Bold as Lions: Care Memory Verse: :Romans 1:16a

November 13, 2022 Scripture Reading: Romans 10:9-15

**SLIDE 1: TITLE**

Today we are going to continue our discussion about evangelism. It’s that churchy word that means to spread the gospel. It something that is both a joy and a duty for those of us who follow Jesus. If we have questions about what this gospel is exactly, Paul clarifies for us in his letter to the Roman church. He says in chapter 1 verse 16: “I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is God’s own power for salvation to all who have faith in God.” And as we talk about sharing this gospel to those who are unfamiliar or uninitiated, we have borrowed from the natural world the image of a lion. We ought to be “Bold As Lions”. A lion is not ashamed. A lion does not fear. A lion would not cower or back down. Now being a bold lion does not mean that we pounce on everyone we meet, or we roar out into people’s faces, or that we carry ourselves with an air of arrogance…How many of us have known someone like that? No, our boldness is a reality in the spiritual realm. Our boldness comes into play as the Spirit of God moves in our lives, prompts us, guides us. Our boldness comes into play when the gospel is at stake and Jesus needs to be shared.

**SLIDE 2: Jesus needs to be shared**

 Last week we focused on the primacy of prayer. If we want to plant the seed of the gospel into someone’s life, then we had better plow up the ground! Prayer is that plow! When we lift others into God’s care, when we pray for their eyes to be opened to the truth, and we bind the devil from having any sway with that person, we are plowing up the ground. When we stand as bold as a lion before God on behalf of someone who does not know Him, do we not think the He is going to move? Do we not think that all the powers of heaven will be unleashed on behalf of our request?

 There is a battle that rages, a fight for the soul of each and every person. We might not be able to see the armies clash against one another, but we can often see the affects. People we love struggling against addiction or depression. People we love locked in a cycle of sin and not able to break free. Sometimes we even might even say or think: “That’s just not like him.” There is a fight for the soul of those we love, and if they are unaware or uninterested then they are unable to fight on their own. The battle is upon us whether we would have it or not, and these folks need us to step in on their behalf. To take up the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God and go to battle on their behalf! This is what prayer is all about. Fighting for those who cannot or will not fight for themselves. It is about plowing up the ground, asking God to make way for the seed of the gospel, to make a hard heart soft.

 So there is no evangelism without prayer. And this lion boldness does not heed any list of excuses we might have. This lion boldness reduces such excuses to nothing more than shreds. So we pray for others and we pray for boldness in ourselves. We also know that we are called to relationship with God and others. It is our job to care.

**SLIDE 3: It is our job to care**

 Nearly two months ago, I had asked you all to be in prayer for one person who doesn’t know Jesus. There was no other follow up included. No conversations to be had, no events to invite them to attend. We were just praying on behalf of another person, fighting for them. So let me ask honestly, how many of you have kept up with these daily prayers, or at least tried to? That’s okay, we can be honest here. How many of you started off strong but faded and sort of forgot about praying? And maybe there were some of us who just didn’t really do it at all. But let me just say, without the pre-plowing of prayer, the rest of the work is moot. We cannot evangelize, we cannot spread the seeds of the gospel successfully without the prep work!

 I want ask, for those who have taken the work seriously, and labored on behalf of someone who does not know Jesus, as you have done so over the past two months, how has your heart changed toward them? You probably think about them a bit more often, maybe you find that that person enters into your thoughts sort of randomly. But I think you would also find that you simply care more about them. In our efforts to soften up their hearts toward the Lord, we find that our hearts have softened toward them. Maybe have felt led to call them or email them or get coffee. Maybe not. But it is extraordinarily difficult to pray earnestly for someone without growing to care deeply for them.

 So what are some ways can express our care? That’s a pretty stupid question. I would bet that the person sitting across from you is one of the most caring people you have ever met. I mean, we are a caring church. We greet people warmly. We feed them food. We show a genuine interest and support. Here is a list of some ways we care for others. Would you write down one or two that describe you?

**SLIDE 4: How do you show love?**

We know how to care in a general sense…but we are here to be challenged this morning right? You don’t want me to get up here and just say the things that you already know. You don’t want me to get up here and say a bunch of things that sounds nice and keep us all comfortable. I want to get up here and speak the truth. And I believe that is what you want in a pastor, some one who can be truthful. And I believe that is what caring truly is…speaking truth in love. Saying things that are not always easy in order to get to the truth.

 So, I am highly impressed and grateful for the way this church cares for people, and the next step in the ladder of care is the toughest step of all…the step into the spiritual life of others. How do we go beyond a general caring into spiritual caring, into soul care? How do we share the gospel? What’s the next step?

**SLIDE 5: ACTS 17: 16-21 While Paul waited for them in Athens, he was deeply distressed to find that the city was flooded with idols. 17 He began to interact with the Jews and Gentile God-worshippers in the synagogue. He also addressed whoever happened to be in the marketplace each day. 18 Certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers engaged him in discussion too. Some said, “What an amateur! What’s he trying to say?” Others remarked, “He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods.” (They said this because he was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.) 19 They took him into custody and brought him to the council on Mars Hill. “What is this new teaching? Can we learn what you are talking about? 20 You’ve told us some strange things and we want to know what they mean.” (21 They said this because all Athenians as well as the foreigners who live in Athens used to spend their time doing nothing but talking about or listening to the newest thing.)**

Let’s turn to Acts 17 starting in verse 16-21. READ First of all, Paul was deeply distressed at the situation he observes. Athens is flooded with idols! Everywhere Paul looks he sees another idol dedicated to another god. I think we get distressed as well. While the form of the idols have changed, we certainly can observe how people bow down the things of this world. It’s distressing! But what does Paul do about it? Verse 17; he begins to interact. He works with the local synagogue but he also hangs out in the marketplace and just talks to whoever is there. He is forming relationships. Paul is open, he is listening, he is observing, he is looking for opportunities to share the gospel of which he is not ashamed. And finally that opportunity comes when the philosophers of the city invite him in to speak to their group. Paul does so without fear and unashamed. He takes his gospel message and speaks boldly. Some laugh him off, some roll their eyes, but some listen.

 Paul earned that listening ear. He was present and engaged. They were willing to listen to him because he was willing to listen first. Paul’s listening presence gained him a sense of trust. He was also authentic. He was saying strange things about resurrection and something about Jesus, and he really believed it. Paul was not trying to sell anything, he was authentically being himself.

 Finally, Paul addresses their faith. He tackled the main issue, what do you believe? This is the culmination of love, the highest form of care. How can we say we love someone if we are not willing to address the topic of faith and eternal life? How can we love someone and not offer them Jesus? It is their greatest need. It’s also our greatest challenge.

 In Athens, everyone was very religious. They believed in a little of everything. Our culture is a bit different. Now, you are expected to shut up about it and keep it to yourself. It fine for you if you want to believe in Jesus and read the bible but no one else should have to be bothered by it. But we don’t start by preaching what we believe, we start with prayer first and foremost, and then we listen, we observe. What is important to them? What guides their decisions? What motivates them?

 As we listen, we can ask questions. Find out where they are from, how their family was growing up, what interests or hobbies do they have…and take note of things you may have in common. As you listen and learn, eventually it will be possible to ask questions about what they believe. Everyone seems to have an opinion about God or the afterlife. Sometimes these discussions will bring up past hurts or current struggles or maybe anger and frustration, but by the power of the Holy Spirit, we can boldly remain in the conversation. We don’t have to back down when things get heated. I have also heard it suggested to use a “sometime” question. “Sometime, would you tell me about your beliefs?” Keep praying and trust God to open doors and opportunities even while He softens hearts. The goal here is not to have perfect conversations about Jesus, but to have more conversations about Jesus.

**SLIDE 6: The goal here is not to have perfect conversations about Jesus, but to have more conversations about Jesus.**

 To express love in its ultimate form: a concern for the soul, a concern about someone’s spiritual life. One of the reasons Paul was able to gain a hearing with the people of Athens is that he was interesting, different…odd. It’s probably fair to say that being odd is not the description we would most want to be known as, but it is partly what it means to be salt and light in this world. We are a holy people, set apart, not of this world….we are odd. It’s up to us to do what we can to be an interesting odd and not an off-putting odd.

**SLIDE 7: interesting verses off**

 Our verse from Romans says that the gospel is the power of God for salvation to all who have faith. It is hard to know what exactly power means in this context, but we can say that, without the gospel, faith is powerless. The power of a saving faith is somehow contained in the good news we have about Jesus. That is a bold claim! Something a lion would say.

**SLIDE 8: Romans 10:14 So how can they call on someone they don’t have faith in? And how can they have faith in someone they haven’t heard of? And how can they hear without a preacher?**

Elsewhere in Romans, chapter 10 verse 14; Paul asks us some pointed rhetorical questions about those who don’t know Jesus. He asks, “How can they call on someone they don’t have faith in? And how can they have faith in someone they haven’t heard of? And how can they hear without a preacher?” You are that preacher! But don’t loose sight of the heart of it all…Paul’s driving desire is for others to have the joy and abundant life that only Jesus can give. He wants everyone he talks to to be able to call upon a savoir who loves them and will forever provide them with hope and everlasting life. The root of any sort of evangelism must be this kind of love. We have to love people. That’s why Paul is present with others listening carefully and observing what they believe: he loves them.

 So take a look at that expression of care that you had written. How can you use that gifting from God and leverage that into conversations about faith in your everyday life?

 Remember the goal is not to have perfect conversations about Jesus, but more conversations about Jesus. So work with what you’ve got! Start with what you are good at.

 Think about that one person you have been praying for…how can you extend care toward them? How can you practice a love for their soul?

**SLIDE 9: 1. PRAY / 2. ENGAGE / 3. SPIRITUAL QUESTION / BE BOLD**

Take a moment and write down number 1: PRAY. Pray for them. Pray for their hearts to be softened, pray for their minds to be opened to the truth, and pray against Satan’s schemes to keep them in unbelief. Number 2: Write down something specific you could do to engage with them based on what you wrote earlier. How can you specifically use your natural gifting regarding this specific person? And finally, number 3: Write down one spiritually minded question that you could ask. Maybe it’s a “sometime” question, maybe it’s very broad, maybe it’s a very pointed question. Then at the bottom of it all, add the words, “BE BOLD”. Eternity is at stake! It’s clear that we do not save anyone, but we can allow God to use us in the process. Paul also declares, “Today is the day of salvation”!

**SLIDE 10: “Today is the day of salvation”!**

 Next week we will be hearing from a couple who have decided to allow God to use them. Craig and Christy Philips will be serving as bible translators in the Caucusus as they boldly share the gospel with those who have not heard and so cannot call upon Jesus as their Savior. We will have an awesome opportunity to support and be a part of their work overseas.

 “I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is God’s own power for salvation to all who have faith in God.” Amen.