

Courage to Share

Sterling UMC
September 19, 2010
2 Timothy 1:3-12

Last week I began to tell you a little bit about my story. I shared with you about my call to ministry and how God called me to get out of the boat and take a new direction in my life. This morning want to share with you another part of my story. This is a part that I'm not too proud of. You see during the time when I was wrestling with my call to ministry often found myself in the library at Old Dominion University and instead of studying electrical engineering or calculus or differential equations you could find me reading and studying my Bible. Instead of concentrating on what I knew I needed to do in order to get good grades in my engineering courses, I spent many hours reading and studying the Bible. Now that was all well and good, in the library. But when I packed up my books and left the library to walk around campus and to go to my classes, I would hide my Bible. I didn't want anybody to see it. I can't really explain to you why. I guess I was self-conscious. I didn't want anyone to think I was a nerd or geek. I didn't want to be looked down upon or looked at as being odd or different. So around all of my friends and classmates my Bible stayed hidden.

Have you ever had a similar experience? We are people of faith. We know and believe in the greatest news ever heard by human ears, the good news of the gospel. We have received the greatest gift we could ever imagined, the gift of forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life through Jesus Christ. Why is it so difficult to share it?

Why is it for example that when we go off on our mission trip to Jamaica and I see our people, me included, have no problem asking a complete strangers, "Are you a Christian? Do you know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?" Or sharing their faith with someone else, and yet back here at home we would never even consider doing such a thing with a family member, a neighbor, a classmate, or even a stranger we happen to meet in the store?

Why has the church today become largely ineffective in reaching this world with the message of Jesus Christ?

There are a number of reasons why we are scared to share. The first reason is because we're afraid that people will think that we're geeks. We're afraid that people will say, "All you born again Christians talk about is Jesus this, and Jesus that. Why do you always have to preach at people? Why can't you just live your life and let me live mine?" We don't want to be humiliated like that! We don't want to experience the rejection that Jesus experienced. So we clam up. We mind our business. We don't say anything."

Another reason why we're afraid to share our faith is because we're afraid that we're not going to know what we're talking about. Someone will say, "How do we know that the Bible is true? What makes this book so special when there are a zillion other books out there?" We're afraid that people are going to ask us questions like that. And that we're not going to be able to give them an answer. So we clam up. We mind our business. We don't say anything.

Another reason why we might not share our faith is because deep down we don't think it's necessary. We say "God is perfectly capable of saving the people He wants to

save without me getting in the way! Since God is all-powerful, He can redeem the world all by Himself! He doesn't need my help."

Or we might say, "What gives me the right to push my beliefs on other people? This is the 21st century! This is a country where we have a melting pot of ideas. By what authority am I to go out and share the gospel?"

The risen Christ answers that question for us beginning in Matthew 28:17. He says "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore, by the powers vested in me by the Creator of the universe, I want you to go and make disciples of all nations." In other words, "we need to make disciples because Jesus Christ COMMANDS us to make disciples! It's not because we think we're better than other people. It's not because we're bigots. It's not because we're intolerant. We need to make disciples because this is what Jesus put us on this earth to do. Psalm 105:1 says "Give thanks to the Lord, call upon His name; make known among the nations what He has done." Go and make disciples.

There has never been a time when this world has been more spiritually lost. We see it in the declining attendance in our churches...we see it in the faces of our neighbors, our friends, our co-workers, our classmates, our children. People are searching for something to make this life meaningful. People are looking for answers. They are longing for hope and peace.

There are individuals—right in our backyards—who are discouraged; there are a great many people asking questions.

In the face of this we hear and see a multitude of false prophets who are doing a great job boldly promoting their solutions.

The beer companies are doing a fantastic job. The car companies keep us thinking that life will be full if we buy that bigger car. Those who sell sex are doing a fantastic business. They are working real hard and they are getting results. Let's face it. Americans are expert promoters! But what about the church? What about our church? When we look at the church we can see that we, as Christians, seem to fail miserably at promoting the saving message of Jesus Christ. Young people grow up to maturity and make their own decisions, often, apparently with little if any interest in the Christian movement. A great number of, intelligent men and women have very little concern for the church...do nothing about it...contribute nothing to it...and gain nothing from it. Outside of our immediate circle of relatives and friends is the world...the masses of men, women and children who remain completely untouched by the message of Christ.

Friends, it is costly to follow Jesus. There is a real danger for us as Christians that we can come into this building and begin to feel real comfortable, and get inspired being around others who know Jesus. It is a safe thing here in our "holy huddle", behind the walls and closed doors ...we can talk about the Lord, share testimonies of what God is doing in our lives, sing and shout and get excited about the things of God. But it becomes controversial as soon as we walk outside the doors and step onto the streets of Sterling. Do you know what I am talking about?

But if we are to be used by God, if we are going to fulfill our calling to "make disciples of all nations," we are going to make a difference in a world so desperate and needy; Church, I say to you this morning, Its time for us to come out of the closet—to declare ourselves openly to the world.

Listen to the words of Jesus: “You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”

IT'S TIME TO GET OUT OF THE BOAT!

Eph.5:8 says, “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.”

IT'S TIME TO GET OUT OF THE BOAT!

Romans 1:16, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.”

IT'S TIME TO GET OUT OF THE BOAT!

What does it mean to get out of the boat?

To be an authentic Christian—everywhere

To take a stand for Christ and against sin

To seize every opportunity

Paul says in our Scripture to young Timothy this morning, “Don’t be afraid to use it! God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.” The Bible seems to suggest that even though Timothy is a faithful Christian, he may also have been a timid Christian. In 1 Corinthians 16:10, Paul says to the Corinthians “If Timothy comes, see to it that he has nothing to fear while he is with you, for he is carrying on the work of the Lord, just as I am.”

And in 1 Timothy 4:12, Paul says to Timothy “Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, life, love, faith and purity.”

People were telling Timothy “You can’t be a minister of the gospel! You’re too young! Who’s gonna take you seriously? Who’s going to trust you with their deepest darkest secrets? Forget about trying to serve the Lord!” Timothy was afraid.

Maybe the enemy is saying similar things to you: “You’re not ready to tell your friends about your relationship with Christ. They’re going to laugh at you! They’re going to say you’ve gone off the deep end! They’re going to back away from you like a deer during hunting season!”

But Paul reminds us that God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but a Spirit of power, love, and self-control! When I was a kid, I used to watch Popeye the Sailor Man on TV. How many of you remember Popeye? What does Popeye eat to in order to get really strong! That’s right! He’s strong to the finach, because he eats his spinach! And

after he eats his spinach, he gets big muscles so that he can rescue Olive Oyl from the clutches of Bluto.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Holy Spirit is spiritual spinach! The Holy Spirit gives you the boldness and the strength and the compassion to do whatever it is you're called to do to help propagate the gospel of Jesus Christ! God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but a Spirit of power, love, and self-control!

Paul goes on to say this, "So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day."

I have a declaration to make this morning. A statement that I just can't keep to myself. I have been pondering the possible repercussions my announcement could bring about. I have been considering the potential consequences of my disclosure. I've weighed the benefits of keeping it to myself against the cost of letting the cat out of the bag. I don't know what is going to happen, but I've got to tell you this morning, I just can't keep it to myself - I am not ashamed of the Gospel of my Lord Jesus Christ.

I'm ashamed of a lot of things. I am ashamed of the things I have done and things I have failed to do. I am ashamed of seeing those who are hurting yet passing by while looking the other way. I am ashamed of not taking the time to celebrate with those whose joy has overflowed around me. I am ashamed of failing to help the lost find their way. I am ashamed of the days I have wasted, the grace I have tested, and the times I have failed to give God my best. Oh, there are a lot of things that I am ashamed of, but I am not ashamed of the Gospel of my Lord Jesus Christ.

I am ashamed of my failure as a minister and the failure of many of those who share my call to be a shepherd. I am ashamed at how we glory in the crowd rather than in the Cross. I am ashamed at how we tickle the ears of men and tear at the heart of God. I am ashamed at how we turn our backs on the poor and outcasts who can't boost our budgets and instead, seek to boost our credibility with those who can. I am ashamed of my failure as a minister and many of those men I have been called alongside, but I am not ashamed of the Gospel of my Lord Jesus Christ.

I am sometimes ashamed of the Church today. I am ashamed of the way we build buildings while neglecting hearts and souls. I am ashamed of the way we cling to tradition rather than clinging to Almighty God. I am ashamed of the way we idolize the messengers instead of the Messiah. I am ashamed of the way we fixate on the budget of the Church instead of the blood of Christ. I am ashamed of the way we desire for our Church to be sanitized instead of sanctified. I am ashamed of the way the Church bows to the power brokers in her midst instead of bowing before the Power and the Glory. I am ashamed of the way we are incensed over broken things instead of broken hearts. I am ashamed of the way we celebrate our history with more vigor than we celebrate our destiny. I am ashamed of the way we have chosen to tolerate a lifeless existence

instead of walking in the newness of life everlasting. I am ashamed of the Church from time to time, but I am not ashamed of the Gospel of my Lord Jesus Christ.

Sometimes I am ashamed of various aspects and elements of life, most of all my own life, but I never have been, nor will I ever be ashamed of the Gospel of my Lord Jesus Christ.

It's time to get out of the boat. We, the Church of Jesus Christ, need to be reminded that some people will not like or receive the Gospel message. But we need to be bold in our teaching of the cross of Jesus Christ and further remind people that sin is sin! We need to be reminded that none of us is perfect and none of us qualifies as a messenger but the Word of God is perfect and demands boldness.

We cannot afford to be silent. We cannot afford to stay in the closet. Every Sunday, some people sit in the pews of this church and hear the Gospel and walk away lost. Every Sunday, in almost every church, are church members depending upon their church activity to get them to heaven. Every Sunday, there are people who are sitting at home, thinking they are a church member and OK with God. Every Sunday, there are people who are washing their cars, mowing their lawns, drinking their coffee and reading their papers completely oblivious to the fact that there is salvation in the name of Jesus Christ and that they stand in need of what only he has to offer.

How will they hear, how will they know and understand unless someone tells them? That someone is you and I.

Are we bold enough to take a stand for Jesus whether or not anyone else does?

IT'S TIME TO GET OUT OF THE BOAT! And boldly proclaim the grace, the love, the mercy, and the transforming power of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Our Lord commands it!

The times demand it!

The hearts of the lost need it!