

November 18, 2007 – Patchogue Church of the Nazarene

## **Evangelism – The Work of the Church**

### **2 Tim. 4:1-5**

Want to start off with a story. It's a golf story and I've told it before. We might use this story in our Alpha Course, so some of you know this story better than I do, but I have a reason for telling it.

**Golf Story** – Pastor calls in sick to play golf – God's judgment – "Who's he going to tell?" When we experience something wonderful or when we learn of something exciting, we can hardly contain ourselves – we feel like we just have to tell someone or we're going to burst.

**Fishing Story** – Man known as great fisherman – fishes with dynamite – brother-in-law a game warden admonishes him – lights dynamite and throws to him – fuse is short... "What are you going to do? You gonna talk or you gonna fish?"

That's the question of this sermon ... Are you gonna talk or are you gonna fish?

### **First Apostolic Age –**

I hear so often that people wish things were like they were in the days of the first church age. People shared together, ate together, had church in the homes, the power of God was evident and many were saved, etc. This era is called the First Apostolic Age. "Apostle" simply means – "one who is sent." The original apostles were sent by Jesus Himself. What did He send them to do? They were sent to preach the Good News to all people in the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit. It didn't stop with the original Apostles. Evangelism was of highest importance to the first century church of Jesus Christ. Jesus commissioned all believers to "make disciples of all nations." The church was birthed and developed through the act and process of evangelism. Evangelism predates the New Testament. The church is a child of evangelism motivated by the power of God's Word.

Evangelism was the mission of the church. Each member was an evangelist called on to "witness" to God's love in Christ. "Go into all the world and preach the Good News." The church was to engage the world with the Gospel. They were to cross over the boundary into the hostile world outside. They called it "witnessing" – the Greek word for witness is "martyr." This gives a little indication of the hostility they faced and the reception they received to their evangelizing. The result of these early day efforts and commitment was the birth of Christendom.

"They had four objectives in their mission that made it successful:

- 1 – Teach people about Jesus Christ (because the people had no knowledge of the Gospel).
- 2 – Convert people's attitude toward Christianity from hostile to favorable.
- 3 – Convince people of the truth (or at least the plausibility) of Christianity.
- 4 – Invite people to adopt the Christian faith and join the messianic community."

(Reclaiming the Great Commission, Payne & Beazley, p. 21).

Once these objectives were met in their day, the age of Christendom began.

Our text for today is from the second letter of Paul to Timothy. It is one of three letters called Pastoral Epistles. They give instructions for ministry. While pastors may have to deal with these things on a more frequent basis than laity, we are all ministers in the church of Jesus Christ. Therefore we would all do well to adhere to Paul's instructions. Let's turn to 2 Tim. 4:1-5 for our text today....

## **READ 2 Tim. 4:1-5 – NIV -- Paul's charge to the church – Preach the Word**

### **Age of Christendom –**

In about AD 313, the Roman Emperor, Constantine decreed that Christianity was the official religion of the empire. Christianity and the church became the center of Western Civilization. Everyone was assumed to be Christian and evangelism lost meaning. The focus of the church began to turn inward. The First Apostolic Age was based on community and mission, while the Age of Christendom was based on community without mission – just maintain the status quo. As history proceeded, evangelism generally took a back seat to the other duties and work of the church. It surfaces sporadically even to today.

After World War II, the global church focus became the pressing social issues. This deemphasized evangelism as a primary work of the church. This shift in focus deprived members of the sustaining power of the Christian faith and experiences such as spiritual transformation, the expectation of miracles, and a deepening relationship with God. Stagnation resulted. There was a move away from missional expansion and toward maintenance of its membership. The mentality was that most are already Christian and those who are not will be attracted to the church on their own.

What is the single most effective way someone comes to church? They are invited! That's a form of evangelism.

Today's church ministers primarily to the Christian population and membership. We are not too attentive to the unchurched, and we pay only lip service to evangelism generally. We don't make disciples anymore. We are in decline overall and here locally too. Look around you today. A couple of years ago we had to go to two services because we had so many people there was standing room only. What happened?

Meanwhile, the unchurched are looking for spiritual satisfaction in all kinds of things and groups and teachings that pop up claiming something new and exciting. People have their own view of God and how things should work in the spiritual realm.

### **GOD SQUAD ARTICLE – READ QUESTION – spiritual but not religious – and wrong.**

What happened to the early church's testimony and message of a life transformed by the power of God through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit? "They lived their faith – risked their lives for this faith – and found their lives in that faith." (Reclaiming the Great Commission, Payne & Beazley, p. 23).

## **Post-Christian Age – where we are in our generation**

The church has become silent about our faith and religious beliefs. The church is in maintenance mode, for the most part, and virtually irrelevant to the unchurched. We don't even provide the needed spiritual direction for our own members.

Where did you come from before you met Jesus? Are you the same as you would have been without Christ? Has your life been transformed by the Holy Spirit? Don't you believe that this life of faith in Jesus Christ is right, necessary, God's plan for humanity, and what every person should experience? What are we doing about that?

"Shepherds do not make new sheep; sheep make new sheep." (Hunter, 1996, p. 157). Evangelism is the essential work of the church – and should always be.

Where are you in your personal walk with the Lord? Are you in a "hum drum" place in your faith? I hear people asking, "What's wrong with our church?" Attendance is down; giving is down; and the people are down. We have projects on the schedule that keep getting postponed for lack of money and/or lack of enthusiasm. We are basically just existing here instead of thriving – WHY? "We need this" – or – "we need to do that." "The pastors should ... or the people should ..."

Do you want revival in this church? Do you want renewal in your personal walk with God? Do you want to sense His presence like you used to? Do you want to feel His anointing and leading in your life? Don't we all? I'm not talking to the new believer here. You are already excited in your new found faith. People are still getting saved and filled with the Holy Spirit of God. I'm talking to the veteran and long time members of the church of Jesus Christ today. Do you want to experience a fresh move of God?

Tell someone about Jesus! Invite a friend or co-worker or neighbor to church or to the Alpha Course. Lead a Bible study at your place of work or in your home. Open your home up to a small group meeting. Disciple a new believer in the faith. You will come alive spiritually. You will begin to experience the Word of God in new ways and see the power of the Holy Spirit transforming you and the person you are ministering to. Don't complain about what's wrong with the church. You ARE the church. Do something about it. Change it. Become part of the revival. You can not just know the Good News, or even just share the Good News – You must live the Good News. By teaching others, we ourselves learn. Evangelism in varying forms is essential to the life of the church and the spiritual life of the Christian.

Did you ever notice how new churches seem to be so alive and vibrant? They grow quickly, and the people are enthusiastic about everything going on there. How do they express their enthusiasm? They tell everyone they know about what's happening and how they have found something special there. It's not about the programs. The enthusiasm we are to have is about a relationship with Almighty God through Jesus Christ – That's more exciting than anything else we could experience. Our name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life. We're saved - redeemed! We have eternal life and the promise of heaven.

How can we get our spiritual life back on track? Just as Paul charged Timothy, I charge you today ... **PREACH THE WORD** – Be ready all the time to speak for God – Correct – Rebuke – Encourage – with patience and careful instruction.

**CORRECT** – reprove – to correct gently with kindly intent

**REBUKE** – expression of strong disapproval – to criticize sharply

**ENCOURAGE** – to inspire with courage, spirit, or hope – to spur on or by warning

Whether positive or negative, we are to be active in the Word of God and under the anointing of the Holy Spirit - (all the time).

Like it or not, God has called us to confront the issues of our fellow human counterparts and show them a better way – the way of the cross – the way of God. We have the answer they are looking for. God's answer is JESUS! Whether they receive this answer or not is not up to us. He is the answer regardless. We are not called to make them accept the answer – we are called to give/provide the answer for the hope WE have – and that answer is Jesus.

So – Preach the Word! We have to know the Word in order to preach it. This statement requires us to study the Word in order to know the Word so we can preach the Word. As we share the Word with others, we are compelled to study more diligently to answer questions and give better explanations. By teaching others - we learn more. This is not some whim of the modern church. Paul tells us – compels us – by God and Jesus Christ to do this. Jesus will soon judge the living and the dead. We have an obligation before God, to obediently Preach the Word to everyone we can.

**BUT THEY DON'T WANT TO HEAR ABOUT GOD – OR JESUS CHRIST...**

Paul tells us that “they will not endure sound doctrine.” We have or should have sound doctrine to share based on the Word of God. They only want to hear what intrigues them at the time – or what aligns with their own mental deductions and intellect. Everyone has a spiritual vacuum that must be filled. They will try to fill it somehow. People gravitate to all the things God forbids. Did you ever notice that? These things lead people away from God: **WITCHCRAFT – ESP – HOROSCOPES – MEDIUMS – PSYCHICS – CHANNELING – MYSTICS – FORTUNE TELLING – ETC.** These are all spiritual, but not Godly or God condoned. In fact He hates these things because they replace Him.

There are more and more spiritists out there offering an alternative to the church and organized religion. They want spirituality without the cross – without Jesus. They want to hear what they agree with in their spiritual blindness – their own desires. “Well, I think ... or - I can't believe that a loving God would ...” They don't know God or His Word. They are turning their ears away from sound doctrine by the millions. The things they are turning to are myths – stories about a god, but not the Living and true God of the Bible or His Christ – and the power of salvation to provide true spiritual fulfillment.

Our challenge? Paul says, “be sober” – or self-controlled – ready 24/7 – alert – discerning – in all things and at all times – ready to correct, rebuke, encourage patiently and accurately. We may get some flack along the way – “endure hardship,” but keep going.

“Do the work of an evangelist.” Keep the message of telling people about Jesus a priority in your life and in the life of the church. They need to know the truth and the truth will set them free. We are all ministers – of what? – of preaching the Word to those who don’t know the truth yet – keep preaching – keep sharing – keep inviting – keep the faith alive!

### **New Apostolic Age – we could be ...**

We are at a turning point in Christianity. Patchogue means: “turning point.” Isn’t that interesting? Great opportunity awaits the church today. There is also a risk. If we embrace the missional model - like the early church did – we can turn things around, and people will again experience the transforming power of God through Jesus by His Spirit. If we choose to ignore this approach and stay in maintenance mode, we will continue to decline until we eventually die out. The choice is ours – the choice is yours! It’s an individual as well as a corporate effort. God is waiting to use you! He is the same “yesterday, today, and forever.” He still wants ALL people to come to the knowledge of the truth and be transformed.

I believe the stage is set. I believe the Lord has already begun working in our lives and in our church to accomplish this. I believed we are on the edge of revival or some kind of spiritual awakening right here in our church and community. We can let it pass us by, or we can jump in with both feet and embrace this powerful move of God. What do YOU want to do?

### **Alpha commercial –**

I know many of you have murmured about the emphasis we have placed on Alpha over the last few years. “All we hear about is Alpha. It seems all the pastor is concerned about is Alpha. What’s all this intensity about Alpha?” Remember – it’s the pastor of the church who casts vision for the church under the anointing of God. Alpha has been the only successful ministry of our church to reach the unchurched for Christ. We have experienced new believers at every course we have offered so far. What could be easier than inviting a friend to dinner or even going through the ten week course with them so they feel more comfortable? Isn’t it worth your time for someone you know to get saved and transformed because you were obedient and sacrificed a little for someone outside the church?

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What happens to these new believers after they get saved during Alpha? Is there a quality mechanism to disciple them in the faith and in the Word so they can be active members of our church and bring people they know to Christ? It’s up to us here. There’s so much to do for the Kingdom of God right in our midst. The question remains...

What are you going to do? Are you gonna talk or are you gonna fish?