

“Becoming a Contagious Christian: Telling Your Story”

Date: April 24, 2016

Place: Lakewood UMC

Text: 1 Peter 3:15

Theme: Witnessing, evangelism

Occasion: Contagious Christian, series

We're in week four of our series entitled "Becoming a Contagious Christian." When we share our faith story it's so important to speak clearly, saying what we mean and meaning what we say. Something our used car salesman could benefit from. Wow, did he ever give a clear answer to any of those questions? I don't think so.

But we don't have to be a polished public speaker to tell a friend about our faith in Christ. It does help to know your story, and maybe to practice telling it to someone else, before you share it with someone you really want to communicate the faith to.

Here's the thing: It's *your* story. You know it better than anybody else. It's the story of your life and how Christ has made a difference. After we've established an authentic relationship, after we've made a gentle transition to talk about spiritual matters, we offer to tell our story. And believe me, your story matters.

Here's three reasons why: # 1. Your friends will be interested. They'll be interested in learning some more about who you are. #2. They'll be able to relate to it. You're not coming across as a religious expert, just another joe or jane, just like them.

And # 3: your story is hard to argue with. Chuck Swindoll says, "The skeptic may deny your doctrine or attack your church, but he cannot honestly ignore the fact that your life has been changed."

Becoming a contagious Christian is about building relationships and sharing our stories of what God has done for us, in a genuine

and natural way. It's often been said that sharing Christ is like one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread.

Being a Christian is important to you, or you wouldn't be one. Jesus has made a difference in your life. So, believe it or not, your story is important. It includes joy, sorrow, pain, doubts, faith and love.

So, let me tell *my* story, simply as an example of how this might be done. Your story will be different from mine – we've lived different lives and had different experiences. Some people have dramatic stories of coming to Christ and their lives being radically changed.

Others have been a Christian as long as they can remember, and it may not seem very dramatic. But it's your story, of how Jesus has been at work in your life. We need to become comfortable talking about our faith. So let me tell my simple story.

When I was growing up, I had a father who had high expectations of us kids. Dad was the son of an alcoholic father and abusive husband. My father remembers my grandfather as a lousy dad. My Dad was determined to do it right, and do it better. He had high expectation of his three sons, especially his first-born, me.

Dad wasn't mean or abusive; he was a good man. But somehow I felt like I could never do enough to please him. That informed my view of God. I saw God as an angry judge who was just waiting for me to make a mistake, then to judge and condemn me.

I grew up in the church; our family went regularly. I saw the church as just one more place that had rules for being good and doing things the "right way." It wasn't a scary place, but it conveyed – to me – a lot of shame and guilt.

When I was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, our church had a Lay Witness Mission come to our church. A bunch of lay people came up from Atlanta Georgia to my home church in Baltimore, Maryland. They came to share their faith. They weren't theologically trained; they were just ordinary people who loved God and Jesus.

They were full of joy and happiness. They played guitars and we sang a lot folk songs and praise songs, not the usual hymns we sang in church. The youth group had their own time apart from the adults. I had the chance to listen to people my age talk about a living faith, a personal faith in the Lord Jesus.

They made an impression on this 7<sup>th</sup> grader. They had a lot of joy in their faith and religion. It wasn't just a set of rules to live by. They talked about a living Jesus, whom we could know personally, and talk to, just like a friend.

I realized that weekend, that Christ died for my sins, as well as everyone else's. I didn't have to be perfect. I didn't have to be afraid of breaking rules or disappointing God. Jesus took the blame for me, and the punishment that I feared I deserved. I came to believe that God loves me, and accepts me, just the way I am.

That weekend, in the fall of 1967, I went forward to the altar and gave my life to God, asking Jesus to forgive me of my sins. And then I asked Jesus to come into my life and be my leader, to lead me through the rest of my life. I felt such joy and happiness and peace.

Since that weekend, I confess I still struggle with some of the issues I did as a young boy, worrying that I'm not good enough. But now, I have the good news of God's love to counter-balance the idea that I'm not good enough. I don't have to keep struggling to prove

myself. I can fall back into the loving arms of a loving God, and just feel His love and acceptance.

Since that time, I've had an exciting life, following Jesus wherever he leads me. I have the joy of accepting myself, instead of trying to please my parents, or keep God from getting angry at me.

That's what Jesus means to me. Can you relate to any of that? I wonder, what's your spiritual story?

So there's an example of sharing one's personal story. Tomorrow night we're going to work on developing our unique story to tell. I hope many of you will join us. It takes a little practice, to put the words together.

But we're going to help you do that. What was it like before your met Jesus? How did you come to know Christ? How is your life different, now that you're a believer and a follower of Jesus? Working with some simple questions, we're going to put our stories together, and practice telling them to each other.

Being a witness for Christ is similar to being a witness in a court room. The witness is not called to argue the case; that job belongs to the attorney. The witness is not called to issue a verdict; that job belongs to the jury. The witness is not called to rule on the case; that job belongs to the judge.

Witnesses are simply called to describe their own experience – what they saw, heard or observed. At its core, being a witness for Christ simply means sharing with someone else what we have experienced in Christ. Who is Jesus to you?

May the Holy Spirit help each of us to tell our story. Amen?