more you’re more than happy to share your experience, you’re excited, this is a natural part of life

- i. And there's almost always an invitation to those listening to try it for themselves even though you know it's asking for a commitment of time and money
 - ii. It doesn't feel like an imposition for us to say it; and I've rarely ever felt imposed upon by someone telling me about their experience.
 - iii. But our faith gets a pass, what we've got we often keep to ourselves and maybe speak of it in hushed tones not excitedly.
 - iv. Perhaps we would be much more enthusiastic about sharing our faith if we really knew what we were sharing.
- 2. In our Gospel lesson today, Jesus tells the 72 whom He sends out that when they speak His Word, **"He who hears you hears me!"** – we are Jesus' voice. (Lk 10:16)
 - a. This account is unique to the Gospel of Luke
 - i. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record the sending out of the 12 Apostles to Israel but only Luke adds this other sending.
 - ii. The setting here is in Samaria, not Israel, where Jesus has already experienced rejection, this is not friendly territory or even Jewish territory
 - iii. Jesus' description of what the 72 are to do is similar to what He told the Twelve when He sent them out earlier in chapter 9 - to preach the presence of the kingdom, to heal and perform miracles, and to say "peace" to houses where they are accepted with hospitality.
 - iv. And like the Twelve, the 72 must be prepared also for the rejection of the preaching of the kingdom of God, **"But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you.'**" (Luk 10:10-11)
 - b. You see it's been no different since the first days of the church, even before Jesus died, there's never been an "easy" or "safe" time to share the Gospel
 - i. But what the earliest Church had was the commitment that what they were sharing was the very Word of God, speaking for Christ Himself, speaking the Kingdom of God into existence where they were.
 - ii. And that's not only a powerful motivator, it's power in itself.
 - iii. What was the content of Jesus' preaching wherever He went, **"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."** (Mat 4:17)
 - iv. Meaning that Christ was the manifestation of the Kingdom of heaven right there where He was.
 - c. And in sending the 72 they share in that same mission as Jesus says, **"behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves...Heal the sick...and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'...The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me."** (Lk 10:3,9,16)

- i. As I mentioned before the account of the 72 is unique to Luke, and unlike the 12 apostles, we don't know anything about the 72 including their names – they are anonymous.
 - ii. But like the 12 they are sent using the same word of the Great Commission in Matthew 19 “Go”
 - iii. The Apostles were sent to the world, but the 72 much closer to home, in all the villages that Jesus was about to go to on His way to Jerusalem.
 - iv. And wherever they went they brought the Kingdom of God with them in His Word – He who hears you hears me.
- 3. It is the same today for you and me, like the 72 we're largely anonymous but sent to places not so far away but places in our sphere of influence, where God has placed you today – we are the voice of Jesus!
 - a. And the promise given to the 72 is given to all of us when we speak the words of His Gospel, the gift of eternal life and forgiveness of sins through the death of Jesus on the cross.
 - i. When we speak those words, those precious words of the Gospel, we are bringing the Kingdom of heaven right to where we are speaking.
 - ii. Jesus promises that when we speak those words, His words, He is present, **“For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”** (Mat 18:20)
 - iii. He promises that His word is powerful, that it's not just mere human words but the very power of God, **“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.”** (Joh 6:63)
 - iv. Those words bring life and faith with them to those who hear.
 - b. My dear friends in Christ, return to our Lord's word and promise, take it to heart
 - i. You have been given the gift of eternal life through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.
 - ii. You have received this faith so that you may share this faith as Peter tells us, **“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”** (1Pe 2:9)
 - iii. Do not hide the light of the Gospel under a basket, but trust in the Lord who promises that His Word is powerful that He will provide you the opportunities and abilities to witness to the hope you have in Christ.
 - iv. We are the voice of Jesus...you are the voice of Jesus for the life of the world!

ⁱ <https://www.barna.com/research/sharing-faith-increasingly-optional-christians/>