

“The Ice-Bucket Challenge”

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Text: Romans 13:8-14 Theme: Love, Evangelism, Learning
Occasion: Christian Education Sunday

Remember when we played “Tag” as kids? The worst thing that could happen to you was to be touched and declared, “Tag! You’re it!” You didn’t want that to happen. Once tagged, you were the enemy that everyone tried to avoid. You had to work hard to get rid of that label by giving it to someone else.

My, how times have changed. Today, to be tagged is to be one of the elect. It means to be included, to be part of a movement, to be involved in something larger and more important than yourself. To get “tagged” is to be drawn into a new community with distinctive concerns and a unique consciousness.

Today’s text from Romans is all about being “tagged.” As Christians, we have become part of unique community called the Body of Christ, defined by a confession of faith in Jesus Christ as God’s Son and our Savior. We are totally “tagged” by a divine challenge. I’m talking about the Ice Bucket Challenge.

Christians are not defined by their ability to dump icy waters over their heads. Christians are known by their ability to dump love over all those people they bump into. When you are tagged by Christ’s love, you are called to “tag” all those you can with that same amazing, transforming, overwhelming love.

Is there anyone here today who has not heard of the “Ice Bucket Challenge?” Anyone here today who has taken the challenge? I thought so. What was your experience like?

Well, just in case you just woke up from a long nap and haven't heard about the challenge, this is what it is. You are tagged by a friend, where "tagging" means that you are dared to post a video of yourself being drenched with a big bucket of ice water.

Why are people doing this? All in an effort to raise awareness and money for research to find a cure for a disease called ALS, which stands for Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis.

Before the Ice Bucket Challenge, only about a quarter of US citizens even knew that ALS existed. Before this past summer, most of us who had heard of the disease knew of it as "Lou Gehrig's Disease," named after a famous baseball player who publicly admitted to having the disease in 1939.

In Gehrig's famous "retirement" speech at Yankee Stadium, he declared that despite his ALS diagnosis which gave him only a couple more years of life, he felt the life he had already lived made him feel like the luckiest man on the face of the earth.

75 years later, a diagnosis of ALS still means an average life expectancy of three to five years. Unlike cancer, heart disease, AIDS or diabetes, ALS has not received a lot of funding for research. There has been a very low public awareness of this disease.

Until the summer of 2014. Now, thanks to the Ice Bucket Challenge, new generations have not only been informed about it, but they have been recruited to join the fight against ALS.

The challenge is three-fold: 1. To be doused on camera to raise awareness; 2. To give a donation to the cause of curing ALS; and 3. To call out others to join with you in this experience. The challenge has raised millions of dollars; last I heard almost 100 million.

The phenomenal success of the Ice Bucket Challenge tells us something about the world we live in today. First, we know that learning today is becoming more and more EPIC, standing for Experiential; Participatory, Image-Rich and Connective. (EPIC)

We see that in the Ice Bucket Challenge. “E” stands for experiential. The most enthusiastic participants in the challenge were young people – middle school, high school, college, post-college age groups. They got involved, researching the disease online. It was a non-classroom based, peer to peer, largely online experience. And it doesn’t get any more experiential than a dousing of ice water.

The “P” stands for participatory. You invited your friends to participate. You shared online. You gave online. But you participated by experiencing a blast of ice-cold water being poured over your head. It was an experience that people won’t forget. They had participated in something bigger than themselves.

The “I” in EPIC stands for image-rich. How much fun it is to view videos of people we know – friends, family, famous people, all being doused with a bucket of water and ice. And what did the image represent? A willingness to get involved. A willingness to experience a life-changing event that can help others and make a difference in the world.

I can’t help it when I watch those videos, I am reminded of baptisms – joining a unique group of people, tagged by love to make a difference for others. What a rich image it is.

The “C” in EPIC stands for connective. People were not just given information to think about. They were given the chance to be

baptized into a community with a cause. Not just to think about it, but to do something, by joining together with others.

As we consider this model of learning, it's something for us to think about as we offer our Christian Education for today's people. Let's work to make it EPIC: experiential, participatory, image-rich and connective. Let's invite others to join us in the community of faith, and participate in this EPIC journey called the Christian life.

It is not enough simply to know with our heads that God is love, Jesus is Lord and Spirit is life. Paul was tagged by Jesus on the road to Damascus, and went all over Asia Minor and into Rome "tagging" any and all he met with this message and challenge: "God is Love, Jesus is Lord and Spirit is Life."

We are called to do no less. "Tag! You're it!" should be the chorus of every Christian in the world. We are to tag those we meet, those we work with, those we know and care about – not with a challenge to dump ice water on their heads.

But to tag them with the assurance that they are loved beyond all measure by a Savior God. "Tag! You're all it!" God's love is in your hands. The news that "God is Love; Jesus is Lord and Spirit is Life" is waiting to be doused on your neighbor.

That's the challenge you are facing this week. Whom will you tag?

Adapted from a sermon by the same title by Leonard Sweet, ChristianGlobe Networks, Inc. 2014.