

When I was younger, I mean 9 or 10, I got interested in fishing. The river Lagan was not too far from where I lived, so me and other mates would go down on summer evenings and fish – we had no idea whether there were fish in the water, but it seemed like a good idea. Anyway, one evening the bank on the river was a little slippy, and before you know it I was in the water. I lost control of any senses and can then remember being pulled back out. I can also remember the long walk home absolutely soaking wet and my head down in disappointment.

My adventures with water didn’t get any better, when on a school trip I experienced for the first time that feeling of seasickness. And so over time I just hated being anywhere near water. When I met Alison, she found it so strange that when we would be on the water on a boat, I would get really quiet and irritable, leaving her to be on my own. There was and continues to be a real fear of water.

And everyone one of us has fears, of some sort or another. But I’m guessing that if I was to ask any of you about sharing your faith with another person, that will be on the list of our fears. It’s very common for people to tell me that they don’t know how to tell others about Jesus. And so today through this passage from Romans 10, we are going to unpack why the need to share with others about the hope of the Gospel is so important.

Last week we considered about the incredible mercy of God on our lives, that was willing to save a wretch like you and me. And you may remember last week that we saw the depth of love and desire that was in Paul’s heart to see his fellow Jews saved. And so as we embark on some verses in Chapter 10, I know there will be people in your mind right now who you like Paul would love to see come to the Lord. So, we are going to look only at a few verses today from this reading, where Paul raises important questions about those who don’t know about Jesus – verse 14 & 15. *‘How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? 15 And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”*

If we think about fears of sharing the Gospel, Paul isn’t frightened of this. In fact, he’s eager to ensure that everyone at least has heard the message so they can make their mind up. So here we have 4 rhetorical questions all beginning with the word “How?” So, let’s look at these for a moment:

How can they call on the one they have not believed in?

This comes on the back of the previous verse, verse 13, which is from Joel Chapter 2 – *Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.* So, Paul is then saying, well how can they call on someone they don’t believe in? What is this salvation thing? You know I’m so glad that many churches today are moving away from that comfortable culture of people just attending church every Sunday, going home, and living their lives as normal the rest of the week before starting it all over again the next Sunday. Salvation requires more than just going to Church on a Sunday. Church is the petrol station for being refilled and encouraged for the week ahead, but salvation is something else. It requires a calling out by each of us - calling out to God means expressing our need for salvation, it means repenting, it means following him. It’s a surrender. Folks that’s much much more than church attendance. Paul is saying how can they call on the one who don’t believe in.

And then Paul asks the second question “how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?”

So typically, the way that evangelism works is this – those of you who know Jesus go and tell someone who doesn’t know Jesus. – that’s it. It doesn’t work to just expect people to read

about Jesus or open the doors of Church each Sunday and expect people to roll right in – no, his story must be shared. And that was so important back in the 1st Century as most people then couldn’t read so they would have relied upon people to speak to them. And this approach has continued to be the most effective means of evangelism throughout history. Here’s what Martin Luther said during his reformation of the Church – “*The Church is not to be a pen house but a mouth house*”. In other words, we are not meant to be a reading club, or so stuck in our theological and doctrinal differences and debates that we lose sight of the need to share the gospel by talking with others who do not know Jesus. The Gospel is designed to be proclaimed so that others can hear it. And so then the 3rd question that Paul raises here is this – **“how can they hear without someone preaching to them?”**

I think it’s quite amazing that with all of God’s power and ability, he still chooses feeble people like me to preach the Gospel. But you see the thing is that it’s not the ability or the qualifications that’s within me that matters, it’s the power of God through his Holy Spirit that chooses to place his message through my availability that matters. And actually, what Paul is getting at here is that in each one of us, not just me, we all are to be preachers of the Gospel. Now not Preacher in the typical sense of the word, but if you declare that you are follower of the Lord Jesus Christ then you are to proclaim the Good News of the Gospel to others. And here Paul uses the most prominent Greek word for preaching – and it’s the word ‘*kerysso*’, and it means to proclaim like a town crier going around the streets heralding news. It doesn’t require any special qualifications, and God could have chosen other mechanisms to get the message out, but he didn’t. **We who claim to follow the Lord are all to be God’s proclaimers.**

Now here’s a thought – why if we have given our lives to the Lord, are we still on this planet? Why would God not just lift us up to glory? We’re his. Well, it’s because we have a job to do folks, and that is to proclaim him to others. But you might be saying, well Jonny I’m not like the evangelists, I don’t have that gifting. Well, let me tell you a little bit about that word Evangelist which is the Greek word ***Evangelion***. It actually originates as a military word well before it became a religious word. An evangelist was someone who after a battle had been won, would go back home from the war and proclaim to the towns the good news of victory. This person would walk through the streets and tell people that they had won. You might have this image of preachers as being those who stand on street corners and tell everyone how wrong their lives are. That’s not actually the model of preaching as described in the bible. It’s about proclaiming good news. Christians in Rome would have been very familiar with this word preacher, because this is where they would have been dispatched from to tell towns around the city about good news from Caesar.

So Paul is saying, “how can these people hear without someone going to tell them the good news”. You know over the weekend I heard some news about the golf club where I am a member. I have had some connections with Sports Chaplaincy Ireland, an organisation that is trying to put chaplains in every football club, all rugby clubs, golf clubs, basically wherever there’s sports being played. And I had written to our Golf Club about having a chaplain available to members so that whenever there are people needing help with life issues, there’s someone they can talk to, and has a listening ear. Anyway, I hadn’t heard anything back for months and I knew that the committee basically had ignored my request. Anyway, I heard at the weekend through a friend that basically they ditched it out the window, because they didn’t want anyone preaching at them. Isn’t it amazing how people feel threatened, possibly because of their perception of what it’s all about? And yet here Paul is explaining that what it’s all about is providing Good news. Who doesn’t want to hear Good News? Well clearly there are still many, but you have to try.

So can I ask you, what about the people in your life? Your friends, your family, your work colleagues, have they heard good news? And if we don’t tell them, who will tell them? One more person to hear the good news is much better than none – remember that. We all know how much our world is hurting right now, and it needs to hear something of hope that cuts through the terrible things that people are having to face these days. The impact of one act of obedience makes such a difference.

So we come to Paul’s final question **“And how can anyone preach unless they are sent?”**

And right now you might be thinking, you see, I’ve not been sent like you to go and preach. But the truth is that everyone of us who have received the Lord Jesus as saviour has been sent. Jesus said in John 20 after his resurrection, *“As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you”*. That’s all of us if we are his followers. He said in the Great Commission, *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations”*. Wherever you are, this is your commission to go into your setting, your workplace, your family wherever it is. Preaching is for everyone. It’s not about microphones and pulpits and qualifications. Those things are important for me to encourage all of you and equip you into the week ahead, but if you are in Christ, you are to be proclaiming Christ in your lives. And if your theology is causing you to be passive about sharing the Gospel, it might be time to change your theology.

But I realise that the fear of all of this, maybe the embarrassment as people have a go at you for speaking out about the Good News of Jesus Christ is just really hard, especially if people start to avoid you. I know that in my own life, I’ve had people talk behind my back as I’ve come up to them saying *“Watch out, it’s the God Squad coming over”*. So, I understand how it makes you feel.

But let me tell you something about fear, and I’m going to do it through a little illustration. I absolutely hate arcades with all the rides. Last year I took the young people who went on our Exodus team up to Currys (which used to be Barry’s) in Portrush. We went on a ride that swings you from one side of the room to the other. I didn’t want to go on it, but if I didn’t go on it I would have been the only one not to do it. Everyone else was on. So I got on, praying all the way, making sure that the safety bar was fully down and secure. The next 3 mins were probably the longest of my life. I screamed the entire time. But you know something, when I got off, I said to someone, I want to go on that again. I would have really missed out if I hadn’t tried it. Folks, fear robs us of the adventure that God intends us to live. Fear is convincing you to stay safe, you don’t want to bother anyone. Can I implore you to get on that arcade ride (figuratively speaking). Perhaps Paul would say relating to the Great Commission, *“How can they believe if we don’t take the risk and open our mouths, if we don’t do something?”*

And so Paul concludes these verses quoting Isaiah 52, *“As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”* What does that mean? Back then messengers with news would have travelled mostly on foot. And so feet had to be looked after. And even after a long day of walking where they were cut, blistered, and dirty, they were beautiful to the people who would have received good news from the messenger. Beautiful are the feet, thank you for coming to speak to us with good news.

Don’t fear folks, be that messenger of good news, go equipped by the Holy Spirit today. I heard a story of a man who was very well equipped and qualified on how to evangelise to people. Anyway, he was walking down through his neighbourhood, and he noticed a young man at the corner of a street who wasn’t very well presented, handing out Gospel tracks to people walking past him. And so the qualified evangelist went up to the guy, and said *“Look I appreciate what you are doing here, but it really isn’t the right way of doing this, trust me”*.

And so this guy looked so hurt, he began to stammer and stutter really badly, so much so that he could hardly get any words out of his mouth but he said “I just love Jesus, and I know he loves these people”. And in that moment the qualified evangelist was deeply humbled. Folks I know there are always going to be important processes we need to put in place in how we share the gospel, but you know it’s so easy to critique others when we are not actually doing it ourselves. We don’t have to have all our theological ducks lined up in a row to have a conversation with someone about the good news of Jesus. Yes there will always be issues that we will wrestle with when we enter into a conversation with someone. But what if we, by the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives, just opened our mouths, because this news of the Gospel is not just good it’s absolutely amazing. As the hymn says, “We have a Gospel to proclaim”. That’s every one of us. Paul knew how far he had come in his own life. After all he was the one who was responsible for ridding out and killing these Christians, and therefore I wonder if when he wrote verse 13 “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”, maybe he was thinking to himself – the Lord would even save me, even me.

I think the greatest description of what I’m asking of all believers today in this church is what Jesus said in Mark 5 when he has just healed a man of demon possession and Jesus says this to him, “Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you”. That’s it folks in a nutshell. Go home, whatever your family setup is, you don’t have to have all the answers, just tell them of all the good things that God has done for you – all the detail, all the messy stuff, all your brokenness, just be honest to people at how God has just kept pursuing you in love.

It’s quite amazing how much we have to say about other things going on in our newspapers, or the things that are happening in our community, but what an incredible news we can tell, good news, the greatest news ever told, especially in this week leading up to Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Don’t leave it to simply invite someone along to church to hear me or someone else tell the story. You have the story in your own life, you can tell them how Jesus on that cross has loved you with all your warts and foibles.

And just so we are clear, a Church that doesn’t have people who go out and share the Gospel is no Church at all, and a Gospel that doesn’t stand with those that are marginalized in our community, that doesn’t give hope to those disillusioned by all they see around them, it’s not the true Gospel. May we remember that this Gospel message originated with God in these familiar words ¹⁶ *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life*”. And although many of us know this verse, many forget the rest of the phrase, verse 17 *For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him*’. God both initiates but also provides the means, for all to come (those in your families and friends who you think are far away from God right now), for all of them to come to him. Folks, that is really really good news. Don’t be afraid to share something that is life changing.

I pray that into this week ahead you will be empowered by the Holy Spirit to go out as sent people, that in every conversation, in every interaction, may we see all of it as a charge to live as people on mission for the sake of the world. May God give you opportunities in this week to come to tell someone the Good News. It is for sharing.