

Title: Becoming the Gospel

Text: Ephesians 3:1-12

Introduction: *God has given us this task of reconciling people to him. For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them... And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us.*

Transition: It's been my experience that there are very few ministry moments when we actually get to witness this...really feel like we're an "ambassador for Christ..."

Illustration: Communion encounter...I

wonder if that had something to do with Paul's words in Ephesians...

Communication: Eugene Peterson's, *The Message*...

This is why I, Paul, am in jail for Christ, having taken up the cause of you outsiders, so-called. I take it that you're familiar with the part I was given in God's plan for including everybody. I got the inside story on this from God himself, as I just wrote you in brief. As you read over what I have written to you, you'll be able to see for yourselves into the mystery of Christ. None of our ancestors understood this. Only in our time has it been made clear by God's Spirit through his holy apostles and prophets of this new order.

The Apostle knew what deep down, you and I do...God has come to us in Jesus and dwelt among us offering the gift of salvation from our sin, not for the Jew only, but for the Gentile, those Paul referred to as the "outsiders,"

implying that those of us who have already trusted Christ for our salvation are “insiders.”

The mystery is that people who have never heard of God and those who have heard of him all their lives (what I've been calling outsiders and insiders) stand on the same ground before God. They get the same offer, same help, same promises in Christ Jesus. The Message is accessible and welcoming to everyone, across the board.

Everyone; now those of us who make up the church, “insiders,” understand this, but it is not an elitism. The message of God’s salvation in Jesus is a gift for the whole world, but here is what *sometimes* happens in the church world – to us insiders if you will. The joy of discovering Jesus has a tendency after awhile to only be lived out among us, between us. Before long we become consumed in each other’s lives and no

longer have relationship with “outsiders.” In fact, in some cases all our relationships, all our activities, all our charity, is defined by and lived out in the context of the church – dangerous.

Paul said...

This is my life work: helping people understand and respond to the Gospel. It came as a sheer gift to me, a real surprise, God handling all the details. When it came to presenting the Message to people who had no background in God's way, I was the least qualified of any of the available Christians. God saw to it that I was equipped, but you can be sure that it had nothing to do with my natural abilities.

As it was with Paul so it is with us. *All of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him. For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them...why would*

we then... *And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead...to the outsider..., "Come back to God!"*

Transition: But how do we do this if we don't have a relationship with the "outsiders," those who Paul referred to as, "people who have no background in God's way?"

I get it church, doing life with those who share our faith and affirm our belief in Jesus is enriching, however, one reason we are the church and gather like we do is so that we can worship God and be empowered for life "out there." Our liturgy is meant to shape our lives so

that we too can live our lives *"among those who have no background in God's way."* Again, we are Christ's ambassadors as though God is making his appeal to others through us!

Transition: How does that happen when we are busy, "counting people's sins against them," while failing to see our own sin when we refuse to do life among them? In other words, when do we move, church, from merely hearing the Gospel to becoming the Gospel?

To which you may ask, "What are you talking about?! The church has become more evangelical now than ever before!" I'm not talking about developing church programs and dumbing down the Gospel to reach the unchurched and neither is Paul. This isn't about

"seeker-sensitivity." The good news of God in Jesus-the Gospel-was never to create programs, but to make disciples, and while programs can help to facilitate that, making disciples requires significant personal investment in the lives of other people, sacrifice. The message of Jesus affirmed by Paul today was always about **BEING**

THE GOSPEL AND THAT'S NOT NECESSARILY DEFINED BY WHAT WE DO NOT DO AND WHO WE CHOOSE TO STAY AWAY FROM! I learned this lesson the hard way...

Illustration(s)...

- Not seeing the sacred in the midst of my "secular" job...302nd CAMS
- Waiting for a table vs. sitting at the bar...The Outback

- Earning the right to speak into their lives by living among them...Recruiters

Transition: *And so here I am, preaching and writing about things that are way over my head, the inexhaustible riches and generosity of Jesus Christ. Our task is to bring out in the open and make plain what God, who created all this in the first place, has been doing in secret and behind the scenes all along. Through followers of Jesus like yourselves gathered in churches, this extraordinary plan of God is becoming known and talked about even among the angels!*

Conclusion: *All this is proceeding along lines planned all along by God and then executed in Christ Jesus. When we trust in him, we're free to say whatever needs to be said, bold to go wherever we need to go.*

We're tempted to say, "where no man has ever gone before..."

So, as the prophet Isaiah said, *"Arise...and let your light shine for all to see. For the glory of the LORD rises to shine on you. Darkness as black as night covers all the nations of the earth, but*

the glory of the LORD rises and appears over
*you...*and dare I suggest, through you. Now
church, it is up to you. What are you going to
do? Amen.