

**“Becoming a Contagious Christian –  
Deepening Your Relationships and Your Conversations”**

Date: April 17, 2016

Place: Lakewood UMC

Text: Matthew 28:16-20

Occasion: Contagious Christian series

Theme: Witnessing, Evangelism, Faith Sharing

We're in week three of a series on Becoming a Contagious Christian. In week one, we learned that people matter to God. In week two, we learned we don't have to pretend to be someone we're not; we can relax and be ourselves.

Today we want to talk about some specific things we can do to begin sharing our faith. Being authentic in our relationships builds the context for sharing. But, *who is it* that we're going to be sharing with? Let's look in three places.

People we already know. These might be people that you work with, neighbors, family members, people who belong to the same club or organization you belong to. It could be co-workers or friends you go to school with.

I have a group of friends I go kayaking with on a regular basis. *There's* a group of people I could deepen my relationships with, and deepen our conversations. We're already outside enjoying the beauty of God's world. It's an easy transition to introduce a thought about the One who made all of this beauty.

A second place we can look for opportunities to share our faith, are with people we used to know: a high school buddy, a co-worker that you knew before retirement, or who has since moved on to another job, or maybe a neighbor who moved to another community nearby. We could try reconnecting with these people, just to renew the friendship. Who knows where the conversation might go?

A third place we can look, for people to share our faith, is with people we'd like to get to know. Maybe you have a favorite restaurant where you eat all the time. Maybe you have the same waitress who waits on your table. Have you ever considered striking up a conversation about anything other than what you're going to order to eat?

Or, maybe you go to the same grocery store, or Country Fair to stop for gas? We go to these places anyway, why not consider taking the conversation with these people with whom you interact already, and take it a little deeper?

What do I mean when I say, "take it a little deeper?" I'm not talking about giving a sermon to the person you're talking to. I'm not talking about trying to persuade the other person to accept your theology. I'm not talking about brow-beating someone with the Bible.

What I mean is this: we're simply going to introduce something into the conversation to move in the direction of spiritual things. A couple of key things before we do that. First, let the Holy Spirit guide you. Wait until it feels like "the moment is right" before you move the conversation in that direction. Trust God; I think you'll know.

Second, build some trust in that relationship before you talk about spiritual matters. Invite that ex-neighbor back for a barbeque. Catch up on how the kids are doing. Talk about other things. We're not going to just blurt out, in the first five minutes, "Hey, do you know Jesus?" Wait for the Spirit, and build some trust.

Now, if you've stayed with me this far, you've heard me say that people matter to God, and they should matter to us, as well. I hope you already believe that having a relationship with God is important to

people. Because if you don't already believe that, you're not even going to think about sharing your faith. If it doesn't matter to you, why would you bother telling someone else? But if knowing God makes a difference in people's lives, and I believe it does, we've got a great message to share with people.

So, how do we change conversations in the direction of spiritual matters? I'm going to share three approaches you might try, in starting a spiritual conversation with someone you know. The first is called "bridging," and that's simply taking what you're already talking about and using it as a bridge to spiritual matters.

Maybe you're talking to a friend at school, or a co-worker or a neighbor about what they're planning to do this weekend. It would be an easy bridge to say something like, "I'm going to church on Sunday morning. That's been a part of my life for a long time. My week doesn't seem the same when I miss it."

Maybe you're walking outside with a friend on one of these beautiful days, noticing the beauty of the trees, the blue skies and sound of the birds. You could easily make a bridge by saying, "God sure does good work, doesn't He?"

A bridge in the conversation feels natural, not forced. It flows from the conversation. It connects with what you've already been talking about. See how the person responds. Listen to what they have to say. You don't have to get into arguments and you don't have to have all the answers if they question. Share your experience of God. They can't argue with that.

A second way to move a conversation towards spiritual topics is by asking simple questions. Just like bridging, it flows out of the

conversation you're already having. But this time, you ask a question. On your walk in nature, you might ask, "Do you ever wonder if there is a Master Plan behind all of this?" Or, you might ask in that conversation about plans for the weekend, "Where do you feel connected to God?" Again, don't argue, just ask and listen.

A third way to use ordinary conversations as opportunities for talking about faith is to invite. "Hey, I'm going to this concert at my church this Thursday. It should be really inspiring. It's all clergy and I'm kind of curious to hear what they sound like. Would you like to join me? I'd be glad to pick you up."

If they turn you down, you don't have to be upset or angry or disappointed. Simply say, "Well, maybe another time." Or, "maybe singing clergy isn't your thing. I get that."

It's important to know who your friend is. So, maybe singing clergy isn't his or her "thing." But maybe there is something else you could invite him or her to attend.

A rummage sale? A dinner? – everyone likes to eat. A ball game, or a jazz night, or a movie? Our evangelism committee has been planning all kinds of events for us to invite our non-church friends to attend.

Even if they say "no," it could open up the conversation to talk about spiritual matters. You've deepened the conversation. You've let them know that faith matters to you. You've planted a seed. We just need to look for the opportunities, indeed, *pray* for the opportunities.

Then, be willing to speak when the Holy Spirit prompts us. Be ready when God gives you that chance to talk to someone you know about spiritual things. Take a deep breath and just do it. Amen?