Last Sunday afternoon, we had six High Schoolers who did something about as bold and courageous as I have ever witnessed someone that age do. Those six students sat before members of this congregation, and allowed themselves to be questioned about their faith, whether or not they were actually living out what they claimed to believe. Let me tell you, we have a lot to be proud of in those kids. That was a tough thing to do, and they handled it well. These are kids who are really learning how to live out their faith in their everyday lives, and doing it very well. I think very few Christian adults would be willing to do what they did, much less other teenagers.

One of the questions that I think every one of them was asked was how would your teachers, your coaches, your teammates, or your friends know that you are a Christian by the way that you live your life? Today, I would like to put that question to you. How would your friends, your employers, your employees, and your coworkers know that you are a Christian by the way that you live your life? For far too many Christians, the answer is, they wouldn’t. Yet, sharing our faith is something that every single one of us has been called to do.

If you were here last Sunday night when we continued talking about how we can become more externally focused in our ministry here at Agape, Rod taught about spiritual gifts, and one of those is evangelism. Some people are gifted evangelists, something that I am confident is a gift of the Holy Spirit.

I have a friend that is extremely gifted that way. He used to go and stand on the corner by the courthouse in the town he lived in and preach for an hour or two while people were leaving and coming back during lunch. The paper even ran a story about him, and he got to share about why he did what he did in an even more public way. If I can share something personal with you, that’s not me at all. I am in no way gifted to do what he did, and evangelism like that is not one of my spiritual gifts

Not everyone is gifted as an evangelist, not everyone feels comfortable sharing their faith with random strangers on the street. In fact, I would venture to say that is a pretty rare gift. It’s not every day that you meet someone who can do that well. But here’s the thing, even though you may not be called and gifted to that kind of public evangelism, it does not excuse you from sharing your faith with other people.

But sharing our faith is often hard to do. Why is that? I think the number one reason that people do not share their faith is fear. We fear what it will do to our relationships with other people. We fear what people will think of us. We fear that things will become awkward if we talk about our faith.

There’s even a rule of thumb for many family gatherings, that you don’t talk about religion or politics so that things will go smoothly and things don’t get awkward. That sounds so wrong doesn’t it? That in order for our family gatherings to go well, we don’t talk about our most deeply held beliefs. If you are a Christian, then your faith is at the core of who you are and what you should be all about. Yet so many people avoid talking about their faith altogether because it might make things awkward, or people might think differently of them, or it might make people feel weird. Really, all those things come down to fear: being afraid that things will go wrong, and so we simply don’t talk about our faith at all.

I think that other big reason that people don’t speak about their faith and share it with others is because they feel unprepared and unequipped for sharing their faith with other people. Again, this is a kind of fear, because what it comes down to is that we are afraid we are going to mess something up. We are afraid that we’ll say the wrong thing, that we’ll blow it, and that person will never come to know Jesus because of something that we messed up.

That’s a legitimate concern, because both Paul and Peter tell us to be prepared to answer for our faith, to be prepared to speak about our faith to anyone who asks the reason for the hope that we have. And a big part of how we do that is through studying Scripture, getting to know Scripture, and being able to answer some of those questions. But when we allow that to keep us from sharing our faith with others, then it just becomes an excuse not to do something that is out of our comfort zone. So, if you want to live out your faith by sharing it with others, then don’t allow not feeling prepared to keep you from sharing your faith, work toward making yourself prepared, and go out and share your faith.

One of the important things we could talk about is why we should share our faith in the first place. Last week we looked at what the church should be, what the church should do. One of the things we saw from Matthew 28 is that the primary mission of the church is to make more disciples of Jesus. This is a mission that Jesus himself gave to us.

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Matthew 28:18–20 ESV

We call this the Great Commission because it is something that Jesus commissioned his disciples to do, and not just the 12 disciples that were with him that day, but all the disciples of his that would come after them as well. In John 17, right before he was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed for his disciples, and not only the disciples who currently followed him, but for all those who would come to believe in him in the centuries to come because of the witness of his disciples in the world. When Jesus gives this command for his disciples to make more disciples of his, that is what he had in view, he was commissioning us as well.

What does it mean to be commissioned? Well, you can think of it as people who are commissioned as officers in the military. They are given a job to do, they are given responsibilities, they are given a mission to carry out, and they are expected to accomplish it.

The same thing is true of us. When Jesus gave us the Great Commission, he was giving us a job to do, he was giving us a mission to carry out, and he expects us to accomplish that mission as his followers. The disciples were called the Apostles, which means ‘the sent ones’. They were sent out on a mission by Jesus himself.

We are not capital ‘A’ Apostles today, that was reserved for the original 12 disciples and Paul, those who were sent out by Jesus face to face. But we have still been sent out by Jesus to accomplish this mission of making more disciples of Jesus.

The idea behind this is that we are followers of Jesus making other followers of Jesus, we are disciples making more disciples. One of my favorite descriptions of this is that Evangelism is just one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. There is nothing pretentious about it, there is nothing that makes any person better than another, it is one person who has found life trying to help other people find that life as well.

What I love most about thinking of it this way, is that it puts it into the right perspective. When we think about it that way, there is nothing in this message that is about us or the work that we are doing, there is nothing that puts us above anyone else, this is all about Jesus, and what he has done for us. And that’s the whole point of making disciples of Jesus, that we have found the Way, the Truth, and the Life in Jesus Christ, and our goal is to tell as many people about that as we can.

But why did Jesus tell us to do that, why did he tell us to make more disciples of his in the first place. Was Jesus an egomaniac, was he just trying to make name for himself, to make sure that people remembered him? The answer lies in the message of the Gospel. Jesus put such an emphasis on this, and he gave us all this mission of making more disciples of his, because it is the only way that we can be saved.

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

John 14:6 ESV

Following after Jesus is the only way that we can be forgiven, the only way we can be redeemed, and the only way we get to spend eternity with God. Jesus told us to share our faith and make more disciples of his because God so loves the world that Jesus came here to die for us to pay the penalty for our sins, and he wants as many people as possible to be able to enjoy eternity with him.

If we really believe in the Gospel message, if we really believe that humanity has sinned and that will keep people from enjoying eternity with God, if we really believe that God has called us to love other people, and if we really believe that God loves the whole world, and that Jesus died so that all people could know his grace and forgiveness, and spend eternity with him. Then it means that we have to act on those things we believe. We have to share our faith with other people.

Penn Jillette is half of the Vegas magic show Penn and Teller. One of the things that Penn is known for is being a very outspoken atheist. Several years ago he made a video about an experience that he had with a man who gave him a Gideons Bible, and how that affected him even as an atheist. The man complimented him on the show, then gave him one of the small Bibles the Gideons hand out. Even though Penn did not become a follower of Jesus because of that, it did make an impact on him, and he in turn has made an impact on others.

He said, “I’ve always said, I don’t respect people who don’t proselytize [who don’t share their faith]. I don’t respect that at all. If you believe there is a heaven and hell, and people could be going to hell or not getting eternal life or whatever, and you think it’s not really worth telling them this because it would make it socially awkward. How much do you have to hate somebody to not proselytize? How much do you have to hate someone to believe everlasting life is possible and not tell them that? If I believed, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that a truck was coming at you, and you didn’t believe it, that that truck was bearing down on you, there’s a certain point that I tackle you, and this is more important than that.”

How much do you have to hate someone to not share your faith with them? This is a man who does not believe that God exists, and yet he still understands how important it is for those who believe in Jesus to share their faith with others. This is the single most important thing we can do with our lives, this is the single most important thing we can do to make an impact on the world around us, to share our faith in Jesus with other people. This is something that is worthy of spending your time on for the rest of your life, because it has eternal consequences, and we’re commissioned to do it by Jesus.

So how do we do that, how do we share our faith with other people if we aren’t one of those people who is gifted in evangelism. Well, we have the mission strategy of one of the most successful, if not the most successful missionaries in the history of the church written down in Scripture, the apostle Paul. This is Paul’s mission strategy:

For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.

1 Corinthians 9:19–23 ESV

Paul did everything he could to make sure that he was reaching people where they were at. He left his own preferences behind, and he met people where they were at. In Acts 17, we have an example of this. Paul was in Athens meeting with the leaders of the Greek people, and he used their own culture and literature to proclaim the Gospel to them.

So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for “ ‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, “ ‘For we are indeed his offspring.’ Being then God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

Acts 17:22–31 ESV

Paul used what they already knew to guide them toward the saving message of the Gospel. He did that wherever he went, with Jewish people, Gentile people, everyone that he met. He tried to meet them where they were at to lead them to the Gospel of Jesus. And that is an excellent way for us to share our faith as well.

Now becoming all things to all people does not mean that we lose our convictions and core beliefs along the way. We are still called to follow after Jesus. He called us to be in the world but not of the world. Paul tells us in Romans 12 not to be conformed to the image of this world, not to allow ourselves to get caught up in the things of earth. So, we are definitely called to stay the course, to continue following after Jesus no matter what, and yet we also have to be among people that need to know Jesus. That might mean you need to get out of your comfort zone a little bit, or maybe a lot, in order to reach people who need to know Jesus. We are called to be different, called to be holy, called to live out our faith in Jesus in the midst of a world that does not follow him so that we can make more disciples of Jesus.

And that starts right in our own backyards. A book called *The Art of Neighboring* describes how we can start this process of sharing our faith with the people who are literally our neighbors. The authors ask their readers to go through a simple exercise to see where they’re at in reaching their neighbors for Christ. Think of a three by three grid, like the one on the screen. Your house is the one in the middle. Could you name the other eight neighbors in that grid who live all around you?. Do you know their names, do you know their children, their grandchildren? Do you know anything about them, do you know their greatest passions and desires, and most importantly, do you know if they have a relationship with Jesus?

Sadly, they say that only about 10% of people can fill in the names of all their neighbors. Only about 3% can tell you anything more than just their name, like where they went to school, what they do for work, or what their hobbies are. Less than 1% of people can tell you anything deep and meaningful about all their neighbors, including where they are at in their faith, or if they even believe in God at all.

If we don’t even know basic information about our closest neighbors, then how are we ever going to reach them, or other people for Christ. How are we going to share our faith with them if we don’t even know their names?

Earlier I called Paul one of the most successful missionaries in the history of the church, and that can be intimidating. But time and time again, when we see Paul share the Gospel with people in Scripture, he didn’t have any kind of prepared speech or Gospel tracts to hand out. He simply told people what Jesus had done in his life. He told people about his personal experience with Jesus, and how it had changed his life, and that’s what we need to do as well.

You don’t have to have a degree in evangelism to share your faith. All you need to do is share what God has done for you, to share what he has done in your life, share how he has given you grace and freed you from the consequences of your sin.

And maybe the most comforting thing to know is that we are not in this alone. Even as he gave us the great commission, Jesus said that he would be with us always, even to the very end of the age. Twice we see Paul ask people to pray for him specifically that whenever he spoke about the Gospel, whenever he shared his faith in Jesus, that God would help him find the words to use, that he would open the door for the message, and that he would proclaim the Gospel clearly.

and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

Ephesians 6:19–20 ESV

Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

Colossians 4:2–4 ESV

These are the kinds of prayers that God honors, to build his kingdom, and bring more people to him. So, you’re not in this alone. Jesus is with you as you share your faith in him, and praying for the right words to say, for a door to be open, and to proclaim the Gospel clearly is absolutely the best first step.

I want to close us out today with a quote from Brennan Manning, and command from Jesus that are both a gut check for every one of us when it comes to evangelism. He said, “The greatest single cause of atheism in the world today is Christians: who acknowledge Jesus with their lips, walk out the door, and deny Him by their lifestyle. That is what an unbelieving world simply finds unbelievable.” Last week we read what Jesus said in:

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

John 13:34–35 ESV

Always remember that when you walk out those doors today, the single greatest witness you will have to the world around you, is how you live out your faith. So, go out and share your faith with your words. But most of all share the love of Jesus by the way that you live, the way that you speak, and the way that you treat other people. Because the single greatest witness you will ever have is to share your faith by living every single day as a follower of Jesus Christ.