

A pastor once said to comedian Groucho Marx, "I want to thank you for so much joy into the world." To which Groucho replied in his typical fashion, "And I want to thank you for taking so much out of it."

Christianity certainly has a reputation for being sour faced and judgmental. Listening to some sermons you'd think a pastor's job is to comfort the troubled and trouble the comfortable. Of course none of this helps our evangelism efforts to share the good news of God. The good news can seem like more of a burden than a blessing - something you do because you want to keep God happy with you. When you hear the word, "missionary," I assume you immediately think of someone like Arden Strasser in a third world African nation far far away. Or, maybe you think of annoying Mormon missionaries or Jehovah's Witnesses who annoy you when they show up on your doorstep. Then the last the last thing you want to is be like that!

And yet the task of evangelism is a task for all of us, and we are all missionaries. I think our missionary efforts here at

home are just as important and just as dramatic as those far away.

Let's start with the way evangelism is supposed to work, and then see why it doesn't. This evangelical mission work we are to do is supposed to well up inside us naturally. The love of God should flow up inside us so powerfully that we cannot help but share it. And then when we share it with others it is supposed to spread to them too so that they also want to share. Christian faith should be like a giant pyramid scheme of joy that spreads throughout the world like wildfire.

But it doesn't. Why? Why does something so good as eternal life in heaven not sell well? Why when we share messages like Jesus saying, "In my father's house are many rooms. I go ahead of you to prepare a place for you." is it not well received?

Christians have been asking that from the beginning of our religion. Why is because the Good News of God's salvation is a threat. It is a threat to everyone who has earthly power. It is a threat to everyone who is invested heavily in the status quo. It is a threat to our human desire to think we can take

care of ourselves. And I suppose going right back to the story of Adam and Eve, it is a threat to our desires to be like God. To accept God's gift of salvation you first must admit that you are not God, that you need it, and that you can't do it yourself. That is why a message so good doesn't sell very easily. Swallowing your pride is a pretty hard thing to do.

All this wet weather reminds me of a time when I was in college and my cousin and I had taken over the field operations of the family farm in Pennsylvania. It was a wet summer but we had successfully harvested wheat off a field without any problems. We decided to bale the straw but my uncle said don't try to take the equipment into the bottommost field. We'll get stuck and put wheel ruts in the field. "It's not worth it, just let the straw rot," he said. My cousin and I, with all the wisdom of college kids who know everything, did it anyway; or at least tried too. With a baler and wagon stuck and sunk in to their axels in mud we had to swallow our pride. Even if we could get them pulled out quickly, there were the unmistakable ruts in the field. They weren't going away any time soon. My uncle, being the person that he is, gave us a well-earned, "I told you so." People would rather keep their pride at all costs than admit a need; even when the need is God.

Despite this resistance being a missionary in this area today is not hard. In fact it is quite easy and natural. The first thing you have to do is chuck out all your ideas of going door to door or annoying people with your faith. You also can chuck out the idea of having to travel far away.

I believe that being a true evangelist of Christ and an effective missionary can begin very simply. When you wake up in the morning what is the first thing on your mind? Perhaps it is the hectic day you have ahead of you. Perhaps it is the big contract at work you're hoping to win. Perhaps it's the aches and pains of arthritis. Perhaps it's a frantic need to get to the bathroom. Whatever it is, I suggest you set it aside for just a moment. (With the exception of those who have to get to the bathroom. In that case do that first!) Take a moment, thirty seconds or less, and do a couple spiritual exercises. First, thank God for safely bringing you through the night. (Remember, that is a luxury. For many people a safe night's sleep is only a dream.) Thank God for his love for you and the opportunities of the new day. And say the Lord's Prayer to yourself to help get your mind on track for the day. The Lord's Prayer can reorient many a wrong-headed direction.

With that as a foundation I think you are ready to start the day. Return to those things as often as you have to throughout the day. It only takes a few seconds. And develop the discipline of seeing everyone around you, even the really really annoying people, as children of God. If nothing else, remember God has to put up with them too! When you see everyone around you as a child of God you are already far down the path of evangelism. You'll naturally share God's love with them even when you're not trying. And social trends are in our favor in this regard.

Two weeks ago I had a chance to get a preview of one of the workshops that is being offered at the annual synod assembly in Rochester at the beginning of June. It was the workshop for youth leaders and youth programming. If you'd like to attend it you are welcome to. You don't have to be a congregational delegate or pay any fees. Recent studies in youth faith development are encouraging. Today's youth are not as a whole as rebellious as they were a few decades ago, especially in the realm of faith. And they are also not as duplicitous as just a few years ago. Instead they are relatively respectful and 92% will go on to mirror the faith of their parents.

While all people have famous heroes, most of today's youth fit the general population's desire to be around honest and truthful people. And that is a good trend for all of us.

While we all make mistakes and we all mess up, for the most part youth and adults want genuine, sincere, and honest people. They want role models that care about them and tell the truth. They can sense when they are being scammed or used. Kids can tell the difference between a school teacher who really cares about them and one who is just wants them to have good test results so they can get a raise or promotion. The same goes for a Christian witness.

It isn't hard to evangelize. It can come quite naturally. Just be an authentic Christian person. The rest will come about on its own. And don't expect amazing miracles to happen. They probably won't. Touching base with our gospel reading again, we read some of the same verses we had a few weeks ago. Jesus says, "The one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father." We talked a few weeks ago that most of

Jesus' works weren't the splashy miracles. They were routine day-to-day things, sharing God's love. We do the same.

We celebrate the missionary we support today, but we remember the missionary role we all play. May God's Spirit move in you and inspire you to genuinely share the Good News in every part of your life. Amen