

“Becoming a Contagious Christian: Sharing the Good News”

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Place: Lakewood UMC

Text: John 1:12-13

Occasion: Contagious Christian series

Theme: Witnessing, the Gospel, Evangelism

Have you heard any *good* news lately? We hear bad news all the time. But have you heard any *good* news lately? The word *gospel* means “good news.” So, what is the good news that followers of Jesus have to share?

Imagine you’re having lunch with a colleague or a friend, and he or she starts a conversation about faith. Imagine, that person has questions about your involvement with Lakewood UM Church. As you talk, he or she then asks you directly to explain what it means to be a Christian. How would you answer? What would you say?

Here we are in week 5 our sermon series on *Becoming a Contagious Christian*. Today we want to talk about sharing the good news of our faith. What does it mean to be a Christian?

I want to share with you one version of how we can talk about our faith, today. In our class tomorrow night, we’ll explore a couple of other ways to tell the same story. Each of us, as Christians, should be comfortable telling someone else what the good news of our faith is.

The technique I want to share with you this morning was created by author and teacher, Judson Poling. It’s called the Five-Second Gospel. It goes like this: “God loves us. We blew it. Christ paid for it. We must receive Him.” (repeat it)

Now, that's the short version of it. I want to expand upon it just a bit, so that you too can explain what each of those points mean. So let's start with the first point: "**God loves us.**"

The story of our faith begins with God. God is love. In the book of Genesis we discover we are actually made in the image of God. In 1 John 4:16 it says, "God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God and God in him." That's God's plan for us – to be like Him, to love as He loves.

But that brings us to point #2: "**We blew it.**" Our image is fractured by sin and it needs to be restored. Though we were originally created good, we became sinful. Look around us at the world and we can see the consequences of sin.

Romans 3:23 tells us that *all* humans sin and fall short of the glory of God. No one perfectly lives up to the full image of God, because of our broken condition, called sin.

When we talk about sin, we're not saying that some people are better than others – "they're sinners and we're perfect." The truth is, we are all sinners, even really good people fall short. Being a good person is not enough to reconcile us to God and heal the brokenness of our world.

That brings us to point # 3: "**Christ paid for it.**" Our image is restored and we are made right with God when we come to faith in Christ. 1 Peter 3:18 says, "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God."

You don't have to quote scripture if you don't want to, or if you're not very good at memorizing verses. What you need to know is

that Jesus brings us back into a right relationship with God. It's not our good work that does it; it's His work for us.

All that is needed is for us to acknowledge our need, receive God's love and grace as a gift, and align our living with God's love.

Which brings us to point # 4: **"We must receive him."** Christ offers his forgiveness as a gift, but we must open the gift and receive it. If someone gives you a Christmas gift, but you never open it up, do you get to enjoy the benefits of the gift? No. Christ died for the salvation of the world.

Everyone is saved. But we have to receive the gift to enjoy the benefits. John 1:12, our gospel lesson this morning says, "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."

We receive him by asking Jesus to be our forgiver and leader. (We try not to use 'churchy' language that might put off our friend). We ask Jesus to forgive us of our sins and lead us for the rest of our lives.

That's the Five Second Gospel, four easy points to remember. **God loves us; we blew it; Jesus paid it; we must receive him.** Now, I have to tell you as a United Methodist, I don't think this is the full story, and I would add one more point that John Wesley emphasized. Point # 5: **"God transforms us."**

God's work in our lives is not finished when we profess faith in Jesus. The Holy Spirit continues to be at work in us to form us into the likeness of Christ. Wesley called this work of grace "sanctification."

That's a five syllable word, and I wouldn't suggest you use that when talking to a friend, but you as a United Methodist should know it. All it means is this - God puts the Holy Spirit in us, who leads us towards "holiness," the wholeness of life that is centered on loving God and loving others.

Do you think you could share the Five Second Gospel? **God is love. We blew it. Jesus paid for it. We must receive him. God changes us.** It's five simple points that we can flesh out and add as much details as we feel comfortable.

We're not suggesting you have to go knocking on doors to find recruits. We're talking about something called invitational evangelism. It's one person sharing with another person how he or she has experienced God's transforming love in Christ, then offering the invitation: "Would *you* like to receive him?"

Let us pray: "God, thank you for the undeserved gift of your love. Help me to grow in my ability to share the good news of Jesus Christ in both word and deed. Amen."

Sermon materials borrowed from *A Disciples Path* by James Harnish, Abingdon Press: Nashville. 2012, p. 94; and *Becoming a Contagious Christ* by Mittleberg, Strobel and Hybels; Zondervan, 2007, pp. 66-68.