Bold as Lions: Pray (Holy Communion) Memory Verse: Proverbs 28:1

November 6th, 2022 Scripture Reading: Matthew 19:16-26

**SLIDE 1 - TITLE**

 Today begins a short series on the idea of evangelism. When it comes to Christanese churchy words, “evangelism” is right up there as one of the classics. It is used in the title of some denominations, it is used in reference to certain famous Christian leaders, mostly from the past but many Christians are reticent to apply the term to themselves. “Am I an evangelist? Well, I certainly don’t get paid for it. You pastor! If anyone here is an evangelist, it’s you!” It is tempting to use the term as a type of profession, that way we don’t have to bear the title ourselves. But let’s take a closer look at what we actually mean by the use of this loaded term “evangelism.”

**SLIDE 2: evangelism**

 Well, Google tells us that evangelism is the “spreading of the Christian gospel by public preaching. Aha! So you got me! I am an evangelist after all. I engage in the act of public preaching…but that is not the end of the definition. The spreading of this Christian gospel also occurs through the means of personal witness. And that one is on both of us! We all have a story to tell. We have all encountered God in some way. If we were all to write out the story of that experience, each of those accounts would be different. Certainly, we would see some shared themes and some similar circumstances, but you need to know, that you have a specific and unique testimony of God in your life. And that unique story can only be told by you! Every year, we host the choir from MN Adult and Teen Challenge. Every year we hear powerful stories of love and forgiveness and redemption, and God showing himself in power amidst broken human lives. But have we ever heard the same story twice? And does Ray try to tell Sarah’s story? Does Fiona try to tell Jeffery’s testimony? No! It is crucial, as part of the faith formation process, for these folks to tell their own stories. You are the one to proclaim your story. But it’s not just your story, you are only the reporter, God himself is the author. As he writes it, we proclaim it.

**SLIDE 3: *euangelion,* meaning “good news” and *angellein* meaning “to announce.”**

 What else should be said about this churchy word, “Evangelism”? If we go to the Greek origins of the word, we see *euangelion,* meaning “good news” and *angellein* meaning “to announce.” That boils it down right there. Evangelism is simply to announce good news, to share, to proclaim, to communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ. Well, that is easier said than done, but my hope is that in the next few weeks we will be better prepared and more willing to do just that.

 How many, by a show of hands, have gone to see a movie based on the recommendation of others? How many of you have read a certain book because someone told you it was brilliant? How many of tried out a new restaurant based on the reviews of others? Now, how many of you have been the one to recommend or suggest or encourage someone else to try a certain thing? It is easy, natural in fact to talk to others about the things we love and enjoy. It is so natural we might even find ourselves follow up with those folks… “So did check out that new store? How was it? What did you think?” We are somehow invested in the outcome of their experience. And before you know it, we have become evangelists of the next big thing. Why is it easy to tell someone about a new favorite band, or about the great gas milage I get on my new vehicle…you should get one too! But when it comes to Jesus, our natural instinct wants to clam up. Why wouldn’t we want to share the good news of the gospel? Why wouldn’t we want to inform others about how they can be saved for all eternity?

 I am going to share with you a list of excuses. And some of these actually sound pretty good….but what I am going to ask you to do is take a pen, write the word “excuses” down in big bold letters, and then jot down the excuses from this list that apply to you. I am going to ask you all to be honest in this little self-assessment and realize that every person here is going to be writing something down. No one is exempt. We are human, which means we are really good at excuses. Okay, everyone ready? Here is the first part of the list:

**SLIDE 4: List (wait for a bit then show the next slide)**

**SLIDE 5: List Continued**

 I have titled this series “Bold as Lions”. Now, how does that fit in with evangelism? Well, a lion has no natural predators. They have a few competitors for food, but nothing that actually hunts them. A lion is able to walk through their habitat without fear. They do not need to dart and dodge, or hide and cower. They own the place. They are called the king of the jungle for a reason and that reason can be summed up in the word “power”.

**SLIDE 6: Power**

 From its jaws, to its enormous claws, from it muscular structure to to deafing roar, a lion is powerful, and my brothers and sisters, you too are powerful. For what do we have to fear? What in this world do we have to answer to? What can possibly take us down? Can life? Or death? Or angels or demons? Can future problems or present circumstances? The apostle Paul asks outright, “If God is for us, who can be against us? What can separate us from the love of Christ?” You are powerful, because the God you serve is powerful. You are untouchable, because the God who created you is your protection, your shield. Hallelujah!

 Now I want you to look again at the excuses you listed out on your paper. What would a lion full of power and fearlessness, make of such a list? Shreds, right? Lions do not waste their time with lists of excuses. Well, you might rightly say, ‘That all sounds good, but I am actually a person and not a lion. Tearing up this list does not make the excuses go away.” Agreed. So where do we begin this process?

 Let’s turn to Acts 4 and begin at verse 23. Peter and John we being fearless evangelists and they were telling everyone they could about the good news of Jesus Christ. They were going on and on about this crazy idea called the resurrection. The religious leaders didn’t like it, but Peter and John wouldn’t stop so they were threatened with some jail time. But the leaders were also afraid of the public outcry that would result in detaining these men, so they let them go with a very strict warning to cease teaching in the name of Jesus. Let’s look at verse 23. READ

**SLIDE 7-10: ACTS 4:23-31 23 After their release, Peter and John returned to the brothers and sisters and reported everything the chief priests and elders had said. 24 They listened, then lifted their voices in unison to God, “Master, you are the one who created the heaven, the earth, the sea, and everything in them. 25 You are the one who spoke by the Holy Spirit through our ancestor David, your servant: Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? 26 The kings of the earth took their stand and the rulers gathered together as one against the Lord and against his Christ. 27 Indeed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with Gentiles and Israelites, did gather in this city against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. 28 They did what your power and plan had already determined would happen. 29 Now, Lord, take note of their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with complete confidence. 30 Stretch out your hand to bring healing and enable signs and wonders to be performed through the name of Jesus, your holy servant.” 31 After they prayed, the place where they were gathered was shaken. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking God’s word with confidence.**

Other translations render confidence as boldness. And notice how these Christians come across that boldness in verse 29…they understand that it is something enabled by, produced by, originating from and received from God himself. Verse 31, they do go out speaking boldly about the good news of Jesus not because they all had watched some motivational tapes, not because they engaged in some team building exercises, not even because they had put together some well laid plans, but only because they were filled with the Holy Spirt! They were filled with the Holy Spirit! That is the source of boldness! It was then and it is now! And this filling came to these early Christians through one thing and one thing only…luck?... Right place, right time?...some fancy rituals?...no, they were filled as a result of prayer. We will be filled as a result of prayer and I’ll tell you something else…we will be filled no other way. Now I suppose we can be filled with many things….laughter, hot air, excitement, dread…something else. But we will not be filled with the boldness of the Holy Spirit unless we are on our knees asking God for it. It really is that simple.

 And this confidence is a two-sided coin. Yes we will receive a boldness for the gospel, we will be able to saunter the streets of our neighborhoods like lions with no fear, we will be able to approach anyone with supernatural confidence but look at what Hebrews says in 4:16. READ.

**SLIDE 11: Hebrews 4:16**

We can approach God himself with boldness! A.W. Tozer in one of his sermons discussing this verse said, “Shouldn’t we be humble? Certainly we should. But no man should be so humble that he doesn’t ask, or we’re playing into the hands of the devil. We should be humble, but we should dare to ask and seek and knock.” The Greek word used in both of these passages is *parresia* and it can be rendered boldness or confidence, but it has an additional connotation, and that is, freedom of speech. Paul secures this connection for us in 2 Corinthians 3. He talks about our hope that gives us *parresia* and how Moses spoke with God in the bold freedom, his face actually radiated God’s own glory. So much so that he had to walk around wearing a veil to cover his face! Paul’s point is that we too, can experience even greater glory that that. Jesus has come, he has removed the veil that once stood between us and God. He has given us his Spirit and verse 17 tells us plainly, that where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. Because of the work of Jesus, because of the gospel, we are free to come into the presence of God, boldly, confidently, and with permission to speak freely.

**SLIDE 12: We pray boldly**

 So we pray. We pray boldly. In our scripture reading today, we heard Jesus speak some very disheartening words to his disciples. They witness this rich young ruler turn slowly and sadly away from Jesus and walk away defeated, because he had many possessions. I don’t know about you, but that puts a pretty big lump in my throat. Then Jesus basically says, that those who are rich cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven. It’s too hard! The love of money and stuff and status easily gets in the way. It’s easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle…it’s just not going to happen. This is concerning! The disciples were stunned…well, then if it really is such a ridiculous proposition, who can be saved? Who has a chance? Who has a prayer? Jesus simple replies, “It is impossible. For humans, it is an unachievable, ridiculous pipe dream. BUT, all things are possible for God.” Now notice what it says…”all things.” Does that mean God can give me the gift of flight? Sure. Does it mean that God can miraculously change the wording of our current tax code? Sure, I suppose. All is a very inclusive word, but do not loose what Jesus is specifically talking about here: salvation. How men and women can be welcomed into the Father’s eternal kingdom. The Holy Spirit makes it possible.

 So evangelism begins with prayer. It begins a confident approach to the throne of grace as we ask for impossible things. At the throne we make our plea and beg the Lord to fill us with his Spirit. It’s impossible. It would be like trying to fill up a colander. But nothing is impossible for God. At the throne we make our plea and beg the Lord for the salvation of the lost! We have been for two months now. It’s impossible. People don’t even change their minds let alone their hearts. But nothing is impossible for God. At the throne we make our plea and beg the Lord for boldness! It’s impossible. We are more like mice than lions. But nothing is impossible for God.

 The lion is bold. He carries himself without fear. As he walks across his domain, the other creatures keep watch, twitching in fear. When will the lion pounce? When will the lion roar? They try to steer clear of one who personifies such confidence and authority.

**SLIDE 10: We are that bold lion.**

 We are that bold lion. We are to carry ourselves without fear. Our very presence should indeed cause the powers of hell, the little demons to scurry off in fear, wondering at what moment we will pounce, when will we open our mouths and roar with the authority given to us by the One true King Jesus Christ. To borrow from Tozer again, he writes, “The devil should be on the run. We should never see anything but the back of his neck. He should always be retreating and retreating.”

 When the Church comes together to pray boldly for impossible outcomes, how can Satan do anything but retreat? So, church, will you join me in sharpening your claws, stretching out those muscles and going on the hunt? Will you join me in boldly coming before God’s throne? Will you join me in impossible prayers for lost souls? Can we be bold as lions? Can we overcome our list of excuses? By the power of the Holy Sprit, we can. Amen.