



“The Faith We Share”

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Romans 10:13-15

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Of the five practices of faithful discipleship, *Invite* is the most intimidating. In traditional language of the church, the word is *witness*, which sounds even *more* intimidating. And of the five, it's the one we're most reluctant to practice. Why is that?

The most common reasons I hear from people who are hesitant about sharing their faith (reasons I have been known to offer myself) are, “I don't want to force my views on anybody,” “I don't want to be judgmental,” or “I don't want to come across as holier-than-thou.” If that's what we think faith sharing is about, then it's understandable why we're reluctant to practice it. And with that approach, it's a close contest between who experiences more trepidation: the one making the invitation or the one receiving it.

Evangelism has a negative perception in our society, the byproduct of both political manipulation and bad motives. But I want to make the case for Christian witness, to recapture the spirit of evangelism, whether or not that's what we call it. Invitation is one of our practices because it is part of our calling in Christ, from the Great Commission to the Day of Pentecost to the missionary journeys of Paul and Peter and others: *we are called to be disciples who make disciples*. At its core, evangelism is about sharing our faith with others. When it is done well, faith sharing is invitational, humble, encouraging, honest, and prayerful.

It starts with telling our own story. How would you tell the story of your faith? Think back on your journey and the people who have walked with you. Start with some memories; maybe even journal what comes to mind. Ask yourself, “How has my life been shaped by my faith in Jesus Christ? When did I first learn that he loved me enough to die for me? How has my faith changed and grown over the years? Where would I be without Christ? Where would I be without my church?” It's all about the story.

Sharing our faith isn't limited to what we say. Often, what we *do* is much more powerful. For several years, I wore a bracelet engraved with the letters W.W.J.D. You may remember that trend – the letters stood for “What would Jesus do?” I wore it primarily to remind myself that, in any given situation, I should ask myself how Jesus would handle it and respond accordingly. But that bracelet had another effect – it signaled to people who saw it on my wrist that I was a Christian and, for better or worse, I represented Christ. It's a humbling experience to catch oneself in a moment of frustration or impatience and know that it reflects negatively on our faith and our Savior. That bracelet was heavier than its weight.

How do our lives reflect the Christ we claim to follow? Since the first days of the pandemic a year ago, Church of the Saviour's leadership and staff have prioritized loving our neighbors over ourselves. We knew that, as much as we value being together, our neighbors would need much more from us in the face of unprecedented uncertainty, fear, and loss. So, we contacted civic leaders to offer our help. We diverted financial resources to food pantries and other direct assistance. We reached out to the American Red Cross and began hosting weekly blood drives. We sewed masks and distributed them to anyone who needed one. We invested our energy in creating the best online worship experience we could, then expanded from one service to two – offering modern worship and traditional worship – to reach as many people as possible. And when vaccines became available, we opened our doors in welcome; not prioritizing our members, but creating equal opportunity for everyone while assisting those who needed extra help. That's not to say that we've always gotten it right or that we couldn't have done more. But we have made a point to look outward first and strive to follow the example of Jesus in everything we do. But it's not doing good – lots of organizations work

to build stronger communities. Our work is inspired by the Gospel: the change wrought in us by the unconditional love of God, the redemption we know in Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit that makes us more than what we are.

Do people notice? I hope they do. I hope our neighbors know that we're here for them. I hope our community sees us as beacon of light and hope in times of darkness. I hope people notice the good that we do and are inspired to acts of generosity and kindness. But even if they don't, we'll keep doing all we can to be faithful to the Saviour whose name we bear.

When you tell people you are part of Church of the Saviour, how do they react? What do they say about us? How much do they know about what happens here? People will tell *you* things they won't say to *me*. Look, I'm the pastor: people either are nice to me or avoid me, or they give me an earful about what they don't like about Christians. It's hard for me to get a good read on how they see us. From time to time, I'll surreptitiously ask a server at a restaurant or a store employee what they know about that big church down the street on Lee Road. The answers are always enlightening. Some people have been here for a wedding or a funeral. Some know us because of Upward Basketball or a Flea Market. Others have no idea what happens here. Whatever we're working on at any given time, it isn't meant to be kept a secret.

One simple way to invite people to experience Christ is to share what's happening at your church. If you follow us on Facebook or Instagram, you can share a post that you find inspiring with a comment like, "Check out what we're doing at my church" or say why it's meaningful to you. Post what you came across in your morning devotion or something you discussed in your small group that you found helpful or thought-provoking. Dare I suggest you could even mention something your pastor said in a sermon? Avoid platitudes, like "Everything happens for a reason" or "God never gives you more than you can handle." Be humble. Be curious. Invite others to think with you. As I shared recently, when it's done well, sharing your faith is like "one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread."¹

Each one of us, no matter how long we've been following Jesus, came to faith because of someone. I asked some folks from Church of the Saviour about the people who introduced them to faith. I want to share with you what they had to say. Take a look.

Videos – Aaron Yost, Carolyn Skillern, Curt Campbell

Who brought you to faith? A parent or grandparent? A family friend? A youth leader or camp counselor or Sunday school teacher? How did they pass on their faith to you? Through their personal testimony or their actions? Through their encouragement and the promise they saw in you? Through their prayers with you and for you? Let me ask a different question: How has their influence shaped the person you are? How is your life different now because of them? And what would you want to say to them today if you could? If you still can, consider sending a note or giving them a call to thank them for the faith they've instilled in you.

Discipleship isn't about talking the talk, but walking the walk. We could even say it's about *walking* the talk. *But sometime, we have to talk*. Romans 10:13-15 reads, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. But how can they call on someone they don't know? And how can they know someone they haven't heard of? And how can they hear without someone to tell them?" Friends, that's our job as followers of Jesus – to share Christ even as we follow him. How will they know if we never make the effort to share?

That's why *Invite* is our fifth practice. We strive to live as disciples who *worship, grow, serve, give, and invite* for the sake of Christ and his mission. And just like the other four practices, there are five things we can each do on an individual level. Here's the challenge: *invite five people to experience Christ every year*. We all know people who don't yet know the joy of living out their faith in a church. Don't judge who they are or how they live – faith sharing is *invitation*, not *confrontation*. It can be as simple as inviting someone who doesn't have a church to come to church with you. Right now, it's even simpler: invite them to watch worship online –

¹ D. T. Niles, *That They May Have Life* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1951), 96.

on Sunday morning, or if that time isn't convenient, any time during the week. If each of the 400+ people who worship regularly at Church of the Saviour invited five people a year, that would mean over 2,000 people who were invited every year to experience Christ in their lives. And hey, Easter is coming soon: If you invite five people for Easter you'll have made your target for the year! If you're still hesitant, think about this for a moment: if your friends know you go to Church of the Saviour but you've never invited them to come with you, what message are you unintentionally sending? We don't have to be accomplished evangelists or master communicators. Our words don't have to be perfect. We just need to care enough not to keep the Good News to ourselves.

Think again about the person or people who brought you to faith. How is your life different because of the faith they passed on to you? And then think about this: who would give your name when asked who brought them to faith? Can you be that person for someone else? It's never too late. The faith that saves us is too important to keep to ourselves.

Let's pray: *God, I thank you for the faith that was planted in the hearts of everyone who is worshiping with us today. And God, we know that behind each disciple is the story of another disciple who introduced them to you. We give thanks for them and for the faith they shared with us. Help each of us to be that person in someone else's life, the person who passed on our faith so that they may experience new life in you. In your holy name, we pray. Amen.*