

Lutheran Mission Matters



Volume XXVII, No. 2 (Issue 55) November 2019

Disciples Share Their Faith

Sermon by Alex Lahue

Lent Series: “Getting into Discipleship Shape”

Abiding Savior Lutheran Church, St. Louis

March 10, 2019

I was in the parking lot behind the dorms at Truman State University. I lived in Dobson Hall. Fun fact: the mascot of Dobson Hall is a toaster. One night, I was walking back to Dobson Hall, the home of the Toaster, with my friend who lived down the hallway from me. We’ll call him Ben. Ben was a non-Christian or, as I like to put it, a not-yet-believer. I don’t remember how the conversation started, but Ben started talking to me about the Christian faith. He seemed curious and wanted to know more about what I believed. Unexpectedly, I found myself in the middle of a spiritual conversation. I was surprised that Ben brought this opportunity to me without me ever going around looking for it. Yet, when it was my turn to give an answer for the hope that is in me, I asked Ben, “Have you ever tried reading the Bible?” “A little bit,” Ben said. I responded, “Well you should try reading one of the Gospels. Matthew might be a good place to start.”

A moment of awkward silence filled the crisp winter air, and we walked back to Dobson Hall as if we were walking out of church on Good Friday. I couldn’t believe that I had responded that way. Sure, there are worse ways to share your faith, but this certainly wasn’t my best day. Thankfully, more spiritual conversations came up with Ben and God communicated His Word to Ben through me, even with imperfect responses. Sadly, Ben still does not-yet-believe, but I pray that he will someday.

My response in that first spiritual conversation I had with Ben is probably one of my least favorite responses I’ve ever given to anyone about my faith.

Although, this last fall, I had another conversation with a not-yet-believer. I’ll call



Pastor Alex Lahue serves as Associate Pastor at Messiah Lutheran Church in Boerne, Texas. He graduated from Concordia Seminary with his MDiv in May 2019. He has been married to his amazing wife, Erin, for almost five years. Together, they’ve enjoyed the adventure of raising their son, Jaxon, who is now three years old. alahue@messiahboerne.org

Copyright 2019 Lutheran Society for Missiology. Used by permission.

View Lutheran Mission Matters 27, no. 2 (2019) at <https://lsfm.global/>.

Membership in LSFM is available at <https://lsfm.global/joinlsfm.html>.

E-mail lsfmissiology@gmail.com to purchase a print copy of a single issue.

her Sarah. I did not expect this question from Sarah, but one day she asked me, “What does your denomination believe?”

Once again, I was caught off guard. “Umm. . . well we believe the Bible is God’s Word, so we take it literally but not literalistically. . . Like, for example, the Laws in the Book of Leviticus . . . some of them say stuff like if you steal from your neighbor you should be punished by death. . .”

Sarah cut me off and said, “It says that?!”

“Uhhh. . . I mean kind of. . . I think so. . . or something like that. . . but those were specific applications of the law for Israel at that specific time. . . and Jesus came and re-explained God’s law. . .” I thought, *What in the world am I saying????!!*

I don’t know why I started overexplaining Levitical Law that day and using words like “literalistically.” I’ve learned to just start with Jesus and how He’s impacted my life.

I’ve struggled many times to share my faith, even with fellow believers. I’ve found myself caught off-guard, not knowing what to say, or confusing myself and other people. I’ve been embarrassed, afraid of creating conflict, scared of rejection. I’ve felt inadequate, I’ve doubted myself and God. I’ve thought things like, “I don’t really want to talk with my family about spiritual stuff right now. It’s exhausting or it’s not as fun.” And sometimes, I just don’t even have God on my mind. I’m thinking about when I’m going to do the dishes, whose laundry to do first, what time *This Is Us* or *Walking Dead* is on TV.

It turns out that my experiences match up with that of many American Christians. In partnership with Lutheran Hour Ministries, the Barna Group published a book titled *Spiritual Conversations in the Digital Age*. It explores the trends of sharing one’s faith in today’s society.

According to Barna’s research, the average American adult has only one spiritual conversation per year. That’s not too surprising, I think. A spiritual conversation is any conversation in which you talk about God, religion, spirituality, faith, or even the lack of faith, with anyone, regardless of their belief—Christian or non-Christian.

So then, the average American is not talking about spiritual matters very often at all. What about Christians? Seventy-three percent of American Christians have fewer than ten spiritual conversations in a year. That is, Christians on average aren’t even talking with other Christians about their faith. Wow! When I saw that, I was blown away, but then I thought about my own life and my own conversations. I realized that most of my conversations aren’t about faith or about God.

What about you? How many spiritual conversations do you think you have in a year? Each month? Each week?

Even when we go to church, we can avoid spiritual conversations. We sit, we sing, we listen, we head out the door. Maybe we talk about our lives, but do we talk about God and what He's doing in our lives? Maybe we're not talking about our faith as much as we think we are.

The truth is, sharing our faith can be difficult. It doesn't always end well, and it doesn't always result in someone believing in Jesus, and that can be discouraging and heartbreaking. Perhaps we don't share our faith as often as we wish we did because it only reminds us of how messed up the world is and how broken we are.

Yet, despite our failures and the messed-upness of the world, it's still God's world. He's always working in this world, this nation, this city, this county, this church, and He's working in us too.

God wants us to share our faith with the people in our lives, believers and not-yet-believers alike. Our readings today show how God commanded His people to talk about their faith.

In the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses is clarifying and explaining for a new generation of Israelites the message that God gave to him on Mt. Sinai forty years before. The entire Book of Deuteronomy is one long spiritual conversation with Israel before they enter the Promised Land. It's a conversation that God started with Adam and Eve long ago.

It's the conversation where God said, I made you, I choose you, and I love you. God continued this conversation with Noah, and Abraham, and Moses—and with His people despite all the times they rebelled against Him.

In Deuteronomy 6, God communicates to Israel, "I want you to pass the faith on through the generations and tell stories to your kids about what I've done over and over again. I want you to have spiritual conversations throughout the day as much as possible so that you never forget, I made you, I choose you, I love you."

In verses 20–25, we experience the scene of a child asking his dad an honest question, "Why do you talk about God so much?" Can you imagine if someone asked you that question? The dad answers very simply by telling a story of God's work in their lives. We might call this today a Bible story.

This conversation of God's salvation continued through the celebration of Passover each year as the Israelites retold the stories of how God delivered them from Egypt to the Promised Land. It continued when the angels told the shepherds that a Savior had been born. It continued as a marginalized Samaritan woman spoke with Jesus at Jacob's well. The conversation continued through the Apostles, and the Early Church, and now through us.

So, if you've struggled to carry on this conversation God has brought you into. . . Hear now, O Christian, that for every time you may have bailed on an opportunity to

share your faith, God forgives you because He proclaimed His love perfectly for you on the cross. For every moment you forgot about God because you were thinking about the sports schedules, the recitals, the physical therapy, the student loans, the car payments, the new phone, God forgives you because He thought only about you as He rode into Jerusalem to die. For every time you didn't care about sharing your faith or didn't feel like sharing it so you didn't, God forgives you because He sees you as His perfect child through your Baptism. The God of the universe has begun this conversation with you, and He's not going to stop talking because He wants you to know that your sins and your failures are gone.

God has saved you through this great conversation, the Word, Jesus brought to you. He wants you to know that He values you more than anything else He's ever made, He's staying with you no matter what, and He's going to keep giving you all His grace and all of His Spirit and keep sending you out as His spiritual conversationalist. God says to you, "I made you. I choose you. I love you."

Paul quotes from Isaiah, "How beautiful (or more literally) how timely are the feet of those who bring the good news." God has saved us through the message, the conversation brought to us through Jesus Christ. We have heard and we have believed, and now He chooses us to carry that good news to the people in our lives.

Earlier in Romans 10, Paul mentions that to be saved forever, to be a part of God's family, one has to believe and confess Jesus as Lord, as God Himself. And we know that only the Holy Spirit can create faith. It's not our job to convert people. Only the Spirit can do that. But the Spirit does call us to share our faith with the people in our lives through spiritual conversations. And we've seen in Deuteronomy, in the Old Testament, and now in Romans that God transmits faith by conversation.

Think about the people in your life who told you about Jesus. My grandparents, Frank and Roseanne Lahue, told my dad Tom about Jesus. My mom's babysitter took her to church sometimes, and spiritual conversations and reflections came from those experiences. My parents, Tom and Linda Lahue, brought me to the waters of Baptism. Jim Greenly shared His faith with me the first time I came to Sunday School at Abiding Savior. John and Stacey Gates shared their faith with my family when they invited us to attend Abiding Savior for the first time. If this is how God chooses to preserve and grow His Church, then sharing our faith is critical.

In Romans 10, Paul explains that the ones who trust in God, who are calling on Him regularly, are the ones who are saved by grace through faith. God wants all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, but the Word of God must be shared for this to happen. It's a matter of where someone's eternity will be spent. We don't like to think about hell very often because we can't explain it—it's uncomfortable. But the truth is that people who don't trust in Jesus are headed that direction. God is clear that those who do not believe will be condemned forever.

That's why those who do not yet believe need us to share our faith with them so there are fewer who have not yet heard.

A pastor once shared a story with me about a dear friend of his who was not yet a believer in Christ. This pastor and his friend spent a lot of time together just talking and hanging out and occasionally engaging in spiritual conversations. One day, this pastor's friend said, "You think I'm going to hell, don't you?" The pastor tried his best to explain lovingly that Jesus is the only way. But his friend got angry and left, and the relationship fell out. The conversations stopped, and all the pastor could do was pray for his friend. Years later, the pastor received a phone call. When he answered the phone, he recognized the voice of his old friend from years ago. His friend said, "I just called to let you know that today I was baptized and confirmed in the Lutheran Church." He hung up the phone after he said those words.

I want an ending like that for my friends Ben and Sarah. I want Ben and Sarah to know they are loved by Jesus and Jesus wants that for them too. Who are the not-yet-believers in your life that you desire to know Christ? Keep praying for them. Keep sharing your faith with them. **Keep the conversation going because sharing your faith is serving your neighbor.**

To paraphrase Matthew 28:16–20, "Disciples of Jesus share their faith and engage in spiritual conversations often." - Jesus of Nazareth, 33 AD . . . roughly

With the Spirit living inside of you, you can engage in spiritual conversations more often.

The research shows that people who think about God more, talk about God more. This might seem obvious, but people in America are thinking less and less about God these days. Barna's research shows that people who engage in spiritual disciplines like reading the Bible, praying, and going to church tend to engage in more spiritual conversations. The more you see your primary identity as a child of God, the more likely you are to engage in spiritual conversations. Also, the more you invest time and energy into preparing and expecting these conversations, the more likely you are to have them.

We can begin to prepare for these conversations through a number of resources. One great resource is Lutheran Hour Ministry's Spiritual Conversation Curve. You can learn this approach and more at [LHMlearn.org](https://lhmlern.org). This Conversation Curve is a tool that helps people respond based on where other people are in their spiritual journey. Jesus did this all the time, and Paul tells us in Colossians 4 that our speech should be gracious and seasoned with salt so that we would know how to answer each person. This conversation curve guides you in deciding whether a person is unreceptive, receptive to the Gospel, or seeking the Gospel.

My friends Ben and Sarah were receptive to the Gospel. So, I was able to share my story of how God has worked in my life and move into telling THE story, which is God's story.

If someone is unreceptive to the Gospel, you just talk about life, your joys and your pains and building trust. **It's important to invest in relationships based on someone's value as a human being not based on their readiness to hear the Gospel.**

That's on an individual level. So, how can we as a body of believers foster environments where spiritual conversations are happening more often? Maybe we can make a point to talk about our faith with others when we attend church. In our homes, we can be willing to explore questions with our children, roommates, or guests—questions to which we might not know the answers. We can be willing to ask childlike questions like, “What's that?” or, as Lutherans like to put it, “What does this mean?” We can be patient with our co-workers and our friends, knowing that spiritual conversations take time. It's God's job to convert someone anyway. We don't have to come up with the best arguments for God's existence. We can simply share our story and God's story because God can defend Himself. We can even use technology to supplement our faith sharing because God can redeem anything—yes, even Facebook.

God has saved us through the spiritual conversation Jesus brought to us. He wants us to continue the conversation by sharing our faith. I want to challenge you to have one spiritual conversation with someone this week. In that conversation answer the question, “How have you seen God at work in your life or struggled to see God at work?” Would you have that conversation? It can be with anyone. Spiritual conversations pass on the faith, they bring good news, and they matter to God. Go forth, in the name of Jesus who started the conversation with you and share your faith more often. Amen.