Make a Difference

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 Kimby Young

2 Timothy 1:3-14; 3:14-17 August 20, 2017

I have been reading a lot this summer about church growth and sharing our faith. Evangelism is the old word for it – literally meaning “telling the good news.” Many of us shy away from sharing our faith. We don’t want to be known as “one of those people.” I’m comfortable talking about what I believe with you, with people I know – but even I am reluctant to share my faith with strangers. Going door to door leaves me cold – and don’t worry that’s not what I am going to ask you to do. But I am going to ask you to think about sharing your faith, to think about sharing the good news. Because it is “good news.” God loves you. Jesus is with you. The Holy Spirit touches your life and helps you to be your best. It is good news. God has a plan for each of us and all of us. Even when things look dark in the world, God offers light and hope. There is meaning in life, purpose for each of us. We belong to something and someone more important than ourselves. We belong. We have a place and a home – always. Sharing the good news is inviting others to come home with you – to remember that they too have a home in God’s grace. That they are loved. That there are second chances. That good can come even when things look bad. That God can change things. And that because of God’s love we can change things. We can make the world a better place for others. We can bring joy and peace and goodness. This is the good news.

There’s an old legend about what happened to Jesus after his death and resurrection, after his ascension into heaven. The legend says, when Jesus entered heaven, he was greeted by a host of angels and saints of old. Amid the joy and welcome, as the beings of heaven gathered around Jesus, a question was asked, “So Jesus, what is your plan for the continuation of your message to the peoples of the earth?” As a hush fell over the crowd everyone leans in to Jesus to hear what is to come. Jesus said, “I have left behind me 11 and more who believe in me.” An expectant silence filled heaven as the crowd waited. Then, “and what else?” came the question. Jesus said, “There is nothing more. Nothing more is needed.”

Just 11 disciples and the Word was spread. Just a handful of believers and God’s great love swept over the Earth. Just a few voices sharing good news, doing good deeds, serving God and telling stories about Jesus. One tells another, and another, and another. And 2000 years later the name Jesus is known – the love of Jesus is lived in almost every corner of the world.

We have been given a gift. I grew up in the church. Many of you did too. I have never had a time in my life when I did not know God’s love. I have always been aware of God’s presence and provision. And I have always been blessed by a community of believers to help me learn to follow Jesus, to serve God, to be all that God created me to be. I am blessed. So are you. Because you are here. Somewhere along the way, you came to faith of your own. Somewhere along the way, God touched your heart and faith became real. We know God’s grace, God’s forgiveness, God’s strength, God’s healing, God’s call. We are blessed.

Now that’s not saying there are no doubts – of course I’m not saying everything is easy and perfect if you have faith. Of course not. We have challenges. We have confusion. We sometimes have failures. We sometimes don’t hear or understand God. Darkness creeps in. We are in the world after all. But thru it all God is still with us. Thru it all the good news is still good. Thru it all God loves us. Thru it all Jesus shows us the way to life, abundant life.

You see somewhere along the way, God touched you. Or you wouldn’t be here today. Maybe you got it like I did or like Timothy did – from family – from his mother Eunice or his grandmother Lois. Maybe you got the good Word of God from a friend or a family member or even a stranger. Somewhere along the way God touched you. Somewhere along the way, you responded to God. Somewhere along the way, you realized the gift of grace that God gave you.

As Paul says to Timothy in the reading for today. “Fan into flame the gift of God that is in you.” Paul could have said that to any of us. For each of us, each of you, has within you a gift of God. You have within you the grace of God. You have been given the Spirit of God. It may be just a spark, just an ember, or it may be a raging fire of faith. Paul’s invitation is to “fan that spark into fire.” See the faith that you have within you. See the gifts that you have within you. See the love that you have within you. And let God’s Spirit breathe on that spark. Let God’s Spirit flow over you. Let God’s Spirit blow thru you so that God’s grace in you explodes into a powerful force for good. That is the promise. “Fan into flame the gift of God that is in you.” And an extension of that phrase is true as well. “Fan into flame the gift of God that is in someone else.” Encourage someone else to be all that they can be, to know God’s love and God’s call, to flourish as a follower of Jesus Christ. Timothy’s mother and grandmother fanned that flame in him. My parents fanned the flame and encouraged me to grow in faith. Perhaps you are fanning that flame in your children or grandchildren or someone else. Perhaps you are already sharing your faith. The call is to keep it up. Keep fanning the flame of God’s Spirit. Keep sharing the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Maybe you think you don’t have much to offer. Maybe you think you wouldn’t be good at sharing your faith. Maybe you think you don’t know anyone who hasn’t already heard the good news. But you never know. It only takes one. Share God’s love wherever you find yourself. Let God use you and you just never know what God might accomplish thru you.

I’m reminded of a story of a person walking along a beach. Maybe you’ve heard this story before. Someone was walking along a beach and noticed hundreds of starfish washed ashore by a stormy tide. The starfish were trapped too far up on the loose shifting sand, and as the sun rose higher and hotter, and the tide went lower and farther into the seas, the starfish would surely shrivel up and die. So this person walking along the beach stopped, bent down, reached for a single starfish, picked it up, and cast it far into the sea. And then another and another. Picking up one starfish and tossing it into the sea. Another person came alongside and said, “What are you doing? There are hundreds of starfish here on the shore. You’re wasting your time and energy. You cannot possibly make a difference.” Our first friend stopped, bent down, reached for a single starfish, picked it up and cast it far into the sea. Then as they both stared out into the waters said, “Made a difference to that one.”

I sometimes feel there is too much to do. I am overwhelmed. We can’t possibly reach the people who need to be reached. There isn’t enough money. There isn’t enough time. I don’t have the right skills. There are just too many problems in the world. I can’t possibly make a difference.

But then I see the spark in one of you. I see the spark of someone who just got it – who just realized God’s great love. I feel the warmth of your love for one another. I realize the depth of compassion some of you have for the needy. I listen as you sing your faith. I watch as you love our children. I catch the Spirit moving among you in some new way. And I realize the gift of God that is in you. “Fan into flame the gift of God that is in you.” It doesn’t have to be perfect. Share your faith. Tell someone about God’s love. Teach someone about God’s Word. Show someone God’s grace. “Fan into flame the gift of God that is in you.” Set the world on fire with God’s great good news.

Your challenge in the days ahead, is to think about one person who needs to know God’s love – just one person. Think about one concrete thing you can do to show God’s love, to share the gift of God that is in you. Just pick up one starfish and cast it back into the sea. Just think of one person and offer that person God’s grace. “Fan into flame the gift of God that is in you.” And be blessed by the grace of God.