

## **Scripture: Matthew 28:18-20 (NRSVUE)**

<sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

## **Sermon: Overlying Generosity - The Scary E-Word**

We’ve all heard the horror stories...or maybe we’ve lived them. A cold call. Or rather a knock. The door is opened, and it begins. “Do you believe in God?” or “Have you claimed Jesus Christ as your Savior?” As a child, when I would see people walking along the streets from door to door with Bibles, I would hide, and I’ve been a churchgoer my whole life.

Some denominations believe that this is the best way to grow the church. And maybe it is for them. But what about us as United Methodists? Honestly, we’ve been pretty bad at it since, well, a very long time. Our churches thrived when going to church was the thing to do, but as that went away, we didn’t feel equipped to invite people into our space in a different way.

The scary “E” word is...evangelism, but it comes from very humble beginnings. Evangelism really stems from the Ancient Greek word meaning good news. It’s all about sharing the good news, that is, sharing the hope that we are given because of God’s saving grace through Jesus’s sacrifice for us.

Over these three weeks about Evangelism in our Overlying Generosity sermon series, we will look at three things: Today is about understanding what Evangelism is. Next week, we will look at why sharing our faith matters. In the last week of this topic, we will introduce ways that we can evangelize, or share hope, as United Methodists. So, let’s look at this scary “E” word, evangelism.

Jesus tells us that evangelism should be our response to God’s gift and our directive.

When Jesus spoke to his disciples, he didn’t tell them to be perfect or to have perfect faith now, or even to go back to their regular lives. No. He gave them

the authority to go and do. In Jesus's instructions in the Gospel of Matthew, the disciples were told to do three things. Of those three instructions, there was nothing about actually preaching to people. Isn't that lucky for all those sitting on your side of the pulpit?! Jesus told his disciples to make disciples, baptize them, and teach them. By these three directions, he was assuming that people will talk about the good news, our hope, because of God's saving grace through Jesus. Our approach does not need to be perfected but simply authentic.

In addition to this instruction, Jesus included "to make disciples of all nations". He was specifically pointing his disciples to the Gentiles, those who were not of Jewish heritage, who had never been connected with our God, or who the Jewish knew as Yahweh. If we were to take those words literally, there are 7b,984m,200th,000 Gentiles in the world today, with 5b,600m,000,000 who are not already Christian. Even if we acknowledge our more interfaith perspectives, there are 1.9 billion people who are non-religious around the world. Siblings, we've got work to do!

But it's not just about creating disciples. As we create disciples, we are not called to convert and then forget about people. We are called to live our beliefs out loud and with each other. It is about relationship. Caring about people into their relationship with Jesus, not just butts in seats, is all a part of evangelism. And we'll talk more about that in the weeks to come.

Jesus mentioned within his instructions for us the need for baptism. Even though it is a part of the United Methodist beliefs for someone to be baptized before becoming a member of the church, that isn't the point for baptism in Jesus's eyes. For new Christians in early times, baptism wasn't just about washing away their sins; it was about becoming a part of the Christian community. It was acceptance without the demand to be perfect in faith or anything else first. Instead of being on the outside, all were welcome inside. All are welcome inside.

Let us also remember that people who are unchurched or have left the church's institution don't tend to be against what Jesus taught about loving others and

loving God. Many still aspire to be like him. So, that means that when we feel equipped, we can easily evangelize.

Evangelism is about walking alongside others, hearing their stories, grieving with them when they're hurting, never pushing them towards one direction or another, wholeheartedly listening to what is making them come alive. And most importantly, to let them offer the same for us. In that relationship, then, questions may come up like, "How is it that you seem so at peace with life? What's your secret?" Those questions may not come up as soon as we think, yet it should never stop us from being ready for them or any questions like them.

So friends, as United Methodists, is evangelism about forcing church language at someone who has no understanding of who Jesus really was?

Instead, what is evangelism? (Repeat after me)

Sharing the love and hope of knowing God

Let's pray:

O God, open our eyes to those around us who need Your love. Give us the courage to step out of our comfort zone and invite them to church. Prepare their hearts even now to be receptive to the invitation. Amen.