

OVERHEARD AT STARBUCKS

How Can I Share My Faith?

1 Peter 3:13-16

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There are two extremes when it comes to sharing our faith. One is to be obnoxious, arrogant, in people's face. The other is to be so embarrassed by all that, that we say nothing and do nothing to share with others who Christ is and what he means to us. Is there something in between those extremes? In other words, the answer to BAD evangelism is not NO evangelism, but rather AUTHENTIC evangelism.

Notice how our Christian witness comes in stereo--both showing and telling. Not one or the other. Read the first part of v. 15. Set apart Christ as Lord in your heart. There is a throne in each of our hearts, a control center. Only Jesus should sit there. Interestingly, when we let Christ be lord of our lives, two good things happen. Number one, our words and our conduct line up. Less hypocrisy! Number two, we begin to share Christ naturally. It's not a put-on or add-on or a gimmick or program. Have you noticed? We don't have any trouble talking about what we love or whom we love. A lady was in an airport terminal, moving from place to place. She would ask the person, "Pardon me, do you have grandchildren?" If they said yes, she would move on. Finally she asked a poor, unsuspecting man the question and he said no. "Good," she replied, "sit down, shut up, I'm going to show you pictures of mine."

But there's even more in v. 15 for us to explore. We are to be ready when anyone "asks" the reason for our hope. Do you know the biggest indictment of the church today? No one is asking (or at least, not enough people are asking). Furthermore, asking assumes dialogue, conversation. Faith-sharing is dialogical, two-way. In conversation, we make space for people, for their ideas and most importantly, for relationships. One of the reasons we started Lifetree Cafe here at FBC was to make space for questions, to attract unbelievers who are interested. We're really talking about hospitality, which may be the new, 21st-century word for evangelism. Didn't Jesus practice hospitality? He always had time for relationships, for people, for questions. God's hospitality (enter God's throne room and find grace); our hospitality.

And what do you suppose will be the likely topic of our conversations and sharing? Hope! See v. 15 again. Hope is desperately needed in this world. Think about the topics we have covered in this Starbucks sermon series: What happens when we die? What about the Second Coming? What about suicide? Why are people turned off by church? What difference does Jesus make? They're all about hope! Is there hope? The theme of First Peter is suffering. Witnessing is not acting like we have it all together. It's being real and sharing our own pain. Out of our own brokenness, our greatest sharing opportunities will come.

University of Connecticut Professor Bradley Wright has developed a unique religious survey. Instead of a static, one-time questionnaire, he asks people about their religious opinions in real time, twice a day as they text their replies to him. He says it is much more accurate because we feel closer to God and farther away from God, depending on our day. He says the survey showed that people feel more spiritual when they're walking, out in nature and in a religious service and feel less spiritual when they are on the computer or watching TV [*Jefferson City, Missouri News Tribune*, p. A12, Jan. 19, 2014]. Here's my point. People are more open to hearing the Gospel than we think! We just have to earn the right to share!

But there's one more important part to v. 15. We are to share with gentleness and respect. Humility and kindness. I think there is an order to this process. HUMILITY, HOSPITALITY, CURIOSITY AND BOLDNESS. But notice. If we start at the wrong end--with boldness--we never get a chance to do the humility, etc. Because we turn people off. So Peter says we start with gentleness. We might say it this way: less yell, less tell; more listen, more love.

You remember a couple of weeks ago, we talked about why people are turned off by church. The authors of a book about this (*Why Nobody Wants To Go To Church Anymore*, Schultz and Schultz), told us some startling things. But what I want to share with you this week is their suggestions of how to respond to people with gentleness and respect. They say, ***I FEEL JUDGED....(our response): YOU'RE WELCOME JUST AS YOU ARE.*** They say, ***I DON'T WANT TO BE LECTURED....(our response): YOUR THOUGHTS ARE WELCOME. YOUR DOUBTS ARE WELCOME.*** They say, ***TOO MANY HYPOCRITES.....(our response): WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER.*** They say, ***GOD IS IRRELEVANT....(our response): GOD IS HERE, READY TO CONNECT WITH YOU IN A FRESH WAY.***

A couple of years ago, I was at a national training conference in northern California. I sat at dinner one night with a pastor who had spent hard time in Folsom Prison. After several trips back to prison (cycles of failure that took up ten years of his life), he said he got tired of missing life. He said, "I had a Christian in prison who was all over me with prayer. And he kept showing me Jesus. He said, "I knew Christ had come into my life, because I wasn't enjoying my sin as much as I had!" We sat there that summer evening and he looked into the distance and he said three times, "That Christian just kept showing me Jesus. He just kept showing me Jesus. He just kept showing me Jesus."