

Sharing the Good News
Rev. Meredith Kemp-Pappan

Here's a quick game: can people guess the your hometown if you describe what it is best known for? I'll give you a few minutes to think about it. For me, I would say it is the home of a Free 72oz steak if you eat it in under an hour. My hometown is Amarillo, Texas. The free steak is from a popular tourist-y restaurant called the Big Texan. There are signs for it along I-40, especially once you get to Oklahoma City. My spouse's city is best known for the Dodgers. My extended family is from a city in central Texas famous for its eclectic history. If you are from Topeka, you might say that we are best known for Brown v. Board of Education. (you get the idea!).

Each of these cities and towns is more than the 1-or-2 events or places that put it on the map. When I tell people I am from Amarillo, they usually say, "oh yeah, there's that steak restaurant there." And I have the opportunity to confirm and also share a few ideas on what is special and unique about the city where I grew up. Today's scripture readings are about sharing and it is an appropriate finale to our worship series. On our Walk with Jesus, we worship; study; serve; and give. Finally, we are invited to share our love for Jesus with the world. I'm not saying we need to put up a billboard every 40 miles advertising Trinity, but too often we treat our faith as a "best kept secret."

I grew up Presbyterian and I have found that if you grew up Presbyterian, too, then you likely learned to read and study the Bible; you probably attended a church that was deeply involved in mission. But you probably were not taught to share your faith. Most Presbyterians believe, and rightly so, that works of service are the best form of evangelism. What happened though is that we have often overemphasized our work and underemphasized words. Now we have up and coming generations of Presbyterians who have a passion for building God's kingdom but lack the vocabulary to tell others why.

You probably know what bad or coercive evangelism looks like. Once while waiting for the bus, a stranger approached me at the bus stop and asked, "If you were hit by a bus and died, do you know if you would go heaven?" For most of us, that is a little too aggressive. What, then, does "good" sharing look like? The comment I most often hear about evangelism is that "I don't want to offend anybody." But think of a time when someone shared a recommendation to you, either for a restaurant or a movie. Or maybe they recommended an activity that they love. Were you offended? I doubt it. At the very least, you politely nodded and the conversation continued. You might have appreciated the enthusiasm of your friend. In the same way, sharing about Jesus or your church is the sharing of a bit of yourself. You have a relationship with Jesus and a church. Why not share with the world?

The other part of sharing involves some investigating. Good or bad, what is our church (your) known for? Obviously, Amarillo is more than 72 oz. steak dinners. I grew up in Amarillo and my parents and brother still live there. The church that raised me in the faith is still there. Amarillo has a strong local arts scene and some of the best Tex-Mex you can find. It is also home to a large refugee resettlement. When I was interviewing to be your pastor, I asked the committee, "What is Trinity known for?" The PNC responded, "we are mission church." I have found that to be abundantly true! Congregations also need to know what non-churchy people say about their church. James Forbes once remarked, "nobody

Sharing the Good News
Rev. Meredith Kemp-Pappan

gets into heaven without a reference letter from the poor,” and the same goes for churches. In his study for this week, Rev. Adam Hamilton writes,

Nonreligious and nominally religious people are seldom interested in our worship styles, theological distinctives, or myriad of programs. These things matter, but they seldom are of primary interest to the spiritual but not religious. What leads the unchurched to take notice of a church is when that church and its members genuinely care about them and when they are actively engaged in seeking to have a positive impact on the community. They notice when a church serves others selflessly, when it gives generously, when it is loves radically.¹

One of the easiest ways to share about Jesus is to connect our service and mission with Jesus' instruction to love our neighbor. For example: I had a dentist appointment the other day and the hygienist and I were making small talk. She asked me what I did for a living and I explained that I am the pastor of Trinity Presbyterian Church. She thought a moment and said, “Oh, my friend takes exercise classes there.” I smiled and said, “Yes--that's it. We partner with Florence Crittenton to provide space. Our congregation thinks that wellness is very important.” So right away she knew that we partner with community organizations and that wellness is one of our values. Think about some of the ministries that Trinity engages in and then think about why that is. Trinity is involved with JUMP because we take seriously God's command to care for the least of these. Trinity has a robust CE program because learning about God is the foundation for a life of faith. Trinity has a partnership with Los Talpetates because our neighbor is not just the neighbor across the street but across the globe.

“Jesus repeatedly teaches us to love our neighbor and even our enemy. I think Jesus is saying that the church and her individual disciples demonstrate their faith with acts of love—not warm feelings for one another, but a selfless love that seeks the good of the other before good for oneself.”² It's not bragging or being boastful to share our faith and our mission to the world. Now, more than ever, the world is crying out for good news. Let's share our light. Amen.

¹ Hamilton, Adam. The Walk (p. 127). Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.

² Hamilton, Adam. The Walk (p. 129). Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.