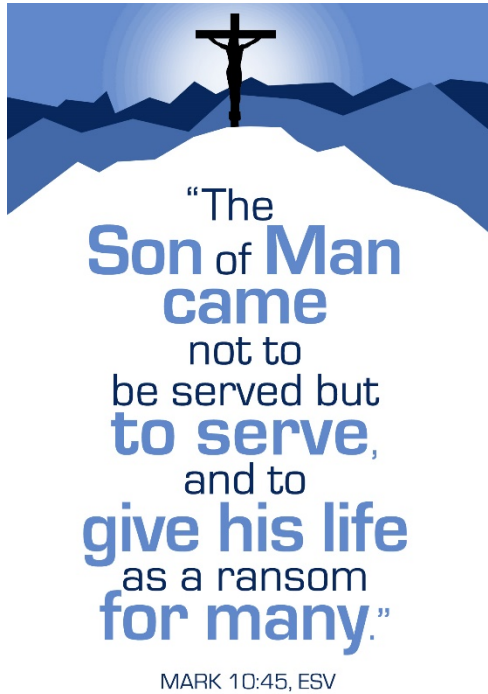


WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?



None of us are born evangelists (unless maybe you are in the Billy Graham family?) We're not evangelists by trade. We do believe with certainty that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone as revealed in Scripture alone. But to put ourselves out there for others in our "Me First" culture can be risky business. It can be difficult, awkward, and even threatening. We may be rejected, harassed, given the "stink eye", or shunned because we let it be known that Christ lives in us. Some people say that you never talk about politics or religion if you want to be in relationship with others. You would not be alone if all of these ran through your mind when encouraged to be a witness for Jesus.

The **Every One His Witness** material gives this encouragement: "Life is the place in which you are called to be Christ's witness. Your life. The life that God has shaped for you and given to you. You are meant to be a witness of Jesus in your family, your work life, your life as neighbor, and your church life - every aspect of your everyday life. You don't have to go to a faraway place to be Christ's witness. You are His witness right where you are - and wherever you are. You don't have to wait to be a witness of Jesus. You are His witness in life now - and at every stage and moment of your life. You don't have to seek out relationships with people you don't know or don't have contact with in order to be a faithful witness. You are Christ's witness for the people who are already in your life as friends, neighbors, co-workers, and family members - and those whom God will bring into your life in one way or another. Life is where you are His witness - and life is what You share as His witness." **(Just a sampling of this great, encouraging material available to you and your church.)** But even with this encouragement for witness, what's in it for you?

At my second congregation, we welcomed a touring drama group called, "Tetelestai". They performed the Passion Story. In the midst of re-creating the Passion of our Lord, Jesus was hanging on the cross. Those disciples and followers standing underneath the cross asked Jesus, "Why all this pain and suffering? Why

are You willing to die? What's in it for You?" I still remember to this very day the goose bumps and tears that fell from my eyes when the person portraying Jesus boldly responded: **"YOU. I love YOU. My work of salvation is finished here for YOU. Nothing could be more precious to Me than to welcome YOU to Paradise as you believe in Me."**

A number of years ago, a small survival manual for clergy seeking maturity in ministry titled, *"The Penguin Principles"* was released. The first principle of church life, according to this book, goes like this: "Despite the pious things we say in public, at any given time, less than five (5) percent of any group in the church is operating with purely Christian motivation. The other 95 percent is asking, **'What's in it for me?'** And before they do anything, you'll have to satisfy that answer."

As a pastor, I took this admonition to heart. Instead of assuming that everyone believed as I did, I would consider how the person might be asking in their particular life situation, "What's in it for me?" It gave me a whole new perspective - **and I pray that it does the same for you.** Every day and night you can watch the news and see a world broken by sin. They know that this world is a broken and challenging place (even though they may not consider this brokenness as sin) but they have no answer. They would love to have that answer satisfied in their hearts and lives. **As the Body of Christ, we have the satisfying answer: it's the life, death and resurrection of Christ for them and for their salvation - the relational Gospel.**

George Sweeting, in his book *"The No-Guilt Guide for Witnessing,"* tells of a man by the name of John Currier who in 1949 was found guilty of murder and sentenced to life in prison. Later he was transferred and paroled to work on a farm near Nashville, Tennessee. In 1968, Currier's sentence was terminated, and a letter bearing the good news was sent to him. But John never saw the letter, nor was he told anything about it. Life on that farm was hard and without promise for any future freedom. Yet John kept doing what he was told even after the farmer for whom he worked had died. Ten more years went by. Then a state parole officer learned about Currier's plight, found him, and told him that his sentence had been terminated. He was a free man. The author concluded that story by asking, "Would it matter to you if someone sent you an important message, the most important in your life, and year after year, the urgent message was never delivered?"

In the Gospel lesson this coming Sunday (Mark 10:25-45), Jesus seems to satisfy the inward desire of the 95 percent. He asks the question: **What do you want Me to do for you?** If you could ask Jesus for one thing, just one thing, this very moment, what would it be? What would you say? I'm sure many things are going through your mind. You might ask for wisdom like Solomon did. Maybe the removal of the COVID virus from our world or healing for you or a loved one you are worried about. Or salvation for that family member who has strayed from the flock. Maybe it's peace and justice in this crazy, violent world. Less stress at school or at work. More time to spend with loved ones. Some, I suppose, would ask for riches. Who knows, I might even ask for the miracle of the Detroit Lions to win the Super Bowl during my lifetime. It probably would depend on the moment, right?

As we continue toward the preview of the marriage feast on Maundy Thursday, the Cross of Good Friday and the victorious empty tomb of Easter: God satisfies the question "What' in it for me?" with His saving answer: I give you the key to heaven through the forgiveness of your sins. **It's the one thing we *should have asked for*.** If we have only one thing to ask, that's what it should be. **Forgive me, O Lord. Forgive me, a poor, miserable sinner. That's our greatest need and the greatest need of every person we encounter.**

Christ Jesus is not a means to an end. He is the End. And He is the One and Only Focus of our lives in Christ. He is the Christ who came not to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many - to give His life for you and the world around you. He is the Christ who is not your self-help guru, but the Christ who shed His blood and died for your sin, my sin and the sin of the entire world and was raised again for our justification. He is the Christ who said NOT *believe in Me and I'll grant you your every wish and desire*, but who said you will be hated and persecuted for My name's sake, and you will suffer and perhaps die for believing in Me. **But most importantly - in Him alone, you have life - life eternal. That's what is in it for YOU and for the world around you.**

Please know that I do not write these articles because I have Evangelism all figured out nor do I share the Gospel faithfully in any and all circumstances. Far from it. **(Thanks be to God for the exciting materials offered by Synod with Every One His Witness and the accompanying modules and the Re:Vitality materials for congregations.)** Luther speaks bluntly that bearing witness about Jesus is the only reason we are on this earth. It brings me joy to be encouraged that God still plans to use me today despite all my failings. **How about you?** What could bring

more joy and satisfaction than sharing with someone, anyone that Jesus saw them as He was stricken, smitten, afflicted, scourged, spit upon, and hung on a criminal's cross - and what was in it for Him was THEM. By His wounds, they are healed, forgiven and saved for eternity. The Holy Spirit works through the sowing of this glorious seed - the Word of God. Forgiveness is the gift above all other gifts. It's the forever gift. Everything else will go the way of the world, of decay and death, but forgiveness lasts forever. You will last forever. You can't take anything with you from this world into heaven - that is except those believing in Christ. That's why we witness for Christ with our lives.

If you knew all this, congratulations. You are part of the 5%. But don't assume that everyone knows these truths. We have been through a difficult year. People are hurting in many and various ways. And they are asking, "What's in it for me?" While on the Cross for you and for me and for the world, Jesus made only one request: **Father, forgive them.** That's what Jesus is all about. The healings, the miracles, the cross and the resurrection, are all about forgiveness - undoing sin and giving life. Thanks be to God, YOU have the satisfying answer the world is yearning for. As Peter said: Always be prepared to give the answer for the hope that you have - and do this with gentleness and respect. (1 Peter 3:15) May God bless your daily witness and may it bring you lasting joy even in the face of rejection and the crosses of this world. Jesus saw YOU from the Cross to make YOU His own - then gave YOU the privilege to witness in His name.

How would you answer the question, "What's in it for me?" The Evangelization Team would love to hear your story as a fellow witness for Christ. Share your stories at EvangelizationTeam@englishdistrict.org. We are also looking for those who find joy in bearing witness for Christ. We could use your help serving on the Evangelization Team where your thoughts and ideas will bless our District. Please prayerfully consider it. Rejoice in knowing that your Savior has already answered your prayer for the one thing you need the most: GRACE. How sweet it is to share this truth of answered prayer.

In Christ Alone,
Rev. John Diener
Galatians 2:20