

*“Asking Caring and Loving Questions: One way of
Communicating the Gospel”*

Sermon notes by the Rev. Arnold A. Bush, 3rd Sunday in Easter, 4.22.2012, Episcopal Church of the Epiphany, 2602 Gilmer Avenue, Tallahassee, AL 36078.

Text: Words of the Risen Christ to share the Good News - Luke 24:46-47 *“This is what is written...and repentance and forgiveness must be preached (proclaimed) in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are my witnesses.”*

I. Introduction

To listen to another human being can be more loving than simply speaking. Does God want us to listen to others, hear their joys and their troubles, and hear where their heart was warmed or where they were heart broken? As we look at human animosity, could not God expect human beings to listen twice as much as we listen? We have two ears and one mouth. We are to listen twice as much as we speak. Sometimes our memory of persons who we say, “loved us” listened to us with care and spoke few words of advice.

Now to our text for the words from the Risen Christ: REPENTANCE AND FORGIVENESS ARE TO BE PROCLAIMED TO ALL NATIONS BEGINNING AT JERUSALEM.

This is at the end of the Gospel of Luke. All four Gospels have this COMMISSION OR EXHORTATION TO SPREAD THE GOOD NEWS.

The Gospel of Mark 16:14: “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.”

The Gospel of John 21:15ff: Jesus reinstates Peter, asking him three times, “Do you love me?” Jesus said TAKE CARE AND FEED MY SHEEP. In a way Jesus is saying to the Church, “Take care of my sheep.”

The Gospel of Matthew 28:16, the Great Commission: “THEREFORE GO AND MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS, BAPTISING... AND TEACHING THEM TO OBEY ALL I HAVE COMMANDED YOU.”

In all these passages we have the thrust of going out, Luke has the image of Jerusalem as the center and the Good News is spread out from Jerusalem. To Samaria, Antioch, eventually to Rome.

II. Repentance and forgiveness to be proclaimed

Looking at our text, we are to manifest REPENTANCE AND FORGIVENESS TO ALL THE NATIONS AND CULTURES. For us, we are to reach the citizens of Elmore and Tallapoosa Counties. How?

REPENTANCE: TO TURN, TO MAKE A LIFE CHANGE (MESSAGE TRANSLATION). The Greek word “*metanoia*” simply means to “turn around.” If you are going south on SR 229 to I-85 and you turn right going toward Montgomery, then you discover you really want to be going to Auburn, then you go the next exit (#22) and turn around. Repent is to turn around. To make a change in your behavior. In terms of lifestyle, to change from too many sweets or alcohol to little or none.

FORGIVENESS MEANS TO RELEASE. In John 20:23 Jesus appears and says, “*If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.*”(NRSV) To retain means to possess, to hold on to, to hold in place or position.

In reflecting on this verse, how can we at Epiphany do this in our work-a-day-world, in our interactions with persons in our life, job, business, etc? How? It seems to me would be more successful spreading REPENTANCE AND FORGIVENESS BY MORE LISTENING THAN SPEAKING.

Some Christian circles may offer a seminar or class on “sharing the Gospel.” They may teach what to say, how to say it, and how to write your testimony. It would be like a course at the community college

on public speaking or a course on how to sell your product. Some of the published witnessing programs are helpful, but this morning I want to suggest another way.

III. Listening, caring, empathic listening

Here are some things you and I can do in spreading repentance and forgiveness:

- To care is to listen. If you are visiting with a friend or meeting someone for the first time, you may ask God to give you power to listen. It is sometimes like shifting gears to listen. For example, in the family for those who are married or seeing your grown children. Ask the open-ended question. How are things going at work? How are things in the family? You are listening with your eyes open and ears following the series of experiences or events.
- Let them know you are listening with a few emotional responses, such as "You seem overjoyed." Or "You were really sad and disappointed about what happened." Be careful not to finish their sentences or thoughts.
- Let them stay on the subject they are discussing. When there is a pause, do not fill it up with a long speech. Yes, I'll share my story/experience in a few minutes.
- If you hear some "confessional" or things they did the wrong way or a problem they are experiencing, keep listening while withholding judgment. Let them know in a phrase or word.
- The more you listen without offering a lot of advice, the greater the chance they will feel affirmed. My own personal philosophy is when I am worried about a problem, situation, or concern, I take it to the Lord. If I do not feel some resolve in 24 hours, then I will call someone to talk to. Here is what is going on. What do I need to change? What do you see I am doing? Is this something I need to continue praying over?
- When a friend is sharing "painful" experiences, your listening may help create a catharsis (Greek word is "cleansing"). You have been caring and loving when they say, "Thanks for listening. I have gotten that off my chest. That was a heavy load on my mind."

IV. Your Witness begins with Your Weakness

- In their stories or experiences they are sharing, REMEMBER TO RESPOND FROM YOUR WEAKNESS. You do not want to respond with a braggadocios or arrogant spirit. "Ever since I committed my life to Jesus my life has been so sweet and peaceful."
- Stems to Respond: I too have experienced that type of issue in our family relations. Here is how Christ seems to help me in my relationships.
- I too remember and still have this issue in the work place, here is how the Lord is helping me cope with the issue that seems to be popping up monthly.
- Here is when I feel depressed and feel that loss of enthusiasm. Here is how God helps my in my coping.
- Let them know life is truly a JOURNEY. WE ARE ALL IN THE PROCESS OF BECOMING. Here are some changes I made in my lifestyle. Here are some changes I am beginning to make. This is Repentance: Turing around going to Auburn and not Montgomery. Changes in my life=repentance.

V. What is the Holy Spirit asking us to DO?

The Resurrected Lord is rather explicit that we are to have a focus on the nonbelievers and unchurched. We are to leave here helping others experience REPENTANCE (CHANGE IN A LIFESTYLE, A TURN AROUND) AND FORGIVENESS (A RELEASE FROM SOMETHING THAT IS BINDING);

we are to help others experience FORGIVENESS. (LETTING GO OF SOMETHING YOU WERE HOLDING ON TO). Every time you kneel or stand to receive communion you are receiving forgiveness for any past sin or transgression. The Risen Christ on the Road to Emmaus listened and asked a question, "What events are you talking about?"

We are to leave remembering, we have one mouth and two ears. Let us listen more than we talk. Let us listen to our spouses, other family members such as grown children, listen to colleagues at work, companions in leisure. Reach out with care as we listen to those in need, who are on the edges of poverty. In learning ways to listen, remember this ratio, with the first number being the other person and you being the second number. A caring ratio is 5:1 or maybe 10:2. They are talking 80% of the time and you are talking 20% of the time together.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, we thank you again for the times we have come to a phase in our life when we have turned over our life to you. We thank you for the changes we have made in following you as Lord and Savior. We thank you for the many moments when your forgiveness has flooded our souls and minds. May we assist others in experiencing forgiveness and repentance.