

September 21st, 2025

Luke 14:25-33 “What Disciples Do: Seeking Others”

I’ve told enough stories over the years about being accosted in grocery store parking lots in Virginia by determined evangelists who want to know if I’ve been saved. And I really don’t need to tell you about any others. I do want to make it clear, though -- I’ve only told you the most amusing ones, or at least the ones *I* think are amusing. It’s happened so many times and in so many places. Even for someone who’d say they *are* “saved,” a quick yes doesn’t mean *anything* to the one asking the question because what they’re really looking for is more than just a passing affirmation. What I haven’t told you is that in the early days of *my* journey in faith, at least in *some* of the churches I explored, that kind of aggressive evangelism was expected. I was taught that all have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory. And you know, I could get behind that because yeah ... it makes sense. None of us are pure and squeaky clean. Even the most disciplined and morally grounded people I know struggle with doing the right thing. So yeah. All have sinned. I was also taught that your works won’t save you, and I got behind that too. Some people think they can atone for their sins by doing good and charitable acts. They feel like if they can at least do more good things than bad, they can either weigh down the cosmic scale to the good side or at the very least balance it with mostly good works. Again, I get it. I mean, good grief, you can’t get away with this with friends and family, so you *sure* aren’t going to squeak by with the creator of the universe. God can see through our bull-pucky, right?

I was told that the only way to be in God’s favor is by recognizing that Jesus is the path to God. Jesus bridges the chasm of sin that keeps us separated from God so that we can be in relationship with God. I was *really* on board with that one because as my youth leader at the time said, “If you want to know the wholeness of God’s character and what God represents, just look to Jesus.” Heck yeah. That’s what attracted me to the faith in the first place. Jesus is the way through which I can know

and relate to God. I learned later on, as I was trying to find a church, that some believe that this is an insufficient or even false understanding of how that works. But that's a story for another day.

I was on board for following Jesus. My confession of faith was the beginning of a deeper relationship with my creator and Jesus gave me the road map for how I can live out that relationship. I also learned that Jesus calls us to go into all the world and *share* this good news. Again, awesome! It sure was good news to me during that season of *my* life! It would be a shame to keep it to myself. I asked my youth leader Greg, "How do I share that good news?" He said, "That's something you'll discover when you find a church."

At this point in time, some of you know that Greg was a leader in the high school aspect of Youth for Christ. Those of you familiar with Youth for Christ might be saying, "How in the world did you end up with such a progressive-sounding youth leader in an organization that was founded by Billy Graham?" The simple answer is, "Greg didn't last long in that organization." But thank God we found each other during a time in my life where I needed someone like him.

My search for a church led to some interesting discoveries, though, especially when it came to figuring out how to share the good news of Jesus with other people. One church that I tried had a ministry where they fed hungry people at a soup kitchen. Good! Sounds like an appropriate place to share good news. Eat with people – get to know them, find out what their felt needs are and look for opportunities to share the good news. Right on. I'll tag along. Except that's not how that church did it. They lined people up and made a makeshift chapel between the entrance and the dining room. They wouldn't let people eat until the people heard a shockingly hellfire and brimstone sermon about how they were on the road to eternal damnation and that they needed to accept Jesus as their *personal* Lord and savior so they can go to heaven. And, to top it all off, they gave an altar call at the end of the sermon and wouldn't let anyone eat until at least one person came forward to "accept

Jesus” as their personal Lord and savior. I said, “Isn’t this kind of manipulative? Of course, there’s going to be one person who’ll come forward so that everyone can eat. And how do we even know about that person’s sincerity if that’s the only way they can eat?” The answer to my question was perplexing. “God will know.” “Okay, but why would you make them do this in order to eat?” I was told, “If we don’t ask, and someone fails to answer the call, then we are held liable for that person’s soul.” Now ... I later found out that there was a board of directors for that ministry that required a certain number of people per week to “accept Jesus” in order to determine the efficacy of the ministry. If they didn’t have at least one person “saved” per day, the governing board couldn’t justify continuing the ministry. But why? I was told, “Because our job as Christians is to save people. If we aren’t saving people, we need to shake the dust from our feet and go to another place where people are willing to be saved.”

Another church I tried took a different approach. Their primary evangelism method was going door to door passing out tracts explaining the need for people to turn their life over to Jesus. And no, this wasn’t the Mormons or Jehovah’s Witnesses. According to this church, the Mormons and the JW’s were cults. They just co-opted their methods because if it works for them ... why not us? As you might guess, when they went out to do their “witnessing,” there were far more people who said, “No thank you” or “Get the heck off my porch” than there were people who said, “Sure, let’s talk.” I said, “I don’t see how this is a good thing. Don’t you think there’s a better way to do this?” I was told, “Our job is to just make sure people have the *opportunity* to know. Many will hear the good news, but most will reject it. We have to make sure that everyone hears so that they can make that decision.” Why? Because, again, we’re liable for their souls. I didn’t last very long there either.

I finally found the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Although my youth leader Greg wasn’t a Disciple, he went the Disciples college in Eugene which is how I discovered them. I was attracted to them because they listened to my questions and gave me the tools to discover the

answers for myself. They didn't require me to check my brain at the door and they encouraged me to be grounded in scripture and they talked more about community than individualism. The only problem I had with them was that they were so turned off by inappropriate and obnoxious forms of evangelism, that they neglected it altogether.

The scripture that Dave read is very clear about how Jesus came to “seek out and to save the lost” (v. 10). The definition of “lost” isn't specifically mentioned, but the one about the shepherd and the sheep tells me that those who are lost are vulnerable and need an extra measure of care. There are a lot of wolves and predators out there. That's why it makes me so sad when some churches use predatory methods as part of their evangelism strategy. So if we don't go door to door and pass out tracts, and if we don't stop people in the parking lot to ask if they're saved, and if we don't hold hungry people hostage by withholding food, what *can* we do? How does a church do evangelism, which the word literally means, “proclaiming good news” with integrity?

1. We can engage in what many of our professors in seminary called, “Lifestyle Evangelism.” Churches who understand evangelism in this way believe the best witness to our faith is through the life we live. When we live like Christ – when we live lives of love, grace, compassion, integrity, service and justice – we testify and demonstrate that we are people of faith. It's like that movie, *When Harry Met Sally*. People will judge us by our actions and say, “I'll have what she's having.” Or as St. Francis of Assisi once wrote, “Preach the gospel at all times; use words if necessary.

2. We can also engage in “Relational Evangelism.” This isn't about sales pitches or pressuring people or annoying people into God's kingdom. This is finding opportunities in our network of relationships to share our faith naturally with people we know. It can be as simple as letting folks know that our faith is important to us, that it grounds us, gives us meaning and purpose, helps us through hard times, and motivates us to

serve others. This kind of relational evangelism is done naturally in our conversations with others *and* can have a huge impact on people.

3. Then there's "Invitational Evangelism." I guess we can call this the "come and see" method. The most common form of invitational witness is to invite people to church for worship or a special event or to a small group. This is a simple and easy way to share faith. And it's exceptionally effective. Studies have shown that about 90 percent of people visit a church because somebody they know invited them to come.

So there it is. There's our call to evangelism right there. But what do you do if someone *does* come up to you in the parking lot of a grocery store, in 100 degrees weather while you're juggling shopping bags trying to wrangle a kid into a car seat? What do you say if they ask, "Is Jesus Christ your personal Lord and Savior?" Just say, "No, I prefer to share him because this good news is way too awesome to keep to myself."

So friends, let's be the kind of disciples who don't push or pressure, but who live in such a way that people can see Christ in us. Let's be people whose lives shine with grace, whose words are seasoned with love, and whose invitations open the door to joy. Because the good news really is too good to keep to ourselves.