Scripture: Isaiah 55:10-11 (NRSVUE)

[10] For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, [11] so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

Sermon: Overlying Generosity - Evangelism: Equipped By God

I've got a fun story for you. Andy and Louie were sixteen years old when their families vacationed together in St. Augustine, FL. After about 2 days on the beach, the guys were bored, so they walked out on the pier to see what people were fishing for. They were amazed. They had never seen rigs like these. Guys were fishing out there with huge rigs. Some wore harnesses. Some were anchored to the peer. Poles were very thick and lines very heavy. They were told that these fishermen were going after sharks. And right before their eyes, a huge shark swam under the peer and between the pilings. The boys had a bright idea. It looked to them like anybody could fish for sharks.

So they went down to the hardware store, bought the biggest hook they could find, got about 100 yards of pretty heavy rope, purchased an inter-tube that they could use as a bobber, and attached it all to a broom handle. "Anybody can fish for sharks, right?" Then they stopped at the supermarket and went to the back where the meat cutters were. They asked for whatever the meat cutter had that was gross and bloody. He gave them a fresh cow heart. So they put their cow heart into a cooler and headed out. They got out to the peer about 11:00 a. m. and started to unravel this contraption. The other fishermen had been there since dawn. They laughed and mocked the teenagers. Finally, they got the broom handle tied to the peer, and Louie threw the hook and line as far as he could out into the water.

They sat back and waited a while. And suddenly, something hit it. That 100 ft. of rope started uncurling into the ocean. Then it went to the far left and then back to the far right! They succeeded in tangling every other fishermens' line into a giant mess. While the other men grumbled, one experienced guy could see their dilemma. He came over and said, "Aren't you boys going to reel that shark in?" They said, "Oh, yeah!" So they start to pull the rope in, a few feet at

a time. Finally, after a lot of effort, they could see it. It was a 6 foot sand shark thrashing about! The more experienced guy helped them get it off the hook and released it back into the water! Andy and Louie were so proud of themselves. They literally took all their gear and tossed it into a big trash can as they walked off the pier……saying to each other…. "fishing for sharks….anyone can do it."

Just like the saying "fishing for sharks…anyone can do it", evangelism is the same. We've made it to the scariest sermon of all. The scary E word at its climax, the doing. We've seen evangelism be defined as "Sharing the love and hope of knowing God", and while that phrase seems simple enough, there is quite a bit of courage and faith to actually do it.

Today, we are going to look at what it actually looks like to be equipped as evangelists. Not the televangelists we may see. Not the Evangelicals we may see, but simply the people who share the love and hope of knowing God.

Over the course of centuries, many churches like us have thought that the best way to have a bigger church family was to wait for people to come into our churches who are already Christian and just disconnected from a church home. For a while that worked, but that was over 60 years ago.

We also have had the problem that we have made our task seem harder than it is. Somehow, we, as Christians, have given ourselves a harder responsibility than what is required of us. We have thought that we are the ones whose responsibility is to save people. Not just tell them about God, and let the Holy Spirit work, but to do the actual saving ourselves. That's not our calling. God has simply asked us to "Share the love and hope of knowing God". We are tasked with connecting unconnected people to Jesus. Not talking to people about all the church language stuff, but simply about who Jesus was and who God is. Our calling is to have authentic relationships with no ulterior motive of filling up our church. We are just sharing who God is. We are participating in something God is already doing. Then when the Holy Spirit has grown more, they may feel more comfortable in our space.

So, how do we do that? Let's look at one easier community example. Let's think about Butterfest for a moment. We are going to be in the parade this year, and while it would be fine to just have a float and pass out candy, there is something more we can do. If we were to pass out, let's say, pop-its (I've used them in a different church), with an attached message, it would go the extra mile for putting the Good Word in the fun giveaway. For instance, one year the little cards said, "We can fidget with excitement! No need to stress! God is always with us!" Then, on the back, it had the church's information as well as the worship times. It's important for us to remember, "People do not know we are giving them something in order to show them God's love unless we tell them that's the reason."

A more specific individual example involves more of our words. Think about this for a moment, when we are in studies of any kind we spend significant time discussing what we think about God, what we believe about God, what we think about the Bible, and what we understand to be true about the Bible. Rarely do we talk about our experience with God. What if when we are around people we feel comfortable with (for our first step), we shared one thing that we noticed as an experience with God each day.

The early Methodists had something called class meetings. In those class meetings, they worked on holding themselves accountable in their faith. One of the first questions each person was asked each week was: How is it with your soul? Or in easier terms: How have you experienced God recently in your life? It was easy for people to be able to answer because they knew that question was coming. So, rather than looking stupid for being caught unaware of God's presence, each person would consistently look for how God was involved. What they found was that God's presence was all over their lives.

Let's try our first half step today. In your pews today, you will find a small blue sheet of paper. Please take it out. On it, I'd love for you to write one place you encountered God today. We're going to place them in the offering plates when they go by today, and then we will post them to share with one another next week.

1. Write on a piece of paper.
2. Share it with people you are comfortable with.

3. Give it with a message of God's love.
4. Share the blessing with a person in general.
5. Form a relationship with no strings attached.

This is evangelism. Equipped by God.

So, let's take them out and write on one sheet, a single instance that you saw God's presence in your life this week.

Let us pray: Why don't you repeat after me.
O God, open my eyes to see Your presence in every moment of my life. Help me recognize You at work in the beauty of creation, the kindness of others, and the quiet whispers of my heart. Give me the grace to pause, and find You in the ordinary parts of my day. Amen.