

Union Presbyterian Seminary

**I Love to Tell the Story:**  
*Reclaiming Evangelism as Good News*

A Final Project Submitted to  
the Faculty of Union Presbyterian Seminary  
in Candidacy for the Degree of  
Doctor of Ministry

by

Rev. Jeffrey Steven Smith

Boone, North Carolina

November 28, 2022

# Contents

Chapter 1	Something We Can All Believe In!	1
Chapter 2	Reclaiming Evangelism as Good News: <i>What is Biblical Evangelism and Why is it Necessary for the Church?</i>	8
Chapter 3	The Need for Evangelism: <i>The Decline of the American Church</i>	26
Chapter 4	Our Christology Shapes our Evangelistic Practice	44
Chapter 5	How Should the Church Share the Good News? <i>Seven Points of Emphasis Regarding Evangelism</i>	74
Chapter 6	Reflections Upon and Evaluation of the Project	92
Bibliography		104
Appendix A		108
Appendix B		130

## Chapter 1

### Something We Can All Believe In!

I have fond memories of being in church with my grandfather at Central Baptist Church in Lenoir, NC. Growing up in a divorced home, neither of my parents were church attenders; they believed that Jesus was their Lord and Savior, but they didn't engage in any church-related activities. My grandfather was involved in the church and wanted to ensure that I had the opportunity to know about Jesus since my parents weren't intentional about it. I remember going to Sunday school, and our teacher would entice us to pay attention by offering Juicy Fruit bubble gum at the end of our class. This is where I first learned about God's love for me as we read and learned about the stories of Jesus. I vividly remember going to the worship service after Sunday school and sitting in the third pew by myself while my grandfather sang in the choir, waiting patiently for him to join me for the rest of the service after the choir sang their anthem. Speaking of hymns, I remember singing them from the Baptist hymnal in worship. Central Baptist Church would repeatedly sing the "top 40" Sunday after Sunday, and many of them I can still sing by heart to this day.

One of those hymns is *I Love to Tell the Story*, written as a poem by Katherine Hankey while recovering from a serious illness in 1866. The second stanza says, "I love to tell the story; tis pleasant to repeat what seems, each time I tell it, more wonderfully sweet! I love to tell the story; for some have never heard the message of salvation from God's holy Word."<sup>1</sup> This hymn is about as evangelistic as it gets, and its primary

---

<sup>1</sup> Glory to God: *The Presbyterian Hymnal* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 462.

message is the privilege of sharing the “old, old, story of Jesus and his love.” It is a story that never gets old because it reminds us of the central story of God’s love for the whole world found in the pages of God’s holy Word. It’s a story that has lasted the test of time, a story that touches the sinners’ heart and will not allow them to remain the same, and a story that proclaims the good news of God’s salvation that offers us abundant life now and for all eternity. This story is worth hearing time and again because there is good news for the sinner and the saint.

Most scholars affirm that the Gospel of Mark was the first gospel written. If that is the case, the first written account begins by declaring, “The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”<sup>2</sup> Mark starts his letter with this heading, announcing that a new beginning is occurring in the life of Jesus, the Anointed One, who is God’s only Son. This new beginning is good news to all who hear the story of who Jesus is and what Jesus does for us. The “good news” is in direct reference to Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, not just part of the story, but the whole story. Yet Mark is not the only account of this good news, for we also find similar accounts in the gospels according to Matthew, Luke, and John. Every gospel writer shares the story of the life of Jesus from their vantage point. And while there are discrepancies between the differing accounts, in terms of the order, teachings, and stories shared, all of them declare a central message: that there is good news to be found in Jesus Christ. Each gospel writer declares that Jesus has made a difference in the lives of all who have come to know him. They share this story because Jesus has changed their lives forever, and they want everyone to know of the transformative life that he offers. Their message declares that Jesus is the Christ, the

---

<sup>2</sup> The HarperCollins Study Bible: *New Revised Standard Version Study Bible with Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books* (London, England: HarperCollins Publishing, 1993), Mark 1:1.

long-awaited Messiah, God's only Son, who has come to turn the world right-side up. Jesus is the embodiment of good news for everyone: Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female, and just as the first disciples and apostles shared this story in their time and place, so we, too, must share this story until the whole world has heard it.

I did not come to a saving faith in Jesus Christ apart from the Church; someone had to share the story with me so that I could claim it for myself. In fact, the Church of Jesus Christ is entrusted with this story – to love it, and to share it because it means something to us. Theologian and pastor, Charles Earnest Burland Cranfield states, “This Gospel is more than just a chronicle of the genesis of God's good news. It is the ground of the church's proclamation of that good news.”<sup>3</sup> The church is called to share this good news, to love the story of Jesus, and to love to tell it so that others may come to know the One who's encountered us, who's forgiven us, who's freed us from sin, and who has reconciled us to God. We are called to share the good news, but the good news of Jesus is not limited to one thing. Growing up in the Baptist church, I was taught that the gospel, the good news, was that Jesus died in my place for my sins, forgiving me and providing eternal salvation where I would live in heaven with him forever. This is great news! However, as I have grown older and as God has called me to ministry through biblical studies in college, to biblical studies in seminary, and serving the church as a Presbyterian (USA) pastor, I find that the good news of Jesus is so much more than just this.

The truth is that Jesus' life is filled with good news because there are many faces, or images of Jesus, found in the gospel stories. Jesus is Lord and Savior, but he's also a

---

<sup>3</sup> C.E.B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 155.

healer, life-giver, God with us, the great liberator, the great teacher, and one who cares for the poor and needy. Reducing the good news to just one aspect of Jesus is impossible because Jesus encompasses so much in so many ways. If you were to interview Christians from differing faith traditions and backgrounds and ask them to define what they believe the good news found in Jesus is, you might be surprised to find differing answers that speak the truth to the same Jesus we've come to know. Not every Christian or Christian denomination will agree on every aspect of our theology, soteriology, ecclesiology, or eschatology, but the one thing we can all agree on is that Jesus is the embodiment of the good news of God. This is something we can all believe in! And yet, we may also articulate differing answers of what this good news is based on our understanding of who Jesus is, for our understanding of Jesus comes from the authentic relationship we have with Christ. In other words, we have come to know Jesus in a specific way, which bears witness to the truth of who Jesus is but can be limited to one face or image of Jesus that we encounter in the gospel stories.

We understand the good news of Jesus because we've come to know this good news through Jesus. Christ meets us where we are, and it's life-changing; we have a testimony of the Christ we've come to know. And because we know him and have been touched by him, we are called as his Church to share the good news we have found in him. We share what we know to be true – our bias for the good news. Mark Teasdale defines evangelism as the “bias for the good news,”<sup>4</sup> declaring that this definition allows space for Christians of every faith tradition to reflect on our beliefs about God and

---

<sup>4</sup> Mark R. Teasdale, *Evangelism for Non-Evangelists: Sharing the Gospel Authentically* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 5.

determine what we believe the good news to be. This definition doesn't "box in" the good news to one universal truth found in Jesus; rather, it gives room for every believer to articulate the good news that we've discovered in our authentic relationship with Jesus Christ. Therefore, when we share the good news of Jesus Christ, we share our own bias of whom we've come to know.<sup>5</sup>

Our bias for Christ is based on particular stories of the gospel accounts that shape and formulate our understanding of who Jesus is. We are drawn into the love of Christ through the love of Christ shared in the gospel accounts of his life, death, and resurrection. This often leads us to see Jesus in a particular way, an image or face of Christ that's presented by the gospel writers. And while bias is often perceived as being negative, our bias for the good news is positive because it's rooted in who God is revealed in Jesus Christ. Essentially, God, through the Holy Spirit, has drawn us to see God's self in a particular way. While there are many faces of Jesus presented in the gospels that we can easily identify with, we tend to be drawn to a particular image or face of Jesus.

So, what does this have to do with evangelism? Everything! My thesis is that our Christology, the lens through which we see Christ most clearly, affects our view and

---

<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that the word, bias, can be perceived both negatively and positively. Miriam Webster's Dictionary defines it as a "sometimes personal and unreasoned judgment/prejudice." Teasdale acknowledges that evangelism is a word that ends in "-ism," denoting a bias in favor of one thing against another. Most "isms," argue for one group of people over and against another: for instance, racism and sexism. He says the difference is that "evangelism doesn't promote one group of people over another, it declares one message over all others – a supremacy to what "good news," is, claiming all others forms of news are deficient." But it doesn't pinpoint what the good news is, giving all Christians space to discern our own beliefs about God and what we believe it to be. This is our personal bias for the good news of Christ, which allows for a variety of beliefs to be shared about the same Lord. The danger is pushing our bias in a prejudiced way that belittles and condemns people of other faith traditions or who aren't associated with faith at all. While we affirm our faith to be the truth, we must also share it with love and respect. It cannot be used as a tool of imperialism, forced upon others, but shared lovingly as an invitation of grace, honoring the God who loves us in freedom and invites us into a personal relationship with God's self.

practice of evangelism; how we tell the story. I believe that an analysis of one's favorite gospel story or stories can reveal their bias for the good news, and it directly shapes the way that they view and practice evangelism. If we are drawn to Christ by the story of his life, then there are specific stories that speak to us and meet us where we are. And if this is true, then our authentic relationship with Jesus will also dictate the Jesus we share with others and how we share him.

My qualitative research will use a mixed method approach to seek answers that shed light on the accuracy of my thesis. It will involve conducting group interviews with Presbyterian (USA) pastors in Salem Presbytery, as well as teaching a class and surveying congregants of First Presbyterian Church Boone, North Carolina, where I serve as pastor. Group interviews will allow theologically trained pastors to articulate their favorite gospel stories in a way that clearly identifies their Christological bias for the good news, as well as articulating their preferred method of evangelism based on five differing models that have been adapted from multiple evangelism sources that fit into a Christological framework that has been modified from Brian McLaren's seven images of Jesus shared in his book, *A Generous Orthodoxy*. In addition, I will use art as a vehicle for conversation as I teach a seven-week Sunday school class on these seven images of Jesus to the laity of First Presbyterian Church. The class provides opportunity for lay people to see multiple images of Jesus found in the gospels and guides them to reflect on which image of Jesus they are most drawn to. A survey conducted at the end of the class will provide insight on their Christology, their favorite gospel story, and their preferred method of evangelism. Mixing these methods provides different approaches to the same results that meets pastors and congregants where they are, with the goal of defining



whether or not their Christology, their bias of the good news, aligns with the corresponding method of evangelism associated with that Christology.

My research intends to show that just within one denomination there is a diversity of thought represented in our Christology, namely, that all lay people and pastors can identify with the seven images of Christ presented, and that there is a direct correlation between one's lens of Christ and their view and practice of evangelism. If this is true, then it means that the Church must self-reflect when it comes to the practice of evangelism in our congregations, because most churches do not focus on evangelism at all, or they practice evangelism in a "one size fits all" model. Reflecting on the stories that inspire us towards the good news found in Christ should identify our bias and help us to be more intentional evangelists, sharing the gospel in a multiplicity of ways that broadens the church's ability to connect with its members to do outreach in a way that fits within the framework of their understanding of Christ, rather than asking them to share Christ in ways that make them uncomfortable.

In short, we should love to tell the story; it shouldn't be a burden because Jesus is not a burden, he is true joy for all who come to know him. Our call is to share the Jesus we've come to know as our Lord and Savior, to share our bias for the good news, because every Christian, regardless of one's faith tradition, believes Jesus is the embodiment of the good news of God. This is something we can all believe in and share!

## Chapter 2

### **Reclaiming Evangelism as Good News: *What is Biblical Evangelism and Why is it Necessary for the Church?***

*“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace,  
who brings good news, and who announces salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God  
reigns.”*

Isaiah 52:7

#### **Biblical Evangelism: Old and New Testaments:**

What is biblical evangelism and why is it necessary for the Church? This is an important question we must reflect on if we’re going to live out our calling as disciples of Jesus to “tell the old, old story.” At its core, evangelism is simply sharing the good news of Jesus Christ; at least, this is the simplest definition we can all agree on. And the story of Jesus Christ is shared in the New Testament, particularly in the four gospels and the book of Acts. But the story of God, who is revealed in Jesus Christ in the New Testament, begins in the pages of the Old Testament’s witness of the triune God who created the world from nothing. God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all present in the first few pages of Scripture. “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. “Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light.”<sup>6</sup> The writer of Genesis tells us that God is present, that the wind of God, the *ruah* – the Spirit, breath or wind of God swept over the waters, and then God spoke... the Word of God, as John declares in the beginning of his gospel, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into

---

<sup>6</sup> *The HarperCollins Study Bible*, Genesis 1:1-3.

being.”<sup>7</sup> In addition, the triune God says, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness...”<sup>8</sup> The Hebrew word, *elohim*, which is the plural form of God, *el*, is used to speak of God creating man and woman in God’s image. And God sees all of creation and acknowledges “indeed it was very good.”<sup>9</sup>

From the very beginning, God declares his goodness on everything God created. God is the source of all good and all good news. Of course, the story moves quickly from good to bad when Adam and Eve disobey God’s command by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden, allowing themselves to be deceived by the serpent. Although sin enters the world, disrupting all of creation, God refuses to abandon humanity. God pursues his people with a *hesed* love, a steadfast love that refuses to let them go. The Old Testament is a witness to God’s unrelenting love and care for a people called Israel, born from God’s blessing of Abraham and set free from the bondage of slavery in Egypt. All nations will be blessed through them, and God’s compassion for everyone will be witnessed in the ways that they care for the alien, the orphan, the widow, and the poor among them. David Bosch explains that mission in the Old Testament isn’t so much about the people of God sharing the good news of God with Gentile foreigners and converting them to faith, but about God’s missionary activity in the world. He says, “So, if there is a “missionary” in the Old Testament, it is God himself who will, as his eschatological deed *par excellence*, bring the nations to Jerusalem to worship him there together with his covenant people.”<sup>10</sup> In the Old Testament, God’s

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, John 1:1-2.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, Genesis 1:26.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, Genesis 1:31.

good news is refusing to abandon the people and the world God created by pursuing them with an everlasting love and showing them how to live rightly.

God is active in mission<sup>11</sup> to God's people, but he often uses messengers and prophets to declare his message to the people of Israel and sometimes even to foreigners, such as the Ninevites. In the Old Testament, the word "evangelism" appears only twice, both in the writings of the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah proclaims, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, and who announces salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."<sup>12</sup> Isaiah is given a word of God's victory that will free the exiled Israelites from the bondage of Babylonian captivity. A messenger brings good news that God reigns and that the Israelites will be set free to go back to Jerusalem and worship God freely again. Old Testament scholar, Walter Brueggeman, says, "This verse is a pivotal one for theological exposition, for it is the second use of the term "gospel" (after 40:9) and carries the "evangelical" news that Yahweh has won a victory and is therefore the ruling sovereign who has just come to decisive power."<sup>13</sup> To a people exiled for 70 years in a foreign land, a people whose

---

<sup>10</sup> David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 20th Anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2020), 19.

<sup>11</sup> David Bosch notes that the terms "mission" and "evangelism" are not synonyms for one another. He suggests that mission is wider than evangelism and that it should not be equated with mission. However, he also says that they are, "indissolubly linked together and inextricably interwoven in theology and praxis." (*Transforming Mission*, 421.) For the sake of this project, the terms "mission" and "evangelism" are being used synonymously because they are so interwoven in theology and praxis. While some may view mission as seeking out the "lost" who are not yet Christians, and view evangelism as seeking those who are no longer Christians; I am using both terms in a broader sense to cover those who've yet to come to faith, those who've abandoned the faith, and those who do have faith in Jesus Christ as Lord. The Christian Church is called to share the good news with everyone, and this includes professing Christians who are actively engaged or even disengaged in the church.

<sup>12</sup> *The HarperCollins Study Bible*, Isaiah 52:7.

<sup>13</sup> Walter Brueggeman, *Isaiah 40-66: Westminster Bible Companion*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Patrick D. Miller (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 138.

homeland was burned to the ground, and their house of worship destroyed; God announces good news through a most welcome messenger. God promises to redeem Israel's brokenness and restore to them the joy of their salvation. And this good news is rooted in the God who is faithful to Israel even when Israel has been unfaithful to God.

Isaiah's prophecy of good news is consistent with God who is later revealed in the New Testament as Jesus Christ. In fact, the Septuagint rendering of Isaiah's prophecy uses the Greek verb, *euangelizo*, (to bring good news) which is consistent with the New Testament writers who speak of the gospel, the *euangelion* (the good news). Priscilla Pope-Levinson states,

The English word evangelism is not so much a translation as a modified transliteration of the Greek word *euangelion*, which is composed to two parts: the preposition *eu*, meaning "good" (as in *euphoria* or *euphemism*); and the root *angelos*, meaning "angel" or "messenger. The content of evangelism is the gospel, the *euangelion*, the good news. The one who brings good news, the messenger, is an evangelist, a *euangelistes*.<sup>14</sup>

The gospel writers are evangelists who proclaim the good news found in Jesus. Luke writes the birth narrative of Jesus and he shares that shepherds were watching their flocks at night when an angel of the Lord appeared saying to them, "Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord."<sup>15</sup> The angel's good news is about Jesus; the Savior, Messiah, and Lord, who's finally come to bring God's reign. Matthew reminds us that Joseph is met by an angel of the Lord in a dream who tells him that his wife is having a child through the Holy Spirit, and the angel commands them to

---

<sup>14</sup> Priscilla Pope-Levison, *Models of Evangelism*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2020), 5.

<sup>15</sup> *The HarperCollins Study Bible*, Luke 2:10-11.

name the child Jesus, “for he will save his people from their sins.”<sup>16</sup> While Mark doesn’t speak of Jesus’ birth, he depicts Jesus as the messenger who announces the good news of God’s mission in and through himself as he begins his ministry saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”<sup>17</sup> John doesn’t speak directly of the “good news” as Matthew, Mark, and Luke do, but he does connect Jesus as the divine Word of God from the beginning of time who becomes flesh and gives the right to “become children of God,” and declares John the Baptist as the messenger announcing the good news in him as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,”<sup>18</sup> when Jesus comes to be baptized in the Jordan River. As you can see, God always sends a messenger to declare God’s good news to us, whether it’s a designated human being – a prophet like Isaiah or like John the Baptist, or heavenly angels who are given the task and sent to share God’s mission, or even the Son of God himself, who directs us to wake up, to turn away from our sinful lives, and to follow and believe in him. Rebecca Pippert says it this way:

Jesus told us that as the Father sent him into the world, so he is sending us (Jn. 17:18). How then did the Father send him? Essentially he becomes one of us. The Word became flesh (Jn. 1:14). God didn’t send a telegram or shower evangelistic Bible study books from heaven or drop a million bumper stickers from the sky saying, “Smile Jesus loves you.” He sent a man, his Son, to communicate the message. His strategy hasn’t changed. He still sends men and women – before he sends tracts and techniques – to change the world. You may think his strategy is risky, but that is God’s problem, not yours.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, Matthew 1:21.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, Mark 1:15.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, John 1:29.

<sup>19</sup> Rebecca Manley Pippert, *Out of the Saltshaker & into the World: Evangelism as a Way of Life*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 34.

While John the Baptist prepares the way for Jesus preaching a baptism of repentance, Jesus, sent by God, comes as the first evangelist pointing people to God's victory that will be displayed in his life-giving sacrifice and glorious resurrection, defeating sin and death forever. Jesus ushers in a new Exodus for the people of Israel as he declares God's reign, that God's kingdom has come upon them as he teaches God's ways, as he heals the sick, as he liberates those possessed by demons, as he cares for the poor, as he raises the dead back to life, and as he speaks truth to corrupt power, modeling faith and obedience to God. Jesus' life is a testimony of God's good news for all who will welcome him into their lives. God pursues us with a love that will not let us go, becoming incarnate in Jesus, who is sent to proclaim that he is the way, the truth, and the life – the embodiment of God's good news for the world. Thus, evangelism, the sharing of the good news, begins with God sharing his good news with us first. This is rooted in the being of God, the Holy Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God who is missionary by nature.

***Missio Dei: The Mission of God has a Church:***

*Missio Dei*, God's mission, is the terminology that helps us understand evangelism rightly. German systematic theologian, Jürgen Moltmann, says, "It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfil in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church."<sup>20</sup> In essence, God is a sending God, a God who pursues humanity with love, despite the sinful human response to turn away from God, which continues to separate us from God. Thus, mission derives from God's very being, unwilling to let creation remain in a state of separation from the One

---

<sup>20</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 400.

who called it into being. Therefore, God sends God's self into the world in Jesus Christ to bring about reconciliation with humanity, and then God sends the Holy Spirit to be with his disciples forever, to guide them as a people set apart and sanctified to declare the good news of God's unrelenting love that refuses to leave us lost in our sinful state. The Holy Spirit gathers believers in Jesus Christ in community, the Church, called to reflect the trinitarian life of God. As Jesus prays to his Father in the Garden of Gethsemane, he affirms the missionary nature of God and of what will become of his disciples, those who followed him in his ministry and those of us who follow him now, his Church, saying, "As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world."<sup>21</sup>

But it doesn't end with Jesus' prayer before his crucifixion and resurrection; before he ascends into heaven, Jesus commands his disciples in Matthew's gospel saying, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."<sup>22</sup> Jesus commands his disciples to make disciples of all the nations, to share his good news with the Jews and the Gentiles. This good news is for everyone, and Jesus commissions them to take what they've seen, heard, experienced, and witnessed, and share it with the world. In fact, John's gospel shares the risen Christ appearing to his disciples in a locked room, and Jesus says to them, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, so I send you."<sup>23</sup> He

---

<sup>21</sup> *The HarperCollins Study Bible*, John 17:18.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, Matthew 28:18-20.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, John 20:21.



then breathes on them and tells them to receive the Holy Spirit. The disciples cannot remain locked up in a room living in fear, instead they must open the door and go out in joy as apostles – “sent ones,” who declare the good news that Jesus is Lord of all, that he’s not dead but alive, and that because he lives, we too may have abundant and eternal life as his followers. “If Jesus is indeed Lord of all, this reality just has to be proclaimed. Nobody who knows of this can remain silent about it. He or she can only do one thing – help others also to acknowledge Jesus’ lordship. And this is what mission is all about – “the proclaiming of the lordship of Christ.”<sup>24</sup> Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder reiterate the understanding of *missio Dei* as it relates to the Church saying, “... *as the phrase goes, the church of Christ does not so much have a mission as the mission of Christ has a church.*”<sup>25</sup> All who proclaim Christ as Lord and submit to his lordship, all who believe in the good news of the forgiveness of sins found in him, all who look to him for salvation, for provision, for true and abundant life are called to proclaim the good news we’ve found in him. Darrell Guder states,

Now, if theology is about “faith seeking understanding,” then, it seems to me, its dominant topic must be that apostolic faith that is to be expressed in faithful witness. The gospel is about news that is so urgently good that it must be shared. To receive the gift of faith is to be called into a relationship of discipleship with Christ that results in apostolate – in his sending out his witnesses. Thus, to be granted gospel faith is to be drawn into the gospel’s commission, to be mobilized as servants of its mandate.<sup>26</sup>

Evangelism, sharing the good news of Jesus, is not optional for the Church. If God is a missionary God, and Jesus commands us to make disciples, to fish for people, to

---

<sup>24</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 79.

<sup>25</sup> Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 8.

<sup>26</sup> Darrell L. Guder, *Called to Witness: Doing Missional Theology*, The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 99.

proclaim the fulfillment of God's good news in him, then we must be missionary too.

Robert Coleman's view of evangelism is particularly helpful here as he states, "Christian disciples are sent men and women – sent out in the same work of world evangelism to which the Lord was sent, and for which he gave his life. Evangelism is not an optional accessory to our life. It is the heartbeat of all we are called to be and do."<sup>27</sup> Jesus calls us into a relationship with him, he meets us where we are, but he refuses to leave us there. As we come to faith in him, we develop our own biases of his good news based on our relationship with him. Our worship, our service, our fellowship with other Christians, and our study of Scripture is shaped by the good news we've found in him. Truth be told, evangelism is practiced by everyone, although it's not typically based on sharing the message of Jesus. Every day people share things with others that have made a difference in their lives. Many of us speak about items we've bought that make our lives more efficient.

For instance, I preached a sermon during Advent about Jesus being the light of the world, and I began the message by talking about a new self-cleaning water bottle that I had purchased that uses UV-C light to eliminate all germs and bacteria that can be in the water we drink. The point of the illustration was to emphasize how amazing light can be. Of course, this transitioned into the message of Jesus being the amazing light that drives the darkness away. Later that week, I received several emails, texts, and even a phone call or two about the water bottle I purchased. Apparently, everyone thought it was a great thing to have, and they wanted to buy one for themselves or as a Christmas present for a loved one. I had no intention of being an influencer for the company, but people saw

---

<sup>27</sup> Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1993), 87-88.

this water bottle as something good, something that would improve their life, and had to have one. What transpired after my sermon is what happens daily as people share with others about things that have made a difference in their lives, things they can't live without, or that they must have. They may not realize it, but they are evangelizing.

But what about our faith in Jesus? Are people sharing their faith? A self-cleaning water bottle can be helpful, but it can't offer living water. In a sermon on evangelism, former President of Princeton Theological Seminary, Dr. Thomas W. Gillespie says,

What difference does your faith in Jesus Christ make in your life?... My assumption is that a difference worth claiming is a difference worth sharing. And if Christ has in fact made a difference in your life, then that difference is the gospel according to you. That is God's story engaged with your story, and it is a story worth telling to others who live in a world that has a story of itself and a story of all things. For the difference Christ makes in your life he can make in the lives of others.<sup>28</sup>

He is right, if Christ has made a difference in our lives, if Christ is truly good news for us, then we cannot be silent about it. Why hoard the good news of Jesus all to ourselves when there are others who need to know the difference he makes in our lives? "D.T. Niles, a Sri Lankan leader in the mid-twentieth-century ecumenical movement, set out one of the simplest definitions of evangelism: evangelism as "one beggar telling another beggar where to get food."<sup>29</sup> If that is true, how horrible it would be for one beggar to enjoy eating while letting another starve to death! Likewise, the Apostle Paul writes in his letter to the Romans of the salvation found in Jesus for those who declare with their mouth that he is Lord and believe in their heart that God raised him from the

---

<sup>28</sup> Thomas W. Gillespie, "The Historical/Cultural Setting for Evangelism: The Issues and Challenges of Evangelism Today," in *Evangelism in the Reformed Tradition*, ed. Arnold B. Lovell (Decatur, Georgia: CTS Press, 1990), 5-6.

<sup>29</sup> Pope-Levison, *Models of Evangelism*, 5.

dead. The dilemma, however, is that they can't call on the one they haven't believed in, and they can't believe in Christ if they haven't heard about him. Then Paul quotes the prophet Isaiah saying, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"<sup>30</sup> Paul connects the dots of God's good news in the past with that of Jesus in the present. His message to Rome is that if there's not a messenger sent to proclaim the good news of Christ, it's like a beggar hoarding all the food from others who need to eat. Paul sees evangelism at the heart of the Christian's life and purpose, and that God alone is the one who sends us as his messengers, his evangelists, to share it, "...the message can only be proclaimed, if God commissions someone to proclaim it."<sup>31</sup> And God has done that through Jesus who commissioned his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations.

### **Distortions of Biblical Evangelism:**

Unfortunately, evangelism has become a word that is often avoided in the church. Martha Grace Reese notes through her four years of research through The Mainline Evangelism Project, that, "The E word seems to have replaced sex and money as That Which Must Not Be Named in our mainline churches!"<sup>32</sup> Over the years, evangelism has received a bad reputation; it's become associated as something bad, not good. The expansion of Western Christian nations in the name of God, mission, and evangelism used colonialism to conquer, colonize, and coerce the indigenous to faith in Christ. While Jesus commands us to go and make disciples of all nations, he doesn't ask us to force ourselves on others. He never forced anyone to believe in him; had he done so he would

---

<sup>30</sup> *The HarperCollins Study Bible*, Romans 10:15.

<sup>31</sup> Cranfield, *Romans*, 262.

<sup>32</sup> Martha Grace Reese, *Unbinding the Gospel: Real Life Evangelism*, 2nd ed. (St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2008), 4.

never have to endure the cross. Yet history has proven time and again, at least since the Constantinian era when Christianity became the religion of the empire, that people have abused others in the name of Jesus, forcing them to become believers and adopt the ways of the empire. British missionary, Lesslie Newbigin, says,

The Christian gospel has sometimes been made the tool of an imperialism, and of that we have to repent. But at its heart it is the denial of all imperialisms, for at its center there is a cross where all imperialisms are humbled and we are invited to find the center of human unity in the One who was made nothing so that all might be one. The very heart of the biblical vision for the unity of humankind is that its center is not an imperial power but the slain Lamb.<sup>33</sup>

In a postcolonial world, Christian evangelists can still at times be judgmental and pushy to the point that it pushes people away. Rather than establishing relationships with others, many preach at them as objects to be manipulated, or souls to be won for Jesus. The prophetic message of “Repent or burn!” is a mantra on street corners where evangelists try to scare the “hell out of people,” rather than introducing them to the good news of Jesus Christ. Brian McLaren says,

On the street, evangelism is equated with pressure. It means selling God as if God were vinyl siding, replacement windows, or a mortgage refinancing service. It means shoving your ideas down someone’s throat, threatening him with hell if he does not capitulate to your logic or Scripture-quoting. It means excluding everyone from God’s grace except those who agree with the evangelizer (a.k.a. evangelist).<sup>34</sup>

In addition, the term “evangelical” has morphed into a political term in America that defines a certain group of Christians who vote a particular way. This most often refers to the “Bible-believing religious right,” political conservatives who vote based on

---

<sup>33</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989), 159.

<sup>34</sup> Brian D. McLaren, *More Ready Than You Realize: The Power of Everyday Conversations* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2002), 15.

their personal interpretation of Scripture. It's not to say that political "liberals" can't be included among those who are "evangelical," as they can also vote their conscience based on their freedom of religion; however, this group is not often thought about when mentioned in voting polls by the news media. There are many who refuse to be associated with the "evangelical" group even though they proclaim Jesus as Lord. Why is this? Many regard evangelicals as fundamentalists who often speak more about what they are against rather than what they stand for. The gospel loses its good news if it's not for everyone, and many evangelicals set boundaries when it comes to God's salvation which is often perceived as arrogant and judgmental by others.

Many are put off by evangelism because they've seen televangelists on television preaching a health, wealth, and prosperity gospel. Some see this "gospel" as a watered-down version of what Jesus teaches. Jesus didn't promise by believing in him that everyone would be well off or have anything they asked for. He taught, "Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake..."<sup>35</sup> In addition, there are a number of televangelists who have been associated with scandal, taking money from people who donated, believing it would support the kingdom of God, only to find out later that it supported a lavish lifestyle for the minister. Some have even been involved in inappropriate activity – sex scandals that have shocked those who have come to know Christ through their ministry. It's easy to see why many Christians view evangelism as something negative rather than what it's supposed to be.

---

<sup>35</sup> *The HarperCollins Study Bible*, Matthew 5:3-4; 10.

Brian McLaren suggests that it's not biblical evangelism that's to blame for all the negative reasons people choose to avoid it, but "the late-twentieth century styles of evangelism." McLaren says,

What if there really is a great and good and kind God, and we humans really are God's creatures, though we lose our way sometimes. And what if our deepest dream is really true, that the God who really exists really loves us? And what if one of the best ways for God to get through to those of us who have lost our way is via the kindness and influence of others who have been brought back to a good path? And what if for every obvious and sleazy religious huckster there are, in fact, a dozen subtle but sincere examples of spiritual authenticity and vibrancy whose influences would do the rest of us a lot of good? What if there really are "angels" out there – not the wings-and-halos type, but of the flesh-and-blood, laughter-and-tears type – people who are literally sent by God to intervene, to help those of us who have mucked up our lives, to give us a taste of grace, a "rumor of glory," as songwriter Bruce Cockburn says?

And what if you and I, who begin as wandering and confused people, could be so helped by our caring God-sent and love-filled friends that we could join them as messengers of grace, carriers of good news, secret-agent angels, case studies in God's power to change, enrich, fill, and rescue lives that were being wasted, ruined, self-sabotaged?<sup>36</sup>

McLaren is right, evangelism isn't the problem at all. If God is a missionary God who pursues us with his love, then evangelism is of God; it's truly good news. The problem is the way we choose to go about it. It's true that there are numerous situations that can taint us from being evangelists, especially if what we see is a distortion of what the gospel of Christ teaches. It would be easy to distance ourselves from such things, refusing to share Christ out of fear of being labeled an "evangelical," or because we might offend someone. Yet there are many mainline Christians who would rather not verbally share anything at all and sometimes these stereotypes are a smokescreen, just

---

<sup>36</sup> McLaren, *More Ready Than You Realize*, 15.

another justification for doing nothing.<sup>37</sup> But as I mentioned before, refusing to share God's good news in Jesus to others is like hoarding food from a beggar!

### **Reclaiming Evangelism as Good News:**

Rather than running away from the call to be evangelists, the Church is called to reclaim evangelism as good news. If we understand God to be good and loving towards us even though we tend to turn away from God's pursuance of us, if we understand the depths of Jesus' love through his death and resurrection, and if we've been caught by God's love in Jesus Christ and have professed faith to follow him, then evangelism should be as natural as sharing why someone should purchase the newest gadget. In fact, it should be more important to us than anything else that could be shared. Sharing Jesus with others is not simply a mandate from Jesus; although, he tells his disciples that he's sending us out, and he commands us to make disciples of all the nations, instead it is rooted in our relationship with him. The Church gets evangelism wrong when we simply make it a mandate to be obeyed. John Flett says, "Mission is not a second step in addition to some other more proper being of the church, because, as the living one, God's relationship to the world belongs to his eternal being. The Christian community is, as such, a missionary community, or she is not a community that lives in fellowship with the triune God as he lives his own proper life."<sup>38</sup> Evangelism is about our lives rooted in the missionary God, in both God's being and act.

In Colossians, the Apostle Paul writes, "As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and

---

<sup>37</sup> Reese, *Unbinding the Gospel*, 12.

<sup>38</sup> John G. Flett, *The Witness of God: The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth, and the Nature of Christian Community* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010), 34.



established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.”<sup>39</sup> The Church is called to live in Christ, to remain in the true vine, rooted and built up in him, always filled with gratitude. Our calling to be witnesses, to share in Christ’s mission, to be evangelists, is directly linked to our relationship with the triune God. Our relationship with God is personal, but it’s not meant to be private. We are called to share what we know to be true, just as the first disciples of Jesus shared what they had witnessed and experienced in him. We aren’t called to be salespeople for Jesus trying to close a deal; we are called to be witnesses of the risen Lord who’s met us where we are. Our witness of Jesus is not impersonal, it’s deeply personal, because he’s made a difference in our lives. Donald Posterski talks about the difference between personal and impersonal witnessing, and he likens it to that of getting a birthday card from your insurance agent. He says, “Your reaction is to trash it.”<sup>40</sup> But when we receive a card from someone we have a relationship with it means something to us; it’s personal. That’s how we are to share Jesus with others, from our own personal relationship with him.

All Christians have a story to tell, a story of how God has encountered us, a story of how God has opened our eyes to faith, and a story of how God is transforming our lives day by day. Martha Grace Reese sums it up by saying, “At its core, evangelism is people sharing with others their personal understandings that life is better, richer, truer if one has faith in Christ and lives in a faith community.”<sup>41</sup> This is our bias of the good news! We must ask ourselves, “Who is the Christ I have come to know most clearly, and

---

<sup>39</sup> *The HarperCollins Study Bible*, Colossians 2:6-7.

<sup>40</sup> Donald C. Posterski, *Reinventing Evangelism: New Strategies for Presenting Christ in Today’s World* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 122.

<sup>41</sup> Reese, *Unbinding the Gospel*, 6.

what is the good news I have experienced in him?” These questions guide us in our own personal testimony of the Jesus we’ve come to know in our lives, the Jesus we are called to share in word and in deed. It’s important to understand that we are not responsible for “saving” anyone, nor are we responsible for keeping the Church alive; what we are responsible for is bearing witness to the truth of Jesus Christ, to share him. Swiss Theologian, Karl Barth, says,

Her (church) sending into the world does not become the means of salvation as though Easter needed to be repeated. The battle has been won, and the work of the community consists of hurrying after Jesus Christ’s own prophetic work. Only the action of the Spirit opens the community to live in and with this eschatological reality. The Spirit is the “summoning power of the divine promise, which points the community beyond herself, which calls her to transcend herself and in that way to be in truth the community of God – in truth, i.e., as she bears witness to the truth known within her, as she knows herself to be charged with this witness and sent out to establish it.”<sup>42</sup>

Understanding biblical evangelism rightly, through God’s mission, God’s being and action with the world, helps us understand that our life in him is what moves us to share the good news that’s encountered and claimed us, that’s elected us as John Calvin would say, “for salvation and service.” And that service is not because we’ve been commanded to do it, but out of gratitude to the One who’s made a difference in our lives and continues to do so each day. As followers of Jesus Christ, we need to reclaim evangelism as good news to be shared, rather than avoiding it because of the negative associations it may have, or because we’re afraid we might offend someone, or because we’d rather not say anything because it makes us uncomfortable. If we can share good news about products that we’ve bought and make our lives better, why can’t we speak of the transformative work of God in our lives? God’s not asking us to speak of what we

---

<sup>42</sup> Flett, *The Witness of God*, 253-254.

don't know, but rather to share our own bias of God's good news with those who don't know him, but also with those who do! "...those who accept the good news must be formed by the good news. In addition, since the good news points to the eternally good God, this formation never has an end. Even those who have long been adherents of the good news can continue to be evangelized."<sup>43</sup>

Thus, the Church's calling in mission, in evangelism, is always rooted in the life and mission of the triune God who has created us, redeemed us, and constantly sustains us as we live and move and have our being. And because of God's great love, we are commissioned as messengers of his grace to be discipled and to go make disciples in all the world, baptizing new believers in the name of the triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything he's commanded while also remembering that God is with us always to the very end. You don't have to be a pastor, a theologian, or a missionary to share the good news of Jesus. In fact, Jesus' Great Commission tells us that "...an evangelist is a common person who seeks to live into the promise that the risen Christ is with all people."<sup>44</sup> And as Christians, "Christ's ones," we have a personal story to share about Jesus, good news for all to hear, but we must be willing to share it, to be the messenger, the "beautiful feet who share good news."<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> Teasdale, *Evangelism for Non-Evangelists*, 7.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 17.

<sup>45</sup> *The HarperCollins Study Bible*, Romans 10:15.

## Chapter 3

### The Need for Evangelism: *The Decline of the American Church*

*“You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit; fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name.”*  
John 15:16

Jesus’ final farewell discourse in John’s gospel depicts him giving his last teachings to his disciples before he is arrested and crucified. John 15 gives us Jesus’ last “I AM” saying of the seven sayings in John’s gospel. He speaks of being the true vine and that his disciples are the branches called to abide or remain in him. In doing so, they will bear fruit, but if they refuse to remain in him, they will be like a withered branch that dries up and withers away. He tells them that apart from him they can do nothing. Jesus’ primary emphasis is that they remain in him no matter what, stating it 13 times in just 17 verses. This is the key to bearing fruit, for fruit is a by-product of being connected to him. This is what they are meant to do – this is their calling – their mission once Jesus ascends into heaven.

Jesus says that he has chosen them, echoing the beginning of his ministry, his pursuance of them, and his invitation for them to follow him. Mark shares that Jesus called the very first disciples by the Sea of Galilee as they were fishing and working their nets. Seeing Simon and his brother Andrew, Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.”<sup>46</sup> Jesus offers them a new vocation, fishing for people – sharing his good news as they listen, learn, and experience all that Jesus will teach and do. As we look back at Jesus’ words in John 15:16, we see the connection from his initial call in their lives to fish for people connected with his continued call as his appointed

---

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, Mark 1:17.

agents to bear fruit that will last. Jesus has called them into his line of work, mission. He is entrusting his ministry into the hands of the disciples who will become apostles (sent ones) to share his message and be his witnesses “in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”<sup>47</sup> They have been chosen for this task, and they will not be abandoned by Jesus, for he will send them the Holy Spirit who will be with them, live in them, and empower them to boldly proclaim all that they’ve seen and heard. After his death and resurrection, it will be up to them to put into practice what they’ve learned from their Lord and rabbi, with the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Jesus has invested his life in theirs and his expectation is that they will have the same compassion and love that he has had for them in the ways they continue his ministry through their evangelism. And we know that these timid and scared disciples will become emboldened by the power of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost to share the message of Jesus and that the Church of Jesus Christ will begin to take root and spread throughout Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Their willingness to follow Christ’s commands to go and share, will spread Christianity and its message throughout the world.

We too, are called to be evangelists, for God’s very being, and action with the world is rooted in mission, and God calls us to participate in his life, to remain in him, and share the good news we’ve found. If evangelists are common people who believe that the risen Christ is with all people, and if evangelists truly have good news to share about Jesus to the world, then we would assume that Christianity in America is blossoming just like the early church after Pentecost, right? Unfortunately, that’s not the reality in America, in fact, Christianity in America is declining rapidly year by year. Multiple

---

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, Acts 1:8.

studies have shown similar trends in declining church membership since the 1960s. It's not what pastors or Christians would prefer to hear, but it's a continuing reality that has become even more pronounced by the recent Covid-19 pandemic that shut down most congregations for over a year. Most churches were forced to find new ways to "do church" online or in outdoor gathering spaces to stay connected safely. The truth is, "going to church" isn't quite the same anymore. Many people have become disinterested in the church; in fact, some no longer remain in Jesus, and their connection with the church looks more like withered branches than fruitful vines. This hasn't happened overnight; it's happened over the course of 50-plus years, but the pandemic has accelerated significant decreases in worship attendance in person and online. You would think that the flexibility of the church to adapt to new technology would provide significant increases of participation since the gospel can be shared all over the world, but it hasn't fostered churches booming with new members. Most pastors are now televangelists thanks to YouTube, Facebook, and other social media sites, but today they are a "dime a dozen." Unfortunately, there are a lot of members of congregations who are members in name only and never engage in the life of the church they made vows to participate with. Has biblical evangelism become a thing of the past? The same Spirit that emboldened the first disciples is the same Spirit residing within us, so why is it that people are leaving the church? I'm afraid that for too many mainline congregations, evangelism has been reduced to passive attempts to draw people in on Sundays. For instance, establishing a church website, an Instagram, Facebook, or Twitter account is a passive way of speaking with people that can also passively be accessed by those looking. While technology can be helpful, it can also prevent us from having face-to-face

conversations that help develop community. Is it possible that the Church has lost its roots in Jesus' ministry of sharing the good news? Maybe we need to re-center our focus on Jesus and reclaim evangelism as he practiced it.

Before his ascension into heaven, the risen Christ tells his disciples, "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."<sup>48</sup> This command, often referred to as the Great Commission, serves as the Church's mission to share the good news of Jesus Christ, making disciples of him all over the world. Jesus' promised gift of the Holy Spirit empowered the first disciples at Pentecost to bear witness to the lordship of Jesus through their preaching and in the way they embodied the Christian life together as the Church. In doing so, many came to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah, the Lord and Savior of sinners. Their testimony and witness went viral during a time when Christianity wasn't popular, nor was it the religion of the Roman Empire, much less of Israel. The Christian Church came into being and spread throughout the known world as many Jews and Gentiles accepted this good news and began living as one body under the lordship and teachings of Jesus.

Over the course of time, a shift took place when Roman Emperor, Constantine I, established Christianity as the religion of the state, allowing the message of Jesus to reach every sphere of public life without fear. Christianity developed in the shadow of the empire as house churches transitioned into basilicas, establishing places of worship where

---

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, Matthew 28:18-20.

believers came to worship the living God. “Constantine’s impact on the life of the church was such that it was still felt as late as the twentieth century.”<sup>49</sup> This shift has impacted Christian worship and sharing the good news for centuries, because for the first time, the Church became institutionalized. Although the Church is made up of a body of believers, it became a localized public place where people gathered to worship. Even though Jesus had established an organic movement that wasn’t located in one centralized place, Christendom changed this movement by establishing church buildings in particular locations to draw Christians together. Private house church services were no longer necessary since persecution had ceased. The good news message no longer had to be on the move, it could now be found within the doors of the church building, inviting those on the outside to move into the church to celebrate it as one. Essentially the building became the focal point of drawing others together in the name of Jesus, much like the temple did for devout Jews who traveled from near and far to worship and observe their annual festivals.

This institutional model of church has existed for ages and is still present today. In countries where the freedom of religion exists, you do not have to look far to find a church building occupying a piece of property in your local community. The issue isn’t finding a church; it’s finding the right church for you. Although the Christian Church has grown in number and has spread into most of the known world, Christianity in the United States has seen a major decline in the last thirteen years. This may seem odd given we have the freedom of religion, and there are churches on every street corner that are sharing the good news and seeking to make disciples. In fact, a 2018-19 Pew Research

---

<sup>49</sup> Justo Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity V 1: The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 124.



Center survey indicated that 65% of American adults describe themselves as Christians when asked about their religion, which is down 12 percentage points over the last decade. In addition, the religiously unaffiliated, which consists of people who describe their religious identity as atheist, agnostic, or “nothing in particular,” now stands at 26%, which is up from 17% in 2009. Protestantism and Catholicism in America are also on the decline. In 2009, 51% of Americans identified as Protestant, whereas only 43% do now, and likewise, 23% identified as Catholic, whereas only 20% do now. Yet, the religious “nones” – those who claim to have no religion are increasing – atheists from 2% in 2009 to 4% now; agnostics from 3% to 5%, and 17% of Americans describe their religion as “nothing in particular,” which is up from 12% in 2009.<sup>50</sup>

As a Presbyterian (USA) pastor, I have also found this trend to be consistent regarding membership in the Presbyterian Church (USA) as well. The most recent statistics from Church Trends, which offers data on all reported PC (USA) local congregations, and presbyteries, along with collective data for the entire denomination, indicate that from 2018-2021 the PC (USA) lost 158,931 members, which is equivalent to an average of over three members leaving a local church each year.<sup>51</sup> This reveals that the PC (USA) had a net loss of members for four consecutive years. As a member of Salem Presbytery, I looked to see if this also held true locally and discovered that in the same four-year time frame, Salem Presbytery lost 2,997 members, which is an average net loss

---

<sup>50</sup> Travis Mitchell, “*In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace*,” Pew Research Center: Religion and Public Life, Pew Forum, October 17, 2019, accessed March 20, 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>

<sup>51</sup> “PC (USA) Research Services-Church-Trends,” Presbyterian Church (USA), accessed June 27, 2022, <https://churchtrends.pcusa.org/overall/pcusa/membership/5/>

of over five members of every church each year.<sup>52</sup> In addition, statistics show that there were only 96 baptisms reported in Salem Presbytery in 2021 even though there are 132 congregations reporting. This is less than one baptism per congregation. To be fair, the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted the gathering of many congregations for at least part of the year, but with a total membership of 19,646 members this number still seems low. Yet, this is also representative of the whole denomination given the total number of baptisms reported in 2021 in the PC (USA) was 9,770 with 8,774 churches reporting. This equates to just over one baptism per congregation. Nonetheless, the data shows a continual decline in membership, as well as our congregations struggling to baptize new members in the faith. It is important to note that the PC (USA) has still not entered in all the data they've received at this time due to the pandemic and to staffing shortages.

The Mainline Evangelism Project, a four-year study on evangelism in mainline denominations, also acknowledges that “New Christians are joining the faith in mainline churches, but the vast majority are our own children or new spouses, and 65% to 80% of the fastest growing congregations in each denomination are in the South or are predominantly racial/ethnic. (Only the American Baptists, at 51% have a large percentage of racial/ethnic churches. The other mainline denominations are 89% to 97% Caucasian.”<sup>53</sup> The findings show that the largest growth occurs from natural growth of Christian families from the South, where church is a part of the culture. Researchers agree that these racial/ethnic churches are covering for Caucasian congregations that are

---

<sup>52</sup> “PC (USA) Research Services-Church-Trends,” Presbyterian Church (USA), accessed June 27, 2022, <https://church-trends.pcusa.org/presbytery/150584/membership/5/>

<sup>53</sup> Reese, *Unbinding the Gospel*, 28.

showing little to no growth in membership. In addition to the ongoing decline in new converts to the Christian faith, the Covid-19 pandemic has added another variable to the decline of church membership as many of its members have developed new habits and have not returned physically to the church building. An Institute for Family Studies analysis shows a significant drop in church attendance the last two years, finding that, “The share of regular churchgoers is down by 6 percent, from 34 percent in 2019 to 28 percent in 2021.” And yet it also found that, “Secular Americans who have never or seldom attended religious services increased by 7 percent.”<sup>54</sup> In the midst of all the depressing statistics showing churchgoers abandoning the Church, there is a glimmer of hope that some folks are seeking faith.

While Christianity is in decline in the United States, so is church membership. It’s apparent that the landscape of the Church in the twenty-first century is changing, whether we want to acknowledge it or not. We have moved from Christendom to a post-Christian era, from modernity to postmodernity. In her book *The Great Emergence*, Phyllis Tickle states, “About every 500 years, the Church clears out its attic, holding a rummage sale. The sign out front reads, “Everything must go.”<sup>55</sup> Her statement comes from Bishop Mark Dyer’s assessment that about every 500 years the Church goes through a new reformation, having to rethink how it’s done things in the past to meet the needs of the present and future. In fact, she suggests, “...about every 500 years the empowered

---

<sup>54</sup> Wendy Wang and Alysse Elhage, “Here’s Who Stopped Going to Church During the Pandemic,” Christianity Today, January 20, 2022, accessed March 20, 2022, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2022/january-web-only/attendance-decline-covid-pandemic-church.html>

<sup>55</sup> Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity is Changing and Why* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 16.

structures of institutionalized Christianity, whatever they may be at that time become an intolerable carapace that must be shattered in order that renewal and new growth may occur.”<sup>56</sup> In other words, changes in the life of the Church since 2000 have ushered in a new era of which we must adapt if we desire the Christian faith to grow and transform lives for the kingdom of God.<sup>57</sup>

Yet we know the term “change” is often an unwelcomed word in congregations that find themselves rooted in tradition. Changing often implies throwing out the things we’ve done in our past and present, which often threatens our members who seek to preserve the history and work upon which the church was founded. Recognizing the need for change is often met with resistance, fear, and anxiety, which can also change the landscape of a congregation. While our culture and our contexts are rapidly changing, the good news of Jesus Christ remains the same, and so is the Church’s mandate to make disciples. Even though the Christian Church in America is in decline, it’s still alive and empowered by the same Holy Spirit that descended on the disciples at Pentecost. However, we can no longer simply rely on the institutional ways of the past to seek disciples; the Church must also embrace evangelism as Jesus embraced it. We must adapt to the changing landscape if we truly desire to reach the unchurched, the unaffiliated, and the uninterested. This will require us to move beyond ourselves, not abandoning the

---

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>57</sup> It’s important to note that God is always sovereign and in control in every age of history. To assume that every 500 years a new reformation must occur and “everything must go,” can inadvertently imply that God has been silent or not worked through those years in history. God has been active in the eras of the Enlightenment, the 19<sup>th</sup> century mission movement, in the era of Romanticism, in the rise of Liberal Protestantism and the Social Gospel, and through the Great Awakenings, just to name a few. We must be aware of God’s work in the world and make sure that we are participating in that work. We must also be willing to change and adapt our evangelistic practices to the changing landscapes around us, rather than allowing our institutional mindset to always remain the same.

Church, but allowing the Church to move into the community to meet people where they are. Jesus tells us to “Go!” and too often we remain right where we are. We must also live into our calling to be apostles who take the good news beyond the walls of the church building just as our Lord Jesus did.

Charles Dickson wrote an article entitled, “*Listening to the Unchurched*,” which was based off a Barna Research Group survey conducted in Charlotte, NC in 2014 that asked one simple question, “Why don’t you go to church?” Responses included: problems with judgments, seeing no value in it, too many problems, not interested, too money-oriented, and that it’s boring and irrelevant. But the most interesting statistic is that only 12% of those surveyed said they don’t attend because they don’t believe in God. Dickson writes, “While many in the Church have assumed that the unchurched have rejected the faith itself, this does not seem to be true. Many claimed to be open to spiritual things, but have closed themselves to institutional expressions of spirituality. For the most part, it is not God they have rejected; it is the Church.”<sup>58</sup> The article concludes that there’s a problem with the attitude of the Church towards unchurched people. In other words, the Church as an institution has become a country club of sorts. While we invite others to come and join us, we know that the majority of those who come are either already believers, already belong to another church, or have a desire or curiosity to be there. The prevalent attitude of Christians in the Church is that those “outside the Church” need Jesus, and they need to come to “the church” to find him. This is the

---

<sup>58</sup> Charles Dickson, “Listening to the Unchurched: Attitude Changes Needed in Evangelization,” *The Priest* 70, no. 5 (May 2014): 13–14.

timeless institutional model of church, where worship, discipleship, fellowship, and even service can be found.

This institutional approach reminds me of a scene in the movie, “Field of Dreams,” where Ray, played by Kevin Costner, hears a voice whisper, “If you build it, they will come.”<sup>59</sup> Isn’t that what we have done? We have built elaborate church buildings, with our elaborate church budgets, providing wonderful ministry opportunities for children, youth, and adults, and yet many of our pews remain empty on Sundays. It appears that our traditional forms of ministry seem to be running their course. While the Christian Church in America continues to declare the good news of the gospel every Sunday, most of our new members come from those transferring their membership from another church. Mark Tidsworth puts it this way, “Christians in other congregations hear about what’s happening at this church and they transfer their membership... They are catching fish, but the fish are swimming over from another aquarium.”<sup>60</sup> We are not baptizing new believers on a regular basis, nor are we reaching folks within our communities who refuse to enter the doors of the church building.

Yet Jesus’ ministry went beyond the synagogue in Galilee, and beyond the temple in Jerusalem. It’s true that he shared the good news in the synagogue when he read the Scriptures and taught about them as they worshipped God, and it’s also true that he shared the good news of God’s love and reign as he taught at the temple in Jerusalem. But most of his ministry was on the move, meeting people where they were. He traveled from village to village with his disciples sharing the good news of the kingdom of God

---

<sup>59</sup> *Field of Dreams*, directed by Phil Alden Robinson (United States: Universal Pictures, 1989).

<sup>60</sup> Mark E. Tidsworth, *Shift: Three Big Moves For The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church* (Pinnacle Leadership Press, 2015), 33-34.

through his teachings that offered a new way of life together. He compassionately shared the kingdom of God through healing the sick, feeding the hungry, and performing various miracles that provided care for the needs of the marginalized and poor. His ministry was based on relationships. Jesus didn't secure and occupy a building, inviting others to come and find him; he sought out the "lost" wherever they were. And although the first disciples followed his lead and traveled throughout "Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth,"<sup>61</sup> as evangelists in his name, the Church eventually shifted from a movement to an institution, which established a new tradition. There's nothing wrong with having a church building or having property where good ministry can be done, but it can easily hinder the church's mission and calling to be "sent" into the community. Having a church building can foster an expectation that people from the community will come because of all the wonderful things we have built and all the programs we offer. And once they come and experience it, they want to become a member. Inadvertently this approach can make the Church the goal of the gospel, rather than the gospel the mission of the Church.

Theologian and missiologist, Darrell Guder, relates the church's mission of being sent into the world through the doctrine of the *missio Dei* – Father sending Son, and the Father and the Son sending the Spirit. He states, "As it leads us to see the church as the instrument of God's mission, it also forces us to recognize the ways in which the Western church has tended to shape and fit the gospel into its cultural context and made the church's institutional extension and survival its top priority... we have begun to see that the church of Jesus Christ is not the purpose or goal of the gospel, but rather its

---

<sup>61</sup> *The HarperCollins Study Bible*, Acts 1:8.

instrument and witness.”<sup>62</sup> Today, traditional ministry is providing the good news through our worship services, through programs for our children, youth, college students, and adults. There’s absolutely nothing wrong with doing these things, for we are discipling those in the church, but we cannot forget that our discipling is meant to be an instrument and witness to send us out into the community and into the world to make disciples of Jesus too.

And while the Church seeks disciples of Jesus, we often use the language of “church member” to describe those who belong to the church. Mark Tidsworth notes,

This phrase in itself simply describes our relationship to the church. On the other hand, an unintended consequence of this organizational development movement in churches is that we began to use this phrase to describe our primary spiritual identity. “I am a church member.” Discipleship, or following Jesus Christ, became secondary.<sup>63</sup>

Seeing ourselves as members of a church versus being a disciple of Jesus matters. Tidsworth goes on to explain that a “church member” is settled in a church and expects for services to be provided for them, while a disciple is sent beyond the church and expects to be the servant. The Church has a responsibility to nurture disciples and not just members who see no reason or purpose to be outward-focused.

Unfortunately, the Church can lose its intentionality through its institutionalism. How we view the Church and our role in it is important. If Church is about getting something rather than giving something, we can easily lose sight of what it means to follow Jesus. The good news can become something hoarded rather than shared, and our understanding of sharing the good news can simply be reduced to what we teach in our

---

<sup>62</sup> Darrell L. Guder and Lois Barrett, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1998), 5.

<sup>63</sup> Tidsworth, *Shift*, 46.



Sunday school lessons, or in our small group Bible studies, or even what we hear preached from the pulpit. We can easily become complacent as a church family with little or no intent to reach out beyond ourselves. And even when we do, our invitations can be passive rather than personal. The Church has reduced its invitations through clever marketing techniques on church signs or newspaper advertisements, or through web-based technology such as a church website or social media platforms. Everything marketed sends the same message, “Come and join us here!” What does our ecclesiology say about how we practice “church?” Essentially, we hope someone will stumble upon our passive efforts and walk through our doors on Sunday. We assume that everyone is looking for a church and so we do everything in our power to become as attractive as possible so that we can convince others to join us. Our thought process is that if we have the best children’s ministry, or youth ministry, or the best preaching, it will attract others like a magnet. Yet, these traditional forms of ministry are clearly not working; otherwise, our churches would be busting at the seams. If Phyllis Tickle is right that the Church goes through a reformation every 500 years, maybe it’s time for the Church to enact change, refocusing its efforts by adopting new approaches to ministry, sharing the good news beyond itself in this post-Christian era. The Church needs to reclaim its apostolic identity; it needs to reclaim evangelism as Jesus did it.

In John’s gospel, Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit upon his disciples, but before he does so, he says to them, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”<sup>64</sup> The disciples were sent to share the good news, and the Church is called to do the same. This does not mean we should close our churches; rather, it reminds us that we have work to do to reach

---

<sup>64</sup> *The HarperCollins Study Bible*, John 20:21.

people beyond the walls of the church building. We must embrace Jesus' command to "Go!" *Missio Dei* theology reminds us that the Church is sent beyond itself to be witnesses of Christ's love and grace in the world. This is congruent with the Book of Order of the Presbyterian Church (USA), which affirms:

Apostolicity is God's gift to the Church in Jesus Christ. In Christ, by the power of the Spirit, God sends the Church into the world to share the gospel of God's redemption of all things and people... The Church bears witness in word and work that in Christ the new creation has begun, and that God who creates life also frees those in bondage, forgives sin, reconciles brokenness, makes all things new, and is still at work in the world. To be members of the body of Christ is to be sent out to pursue the mission of God and participate in God's new creation, God's kingdom drawing the present into itself.<sup>65</sup>

The Church needs to reclaim its apostolicity as Christ's "sent ones," with purposeful efforts to share the good news of Jesus beyond our Sunday services and mid-week programs, and even beyond our church buildings. Our evangelistic efforts must follow the ways of Jesus reaching people where they are, rather than expecting them to meet us where we are. Leslie Newbigin poignantly states the need for the Church to embrace evangelism as our calling saying,

If the gospel is to challenge the public life of our society... It will only be by movements that begin with the local congregation in which the reality of the new creation is present, known and experienced, and from which men and women will go into every sector of public life to claim it for Christ, to unmask the illusions which have remained hidden and to expose all areas of public life to the illumination of the gospel. But that will only happen as and when local congregations renounce an introverted concern for their own life, and recognize that they exist for the sake of those who are not members, as sign, instrument, and foretaste of God's redeeming grace for the whole life of society.<sup>66</sup>

---

<sup>65</sup> *Book of Order: The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA), Part II* (Louisville, KY: Office of the General Assembly, 2019-2021), 4.

<sup>66</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 232-233.

It's not all about us – our call in Christ is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love our neighbors as ourselves. If we truly believe that our faith in Jesus is transformational, if we genuinely believe that Jesus offers us abundant life here and now, as well as the hope of eternal life to come, then shouldn't we, the Church, make it a priority like Jesus, to evangelize? It's not enough to be chosen by Jesus and be content with that. Jesus tells a parable about two sons who are both asked to go and work in their father's field. The first blatantly rejects the father's request but later goes, and the second agrees to go but never does what he said he would do. Jesus' question to the chief priests and elders is, "Which of the two did the will of his father?"<sup>67</sup> The answer is obvious, the one who did what his father asked of him, not just the one who said he would do it but didn't. If we want to do the will of the Father, we must share our faith with others in word and in deed.

Jesus told his disciples that they were appointed to go and bear fruit that would last, and to fish for people. As a fisherman, I'm fully aware that you cannot catch fish if you're not fishing where the fish are. While it's true that evangelism is important in the Church, for we always need to be reminded of the good news of the gospel, the Church is a pond filled with stocked fish; we're familiar with the gospel. Stocked fish are easily caught because they are regularly fed. Yet, beyond the Church is an ocean full of native fish that are timid to take the bait. They aren't interested in artificial lures; they want the real thing! That is why it's important for us to share what's real – Jesus, but we must also be real and authentic in the ways we share him. If we simply hand out gospel tracts or try to debate and argue over who is right or wrong, we're just throwing out artificial bait.

---

<sup>67</sup> *The HarperCollins Study Bible*, Matthew 21:31.

Instead, we are called to be authentic, to witness to the Jesus we've come to know, the One who has made a difference in our lives.

The Church must reclaim evangelism as a practice of authentically sharing the good news we've found in Jesus. And our connection with Jesus is vital in being able to articulate our day-to-day faith; both the joys and sorrows, our faith and doubts, the moments we recognize his presence, and even those moments we do not. Authenticity reveals that we are Christians who put our faith in Jesus even when we can't see the forest from the trees, which makes us real people just like others who have questions, doubts, and are skeptical about putting their faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior. And we cannot allow ourselves to be overcome by the statistics that show increasing skepticism and apathy toward Christianity, as if we have no chance of making a difference, nor can we become numb to the fact that many people don't know the Way, the Truth, and the Life. If we love as Jesus loves us, which is what he commands his disciples to do, then it must bother us that there are people who have not experienced or come to know the saving grace and love of Christ as we have, or that there are people who have rejected faith and the church because of previous experiences in which judgment and condemnation have been preached and modeled over and above the love and grace of God. Jesus has called us and appointed us to go and bear fruit and promises that if we are obedient that we will bear fruit that will last. It's not our job to produce the fruit; it is our job to faithfully share. God will produce the fruit in its proper season. But we are also instructed to pray in his name, knowing that the Father will give whatever we ask. This is all interconnected to praying for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven as it pertains to carrying out the task of his ministry entrusted to us. Jesus tells us, "The

harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”<sup>68</sup> We are the laborers called to the harvest, and the fishermen and women called to fish, bearing fruit that will last for all eternity!

---

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, Matthew 9:37-38.

## Chapter 4

### Our Christology Shapes our Evangelistic Practice

*“Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked the disciples, “Who do people say that I am?”*

Mark 8:27

Who do people say Jesus is? That’s the question that has been discussed and reflected on for over 2,000 years. Who is this man from Galilee who caused so much commotion, who taught as one who had authority, who healed the sick from their diseases, cured the demon-possessed, fed thousands of people with five loaves of bread and two fish, calmed the raging sea with a word, who called God “Father,” who ate with sinners, who challenged the status quo and the religious elite, and who ultimately died on a cross and was said to have been raised from the dead? Who is Jesus – who do people say he is? Jesus’ disciples respond to his question saying, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.”<sup>69</sup> Many believe he’s a prophet of God, but what Jesus really wants to know is who they believe him to be and so he asks his own disciples, “But who do you say that I am? Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.” And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.”<sup>70</sup> Peter calls him the Messiah, but the Greek word used here is Christ. The title Christ literally means the Anointed One or Messiah, the one Israel has been waiting for, the one who would save Israel from their oppressors and restore them to their former glory. Peter affirms the identity of Jesus as the Messiah, the true king of Israel, and Mark notes that Jesus sternly ordered them not to say anything about it. We understand this to be the messianic secret, not that Jesus didn’t

---

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, Mark 8:28.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, Mark 8:29-30.

agree with his answer, but that he didn't want them sharing this outwardly because it wasn't time for him to go to the cross.

The question Jesus asks is important as it pertains to our faith. Do we believe him to be nothing more than a prophet of God, or a good moral teacher, or is he truly the Son of God, the incarnate Word, the Lord of heaven and earth? C.S. Lewis declares, "A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse."<sup>71</sup> Lewis declares that Jesus' claims about himself leave little room for us to decide if he was telling the truth of who he claimed to be, or if he was intentionally misleading everyone. Lewis is right, Jesus has come to reveal himself, and in his day, many were divided on who they thought he was, and even today there are many who do not believe that Jesus is the Christ even though they affirm he's an influential historical figure. Yet, Christians affirm that Jesus is the Christ, that he is the Son of God, the Anointed One, the Messiah, the Lord of heaven and earth, who delivers us from sin and reconciles us to his Father in heaven. We affirm that as the Christ, Jesus is both fully human and fully divine; he becomes one of us, yet he never sins against God. Affirming him as the Christ opens the door to understanding who he is, his life, and his work; we call this Christology.

Our personal Christology is based on our interpretations of the gospel accounts of Christ, as well as the study of all the Holy Scriptures that speak to the God revealed in Jesus Christ. All Christians affirm that "Jesus is Lord," this is one of the earliest

---

<sup>71</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1996), 56.

statements of faith and is central in Pauline theology. And while this simple affirmation unites the body of Christ, we must also admit that there are various interpretations of what this means for us. Our Christology not only shapes the way we think about Jesus, but it should also shape how we should live in relationship to him, and with others. Simply put, how we view Jesus should impact how we live for him. In other words, if we truly believe that he is Lord, then we are called to submit to his lordship in every area of our lives. And while the Christian Church affirms the Lordship of Jesus Christ, we also acknowledge that this isn't the only title or image of Jesus presented in the gospel accounts. Jesus is presented as a healer as he heals the sick, he's seen as God with us in his birth and in making his dwelling among the righteous and unrighteous, he's seen as a life-giver as he raises the dead and offers abundant life here and now, he's seen as socially just as he feeds the multitudes physically and spiritually, he's seen as a liberator as he sets the demon-possessed free or as he heals people oppressed by illness, he's seen as a teacher as he reads and expounds upon the Law and the Prophets, and he's seen as a savior as he gives his life for the sin of the world and is resurrected from the grave. And these are just a few images of Jesus we find throughout the gospel accounts, but they all make up the same Jesus who is affirmed as Lord of all.

Jesus asked his disciples, "But who do you say that I am," and he also asks us this question. I firmly believe that every Christian has come to know Jesus in an intimate way; that Christ has met us where we are and revealed himself to us. Jesus finds us where we are, much like he found Simon, Andrew, James, and John by the Sea of Galilee, or Matthew at the tax collector's booth, or like Saul on the road to Damascus, and he calls us into a relationship with him. We come to know him most clearly through his word



revealed to us by the power of the Holy Spirit among us. As a pastor, I can affirm that the Holy Spirit speaks to us in different ways. On any given Sunday, when I preach the word of God, I will have parishioners speak to me afterward about the word they heard. Some of them speak about something that came directly out of my mouth, and others say things that I never said but are still true to the overall message. The word of God is living and active, and the Spirit of God is actively at work, meeting us where we are and giving us what we need to hear. In that same spirit, while we all affirm that Jesus is Lord, we may also have differing views of the Jesus we've most clearly come to know in our lives. This is based on our own personal experience of encountering the risen Christ. My thesis is that our Christology, the lens in which we see Christ most clearly, affects our view and practice of evangelism; how we tell the story. I believe that there are certain gospel stories that resonate with us more than others. I would dare say that our favorite story or stories are thematic in nature and reveal the Christ we've come to know most clearly. This reveals our own bias for the good news we've found in Jesus, and it helps us to articulate an authentic faith as we answer the call to fish for people and to bear fruit that will last.

### **Theological Framework for Research:**

The theological framework for my research developed from two sources that both articulate how our Christology shapes us. The first is Steven Bevens and Roger Schroeder's book, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*. In this book, Bevens and Schroeder articulate six constants that frame Christianity in its missionary nature, and they provide essential continuity despite the various contexts where the church is present in the world. They acknowledge that there will be differences of

understanding in faith and theology as it relates to the constants, but they give direction and guidance for the Church as it understands its calling toward mission and evangelism. The constants are: *Christology, ecclesiology, eschatology, soteriology, anthropology, and culture*. Within these constants, Bevans and Schroeder share three typologies that come from church historian, Justo Gonzalez, and liberation/feminist theologian, Dorothee Solle. The typologies lay out a common theme in the constants provided that help identify how people view mission and evangelism through a certain theological lens. Gonzalez formulates these from the early church fathers of Christian history: Tertullian, Origen, and Irenaeus. Solle depicts them in a more generalized political lens: orthodox/conservative, liberal, and liberation theology. To blend Gonzalez and Solle's typologies, they look like this:<sup>72</sup>

Type A – Tertullian/Orthodox – focus on law

Type B – Origen/Liberal – focus on truth

Type C – Irenaeus/Liberation Theology – focus on history

As it pertains to mission and evangelism, each type takes different approaches which reflects the diversity of the Church. For instance, Type A folks view the Church's mission to save souls, and to preach the gospel so that others may experience the salvation of Jesus Christ. This Christian sees their vocation as proclaiming the good news everywhere. This requires a verbal proclamation of what Christ has done, intentionally speaking to people about faith and its importance in our lives. They see salvation from God as a gift to be shared with urgency.

Type B folks view mission modeled with bold humility; that one is not taking Christ into a given situation because Christ is already there. They view mission as

---

<sup>72</sup> Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, 35.

participation in Christ's presence which is not dependent on everyone accepting the gospel, for God will provide opportunities beyond this. This Christian sees the importance of proclamation as discipleship, a nurtured faith, rather than conversion. They view Christian education as the ongoing process of learning and growing into the fullness of Christ. They value the importance of spiritual growth as a means of living into the kingdom on earth.

Type C folks view the Church's mission as a visible witness of God's liberating power lived in community, where proclamation of reconciliation with God is practiced with mercy, compassion, and justice to liberate the suffering and the poor. This Christian sees proclamation in service to the poor and suffering. They approach mission and evangelism from the standpoint of serving those in need, whether it's feeding the hungry, dealing with systemic issues of injustice, or providing medical care to those who can't afford it. They are not as focused on verbal proclamation as they are in embodying the gospel in their liberating efforts.

These typologies reflect the diversity of personalities that exist within the body of Christ and understanding them helps us see three different approaches to mission and evangelism. We see these approaches to mission and evangelism lived out in our congregations through the diversity of those who participate in the body of Christ. In the Presbyterian Church (USA) we can see these typologies present as well. Figure 1 details mission broken out into three subsets in the PC (USA): evangelism (Type A), compassionate service (Type B), and social justice (Type C):<sup>73</sup>

---

<sup>73</sup> "What do Presbyterians believe about evangelism?", Presbyterian Church (USA), accessed June 20, 2022, <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/what-we-believe/evangelism5/>



Figure 1 - PC(USA) Mission Diagram

While these typologies are generalities, they do shed truth on how people respond to their faith. It's important to note that there's not a typology that's going to perfectly fit every person's theological grounding in the constants. In other words, a Type A person may hold true to some of the constants listed as Gonzalez has laid out, but in eschatology, they may hold closer to a Type B, and in culture, they may find themselves more blended with Type B & C. Regardless, these typologies and their methodology helps us to understand why people respond to mission and evangelism differently and it lays the groundwork for how we can engage these different types of people in the work of mission and evangelism.

The second source is Brian McLaren's book, *A Generous Orthodoxy*. McLaren's book is centered on the good news that there's diversity in the Church of Jesus Christ when it comes to our personal Christologies. He writes about the Jesus' he's come to know throughout his Christian journey, which has broadened his understanding of Jesus.

He writes about seven different images of Jesus found in the gospels, and he asserts seven different types of Christians based on these images of Jesus.<sup>74</sup> He explains that he has encountered each Jesus on his journey of faith. He lists them as: *Conservative Protestant Jesus, Pentecostal/Charismatic Jesus, Roman Catholic Jesus, Eastern Orthodox Jesus, Liberal Protestant Jesus, Anabaptist Jesus, and Jesus of the Oppressed*. In his view, each of these images of Jesus is essential to who Jesus is and rather than elevating one above another, the Church should celebrate that we have a generous orthodoxy that proclaims all of them as being good news found in Christ and that Christ is at work in all who have come to know him in each way.

My thesis blends both sources by using McLaren's typologies of the seven different Jesus' (although I deliberately renamed the Jesus' to more biblical titles) and Bevans and Schroeder's three typologies that depict how people respond to mission and evangelism. In addition, I have used Priscilla-Pope Levinson's book, *Models of Evangelism*, Frances Adeney's book, *Graceful Evangelism*, and William Abraham and Rick Richardson's models of evangelism to blend models of evangelism that correlate with the different images of Jesus presented. In doing so, I set the context for my research to either prove or disprove my hypothesis that our Christology shapes our view and practice of evangelism.

### **Methodology and Compilation of Data:**

In preparation for my research, I established new titles for the seven images of Jesus based on McLaren's work as a rubric to work from. I felt that using his titles would

---

<sup>74</sup> Brian McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy: Why I am a missional, evangelical, post/protestant, liberal/conservative, biblical, charismatic/contemplative, emergent unfinished Christian* (El Cajun, CA: Zondervan, 2006), 71-73.

skew honest results from participants since many of them reflected political undertones or were framed by Catholic names. What Presbyterian would honestly say that they identify with the “Roman Catholic Jesus” or the “Conservative Protestant Jesus?” Thus, changing the titles was necessary to ensure that survey results were authentic. My titles are listed as: *Savior, Healer, Life-Giver, God with Us, Social Justice, Teacher, and Liberator*. These titles present a more biblical image of Jesus in the gospels, and for the sake of clarity, I have listed McLaren’s titles next to the titles I have replaced them with for the research of this project:

<u>Brian McLaren’s Titles:</u>	<u>Research Titles:</u>
1. Conservative Protestant Jesus	Savior
2. Pentecostal/Charismatic Jesus	Healer
3. Roman Catholic Jesus	Life-Giver
4. Eastern Orthodox Jesus	God with Us
5. Liberal Protestant Jesus	Social Justice
6. Anabaptist Jesus	Teacher
7. Jesus of the Oppressed	Liberator

In addition, these images of Jesus must connect with forms of evangelism to correctly code results of the research. Based on the readings of Priscilla Pope-Levinson, Frances Adeney, William Abraham, and Rick Richardson, I narrowed models of evangelism into five categories that provide practical examples of practice that would correlate with the seven images of Jesus. These categories are not exhaustive but capture the essence of the primary ways people share Christ. The models are presented below, along with headings that identify how I am coding them as a part of my research and how they align with the seven images of Jesus presented. I have also shared how they fit within the framework of the authors who present them in their own writings to show the unity of evangelistic practices amid differing titles communicated by each of them.

## **Evangelism Models:**

### **Conversion Model:** - aligns with the image of Savior

#### Type A (Bevans and Schroeder)

1. Conversion/sharing the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection and the importance of a personal relationship with him. This could be prison ministry, one on one conversations, personal visitation, mentoring, proclamation of salvation – evangelistic crusades, big tent revivals, etc....

Frances Adeney –	Transforming Worldview and Church Planting
Priscilla Pope-Levinson –	Personal Evangelism and Church Growth
William Abraham –	Public Proclamation of the Gospel, Converting Individuals to the Christian Faith, Church Growth and Planting

### **Demonstration of God's Power Model:** - aligns with the image of Healer and Liberator

#### Type B (Bevans and Schroeder)

2. Demonstration of God's power/speaking and emphasizing Christ's miracles and power over things that oppress or hold us captive. This could be praying for the sick, laying on of hands, healing and wholeness services, caring for those who are ill or grieving, helping fight addictions, and seeking revival through the Spirit's power.

Frances Adeney –	Faith Sharing
Priscilla Pope-Levinson –	Visitation and Revival
Rick Richardson –	Demonstration of God's Power

### **Proclamation of God's Presence Model:** - aligns with the image of God with Us and Life-Giver

#### Type B (Bevans and Schroeder)

3. Proclamation of God's presence with us in all of life's situations, including hardship and death. This could be an incarnational ministry – being with people where they are, extending hospitality by preparing and giving food, committing to a prayer ministry, sending cards and notes as an extension of Christ's Church, and inviting others to church to encounter the good news of Christ through worship.

Frances Adeney –	Community Practices
Priscilla Pope-Levinson –	Visitation and Liturgical
William Abraham –	Public Proclamation of the Gospel
Rick Richardson –	Distinctive Lifestyle of the Alternative Community

**Acts of Mercy Model:** - aligns with the image of Social Justice and Liberator

Type C (Bevans and Schroeder)

4. Acts of mercy, justice, peace/caring for the marginalized, poor, needy, and those who cannot help themselves. This could be participating in feeding ministries, helping the homeless, impoverished, and working towards justice through the prophetic witness of Christ's care for the downcast.

Frances Adeney –	Fulfilling Needs and Prophetic Preaching
Priscilla Pope-Levinson –	Prophetic
William Abraham –	Public Acts of Mercy, Justice, and Peace

**Making Disciples Model:** - aligns with the image of Teacher

Type A (Bevans and Schroeder)

5. Making disciples/focusing on becoming disciples and followers of Jesus, which includes imitating Christ's ways and living an alternative lifestyle. This could be inviting others to church to participate in classes designed to share Christ, like Alpha, or leading small group Bible studies that invite those outside the church to participate and learn about Christ.

Frances Adeney –	Discipleship in Context
Priscilla Pope-Levinson –	Small Group
William Abraham –	Recruiting and Making Disciples of Jesus
Rick Richardson –	Distinctive Lifestyle of the Alternative Community

It's important to note that there are only five evangelism models presented and seven images of Jesus. Each model is coded with a particular image or images that are associated with it. Jesus as "Healer" and as "Liberator" are closely interconnected, and as such, "Liberator" is shared between models number two and four. In addition, Jesus as "God with Us" and "Life-Giver" are also closely connected, and so they share model number three (I have chosen to refer to this model of evangelism as "God with Us" even though "Life-Giver" is also associated with it). Once I established a coding model, I had to provide avenues for participants to reflect and respond. While I would have preferred to conduct research along ecumenical lines, I realized that it would be too large of an



undertaking and that an assessment of one particular denomination would likely be reflective of other denominations as well as non-denominational representation. My intent was to prove that within one denominational body (pastors and laity) that all seven images of Jesus and all five models of evangelism would be identified with. This would prove the diversity of Christologies present within just one denominational body, understanding that churches are made up of believers from different denominational backgrounds and some from no faith background at all.

My research was conducted with the church I currently serve as pastor, First Presbyterian Church of Boone, NC, and with pastors from Salem Presbytery, of which my membership resides. Since the Church is comprised of laity and ministers, I wanted to see if there was a diversity of Christologies among both congregants and pastors. My goal was to get at least 30 participants involved from the church and the presbytery. In addition, I would take two different approaches in my research – group interviews with pastors and teaching a seven-week class with our congregants. This would provide different ways of trying to achieve the same results.

### **Pastor Participation:**

I personally invited 45 pastors via email who I had a close relationship within Salem Presbytery to participate in my research. Out of 45 invitations, 33 agreed to participate (73.3%). I emailed all the participants two questions in advance to reflect on and share with me when we met:

1. What is your favorite gospel story (this could be about Jesus or a teaching of him) and how have you come to know Jesus most clearly through this story? (Are there other factors that make this story personal for you such as life experiences (good or bad), upbringing in a particular faith tradition, or even your current faith tradition?).

2. Considering the question above and based on your relationship with Christ, of the five evangelism methods listed below, which method are you most led to practice? Would you say there's a correlation between your relationship with Christ and the way you do evangelism?

I used an online Doodle Poll to find out times and dates they would be available to conduct group interviews and organized them into groups of no more than five. Once the groups were organized, I set up a Zoom meeting to conduct group interviews based on the questions given in advance. The interviews were recorded with their permission. During the interview, each participant articulated their responses to the two questions presented to them. It's important to know that none of the participants were told about the images of Jesus being used in the research prior to their interview. At the end of our meeting, once everyone had already shared their responses, I explained that I was teaching a class with our congregation on seven different images of Jesus. After sharing those images with them, I asked them which image of Jesus they were most drawn to. This impromptu question would provide an extra filter for coding their responses to their favorite gospel story. Many of them asked if they could choose more than one, which I allowed, given they hadn't had an opportunity to reflect on it prior to the meeting.

After each group interview, I coded their responses to the questions asked of them. This required me to listen to what they articulated about Jesus in their favorite gospel story. Their interpretation was key to determining which image of Jesus matched their story. This is vitally important because Scripture is interpretive. As I mentioned before, people hear different messages from God through the same Scripture read and proclaimed. It would be easy to code a story through the lens of the researcher that could skew the results in favor of the hypothesis, but by asking each participant to articulate their own interpretation and understanding, it reduces the probability for this to occur.

Once the story was coded accurately to represent the pastor's Christology, it was then cross-referenced with the model of evangelism they preferred to practice. In addition, I coded their "off the cuff" responses to the image of Jesus they shared at the end of the interview to see if it also lined up with what had been shared. Survey results were compiled into an excel spreadsheet that coded their answers to each question.

### **Church Participation:**

I invited our congregation to participate in a seven-week Sunday school class entitled, *Images of Jesus*, during the season of Lent. Our adult Sunday school classes combined to support my research efforts. The class was conducted in person, but I also offered a hybrid format for those who felt more comfortable using Zoom from home. We met in our multi-purpose room around tables of no more than eight per table. Although the class size changed from week to week, there were as many as 68 participants who took part. The class was 50 minutes in length and focused on one image of Jesus presented in the gospels each week. Rather than lecturing the class, I used art as a vehicle for conversation, selecting two artistic expressions of a Bible story that correlated with the image of Jesus we were studying for the day. Some of the art reflected more renowned artists, while others featured lesser-known contemporary artists. All classes were recorded on Zoom with the permission of the participants. Each class began with a reading of a biblical text, a short synopsis about the text, a piece of art projected online and in the room, and small group questions for participants to talk about the art, Scripture, and evangelism. After a time of discussion, groups reported back what they discussed, and then we repeated the process again with another Scripture reading, another piece of art, small group questions and reporting back. This format was repeated every

week using a different image of Jesus and correlating pieces of art that highlighted stories pertinent to the image shared. I have included the weekly teaching outline below showing the image taught and the two biblical stories used to articulate conversation around artistic expressions of the stories shared. See Appendix A for the full teaching outlines.

<b>Savior:</b>	Calling of Matthew (Matthew 9:9-13) Art: Michelangelo Caravaggio – <i>The Calling of St. Matthew</i>  Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-31) Art: Ben Long – <i>The Prodigal Son</i>
<b>Healer:</b>	Healing Blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52) Art: Unknown Artist – <i>Blind Bartimaeus</i>  Healing of the Paralytic (Mark 2:1-12) Art: Harold Copping – <i>The Healing of the Paralytic</i>
<b>Life-Giver:</b>	Raising of Lazarus (John 11:1-44) Art: Unknown Artist – <i>Raising of Lazarus</i>  Resurrection of Jesus (John 20:11-18) Art: Greg Olsen – <i>He is Risen</i>
<b>God with Us:</b>	The Incarnation (Luke 2:1-20) Art: He Qi – <i>The Nativity</i>  The Last Supper (John 13:18-30) Art: Leonardo da Vinci – <i>The Last Supper</i>
<b>Social Justice:</b>	Jesus feeding the 5,000 (Luke 9:10-17) Art: Dirk A. Walker – <i>The New New Jerusalem</i>  The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) Art: Vincent van Gogh – <i>The Good Samaritan</i>
<b>Teacher:</b>	The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 4:23-5:2) Art: Cosimo Rosselli - <i>The Sermon on the Mount and the Healing of the Lepers</i>  The Parable of the Pharisee and Tax Collector (Luke 18:9-14) Art: James Tissot – <i>The Pharisee and the Publican</i>
<b>Liberator:</b>	Scroll of Isaiah (Luke 4:14-21)

Art: Greg Olsen – *Jesus in the Synagogue in Nazareth*

The Gerasene Demoniac (Mark 5:1-20)

Art: Arthur Robins – *Jesus Evicting a Demon*

Once the classes were completed, participants were emailed an online survey through Survey Monkey that asked them to share their name, gender, and race along with the following questions:

1. Based on our weekly classes together, which image of Jesus do you most identify with? Please only choose one.
2. Why do you identify most with this image of Jesus? In other words, why is this image of Jesus good news for us?
3. If you responded, “None of the Above,” what image of Jesus would you like to add to the list?
4. Choose which method of evangelism you are most drawn to. You may choose one or two, but no more than two.
5. What is your favorite gospel story and why? Include the Scripture reference and be specific about how you see Jesus in this story. Keep in mind that during the class Pastor Jeff shared particular stories about Jesus and then associated them with a particular image of Jesus. It’s important to note that our personal interpretation (our bias for the good news) leads us to the image we see. Thus, one could look at any story shared throughout the class and see a different image of Jesus than the one presented in the class.
6. Is there an image of Jesus that wasn’t presented in the class that you would like to acknowledge?

Participants were given two weeks to take the survey and they were also emailed a pdf copy of the PowerPoint slideshow that reminded them of the Scriptures and art we discussed for each week. They were specifically instructed not to take the survey unless they had completed all seven of the classes for the integrity of the research. Each class was recorded and posted online so that they could follow along and make it up if they missed any of them. Of the 68 people who participated in the class, 48 people filled out a

survey (70.5%). Survey results were compiled into an excel spreadsheet that coded their answers to each question.

## **Research Results:**

### **Clergy Data:**

Throughout five weeks, 33 pastors were interviewed in small groups. Of the 33 pastors, 18 were men, 15 were women, 31 were Caucasian, and two were African American. The pastors represented 20 senior/head of staff pastors, one transitional executive presbyter, one associate pastor, one parish associate, three honorably retired pastors, two campus ministry pastors, three validated pastors, and two members at large pastors. This provided a representative group of Salem Presbytery's pastors, which also provided an age range from 26–75.

Each pastor shared their favorite gospel story, which I have broken down into categories:

- Teachings of Jesus (parables or direct instruction) - 12
- Healing stories - 6
- Resurrection accounts (empty tomb or resurrection encounters) - 5
- Encounters with Jesus (woman caught in adultery, Samaritan woman at the well, disciples called to follow) - 5
- Miracle stories (calming the storm) - 2
- Incarnation account (birth of Jesus) - 1
- Mystery account (transfiguration) - 1

Of all the stories shared, the Parable of the Prodigal Son was mentioned five times, the woman caught in adultery was mentioned twice, the Samaritan woman at the well was mentioned twice, and Jesus calming the storm was mentioned twice. All six healing stories were different, and of the five additional teaching stories (besides the Parable of the Prodigal Son), none were the same.

Each pastor also shared their preferred method of evangelism based on the five models provided to them. Below is a breakdown of the pastor's responses:

- God with Us - 17
- Acts of Mercy - 6
- Making Disciples - 6
- Conversion - 2
- Demonstration of God's Power - 2

This shows that within one presbytery in the PC (USA) that a diversity of evangelistic practices exists among its pastors. This may have implications that reflect that this could also be true for each of the denomination's 166 presbyteries, although further research would be needed to prove it. It's also interesting to note that most pastors in Salem Presbytery prefer to share the good news in an incarnational way; caring for people in various ways, as well as through acts of mercy which include caring for the marginalized, poor, and needy through material and immaterial means such as social justice work. In my 22 years of experience serving in the PC (USA) in non-ordained roles and as a pastor, this reflects a strong emphasis of evangelism as mission – serving the poor and needy, which is reflective of the PC (USA)'s largest emphasis with its Matthew 25 initiative that seeks to care for the poor and marginalized as well as working towards the eradication of poverty.<sup>75</sup>

As it pertains to whether one's Christology shapes their view and practice of evangelism, 100% of the pastors interviewed articulated an image of Jesus consistent with their preferred method of evangelism. Once again, this is based on hearing their

---

<sup>75</sup> "Eradicating Systemic Poverty", Matthew 25 – "A bold vision and invitation," Presbyterian Church (USA), accessed June 20, 2022, <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/matthew-25/poverty/>

interpretations of their favorite gospel story as they are coded from the models of evangelism. There were absolutely no discrepancies among those interviewed. As I mentioned before, I asked each pastor, after they all shared, which image of Jesus they believe they most identify with. I explained the seven images of Jesus that I was teaching in my class with our congregation and gave them a minute to reflect. Most pastors preferred to pick more than one, so I gave them the flexibility to do so. The breakdown below shows the correspondence as it relates to their evangelistic model, which doesn't include all the images shared:

- Jesus as God with Us - 12
- Jesus as Teacher - 6
- Jesus as Life-Giver - 4
- Jesus as Socially Just/Social Justice - 3
- Jesus as Liberator - 3
- Jesus as Savior - 2
- Jesus as Healer - 2
- “None of the above” – 1

Surprisingly 29 of them responded with an image that corresponded with their favorite gospel story, and four of them responded with a different image; however, that image was interconnected with the evangelism model they chose. For instance, a few of them shared a gospel story that connects with the “Social Justice Jesus,” but they mentioned “Liberator Jesus” as the image they connected with. “Liberator” is coded with “Social Justice” (model #4) and with “Healer” (model #2), thus, they were still on point with their model of evangelism; they just mentioned another image that's closely associated with the other. One pastor refused to pick an image of Jesus because he felt that it was too hard to parcel Jesus into different categories. Given this, 32 of the 33 participants affirmed an image of Jesus consistent with their Christology as coded from their gospel story and that fit with the coded evangelism models. In addition, only one



pastor mentioned an image of Jesus that could be included to the seven: lawbreaker, as it pertains to Jesus going against the grain of what was expected by the Pharisaic Jews. And every pastor acknowledged that the image of Jesus they most identify with is consistently present in their week-to-week sermons. In fact, one pastor said, “I guess I’m just a one-trick pony.”

What’s most interesting is that even within one gospel story, people can see different images of Jesus based on how they interpret the passage. For example, five pastors noted that the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) was their favorite story. Out of the five responses came three different images of Jesus – “God with Us,” “Social Justice,” and “Teacher.” One pastor emphasized the mercy extended to the prodigal son and the eldest son, which correlates with the “Social Justice” Jesus – the One who acts with mercy. Two pastors emphasized the love of the Father that never leaves either of his sons, which reflects the “God with Us” Jesus. And two pastors emphasized the parable as Jesus’ teaching, for he is teaching us about God’s grace, love, and empathy for all of us – the faithful and wayward, which correlates with “Teacher” Jesus. Within one story there were three different of images of Jesus identified, which is interesting because I taught this story to our congregation from the standpoint of Jesus as “Savior,” which provides a fourth image that could also be seen. This example is also true of three pastors who shared that the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11) was their favorite story. Between the three of them, two images of Jesus were noted. One interpreted Jesus as “Savior,” offering grace to every sinner, which includes the sinful woman, while the other two interpreted Jesus as “Socially Just,” offering mercy to someone who could have been stoned to death, as well as mercy extended to those who

sought to condemn her despite their lack of self-awareness. This makes it very clear that interpretation is the key to understanding one's Christology.

### **FPC Boone Data:**

The data from First Presbyterian Church of Boone, North Carolina, comes from lay folks in the church who chose to participate in a seven-week class entitled, *Images of Jesus*, taught by me. In addition, I preached a seven-week sermon series that coincided with the class, so the whole congregation had the opportunity to reflect on their own Christology. While we had as many as 68 participants in the weekly Sunday school class (in person and via Zoom), only 48 participants filled out the final survey. Of the 48 participants surveyed, all were Caucasian, 29 were female, 19 were male, and participants ages ranged from 42-82 years of age, with the average age being 67.5 years old.

Each participant was asked in the survey to share their favorite gospel story, which I have broken down into categories:

- Teachings of Jesus (parables or direct instruction) - 18
- Encounters with Jesus (Samaritan woman, anointing of Jesus, calling the disciples, Mary and Martha, Jesus and the children, and an adulterous woman) - 8
- Miracle stories (feeding the 5,000, changing water to wine, and calming the storm) -8
- Healing stories (all were the healing of the woman with the blood disorder – Luke 8:43-48) – 3
- Incarnation stories (birth of Jesus) - 2
- Mystery account (Jesus' baptism) - 3
- Crucifixion account - 1
- "Summary of the Bible" account (John 3:16) – 1

Of all the stories shared, the Parable of the Prodigal Son was mentioned six times, the Parable of the Good Samaritan was mentioned six times, the feeding of the 5,000 was mentioned six times, the Samaritan woman at the well was mentioned four times, the resurrection account was mentioned five times, and the healing of the woman with the

blood disorder was mentioned three times. The majority of participants chose a story that involved Jesus teaching, performing a miracle, or of a divine encounter with him.

Each participant was also asked to choose which image of Jesus they most identified with. They were presented with seven images in the class, but they were also given the option to choose “none of the above.” Participants were asked to only choose one option. The breakdown goes as follows:

- Jesus as Savior - 16
- Jesus as Socially Just/Social Justice - 14
- Jesus as God with Us - 4
- Jesus as Life-Giver - 4
- Jesus as Liberator - 4
- Jesus as Healer - 3
- Jesus as Teacher - 1
- “None of the above” – 2

Participants were also asked to choose which method of evangelism they preferred based on the five models shared with them. They were given the option of choosing up to two, although not everyone did so. Of the lay folks surveyed and based on their response to their preferred image of Jesus, participants preferred the following methods of evangelism:

- God with Us - 16
- Acts of Mercy - 15
- Demonstration of God’s Power - 9
- Conversion - 5
- Making Disciples - 3

Because participants were given the option of choosing up to two methods, there were 69 total responses that slightly changed the data presented above (see Figure 2).

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Conversion/sharing the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection and the importance of a personal relationship with him. This could be prison ministry, one on one conversations, personal visitation, mentoring, proclamation of salvation - evangelistic crusades, big tent revivals, etc...	10.42%	5
Demonstration of God's power/speaking and emphasizing Christ's miracles and power over things that oppress or hold us captive. This could be praying for the sick, laying on of hands, healing and wholeness services, caring for those who are ill, or grieving, helping people with addition issues, and seeking revival through the Spirit's power.	22.92%	11
Proclamation of God's presence with us in all of life's situations, including hardship and death. This could be an incarnational ministry - being with people where they are, extending hospitality by preparing and giving food, committing to a prayer ministry, sending cards and notes as an extension of Christ's Church, and inviting others to encounter the good news of Christ through worship.	45.83%	22
Acts of mercy, justice, peace - caring for the marginalized, poor, needy, and those who cannot help themselves. This could be participating in feeding ministries, helping the homeless, impoverished, and working towards justice through prophetic witness of Christ's care for the downcast.	52.08%	25
Making disciples; focusing on becoming disciples and followers of Jesus, which includes imitating Christ's ways and living an alternative lifestyle (being set apart). This could be inviting others to church to participate in classes designed to share Christ, like Alpha, or leading small group bible studies that invite those outside the church to participate and learn about Christ.	12.50%	6
Total Respondents: 48		

*Figure 2 - Laity Evangelism Models*

Nonetheless, the data remains consistent as the “Acts of Mercy” and the “God with Us” models are still the top two preferred methods, while “Demonstration of God’s power” remains in the middle, and “Making Disciples” surpasses the “Conversion” model by just one. This also shows that within one congregation in the PC (USA) that a diversity of evangelistic practices exists among its laity. This also makes the case stronger that it’s equally possible that it could be true for any congregation within the denomination, or any congregation at all. In addition, the preferred method of evangelism within the church was the “God with Us” and “Acts of Mercy” models, which are identical to the results from the pastor interviews. Once again, this is consistent with the PC (USA)’s focus on mission as it relates to caring for people in need.

As it pertains to whether one's Christology shapes their view and practice of evangelism, 22 of the 48 surveys directly revealed it to be true (45.8%). While less than half of the participants showed a direct connection, there were also other factors that I believe contribute to understanding the data better. For instance, members of the congregation were not put into small groups and interviewed in the same manner as the pastors of Salem Presbytery. They were part of a class and took an online survey on their own. I was unable to listen to their individual interpretations of their favorite gospel story, as was done with the pastor groups. Therefore, I had nothing other than what they shared about the story, which was not as detailed as the pastor's responses. I noticed a trend among some of the respondents; many of them identified with Jesus as "Savior," which did not correlate directly with their preferred method of evangelism. Yet when you looked at their favorite gospel story and their preferred method of evangelism, it matched. For example, one person noted that their favorite story was Jesus feeding the 5,000 and stated, "Jesus provides food for the hungry, but also provision for the future." His preferred method of evangelism was "Acts of Mercy," which aligns with his interpretation of Jesus being merciful to those gathered who had not brought anything to eat. Yet, he chose "Savior" as his preferred image of Jesus. Why would he choose "Savior" when he could have chosen "Social Justice?" Another respondent did something similar, choosing the Parable of the Lost Sheep as her favorite story and stated, "Jesus searches for those who are lost." Her preferred method of evangelism was "God with Us," which aligns with her interpretation of the God who pursues us, like the shepherd in the story. Yet, she chose "Socially Just" as her preferred image of Jesus instead of "God with Us."

As I began to look closely at the stories shared and the evangelistic models chosen, I identified 15 respondents who all had gospel stories and methods of evangelism that aligned, but their preferred image of Jesus was inconsistent with what they had chosen. One of the benefits of being a pastor is building relationships with your church members. In doing so, you get to know about them and their faith backgrounds. There were nine individuals who chose “Savior” as their preferred image of Jesus and yet had gospel stories and methods of evangelism that matched with a different image of Jesus. All nine of these folks grew up in the Baptist tradition before becoming Presbyterians. As one who also began in the Baptist tradition (both in the Southern Baptist and Cooperative Baptist churches) I am aware that the image of Jesus as “Savior of sinners” is the primary image taught and preached. Altar calls are common almost every Sunday so that people may respond in faith and accept Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior. So, is it possible that someone’s upbringing in the faith can dictate the image of Jesus they most connect with, and yet their favorite gospel story and method of evangelism be different? I believe it absolutely can. It’s hard to choose another image of Jesus when you’ve grown up hearing that Jesus is “Lord and Savior” time and again.

In addition, I noticed that one person had chosen a “God with Us” model of evangelism, and their favorite gospel story was of the resurrection account in John’s gospel where Jesus encounters Mary. Yet, she chose “Healer” as her preferred image of Jesus. Once again, this seemed odd, but I also knew that she was a cancer survivor and, therefore, Jesus as “Healer” would be very important and personal to her. Another person chose the Parable of the Prodigal Son, focusing on Jesus’ great love and forgiveness, and chose a “Conversion” model of evangelism that should align with Jesus as “Savior.” Yet

her preferred image of Jesus was “Teacher.” She was a lifelong teacher herself, which made sense. The data suggests that there are outside factors that can shape one’s preferred image of Jesus against their favorite gospel stories and preferred method of evangelism such as faith tradition, profession, or even life experiences. This can alter the results even when the gospel stories and evangelism models align.

In addition, 11 respondents chose an image of Jesus that was consistent with their favorite gospel story, but their model of evangelism did not align. For instance, one respondent chose an image of Jesus as “Social Justice” and paired it with the Parable of the Good Samaritan. She commented that the Good Samaritan story teaches, “It’s our responsibility as Christians to respond with acts of mercy to those in need.” Her preferred method of evangelism was “Demonstration of God’s power” (Healer/Liberator model), instead of “Acts of Mercy.” She even stated that we are to respond with acts of mercy. It appears that she envisioned this model because it speaks directly to “caring for those who are ill,” as the man in the story was left beaten on the side of the road, and the Samaritan bandaged his wounds and sought care for him. The “Acts of Mercy” model speaks more about providing care to the marginalized, poor, and needy and those who cannot help themselves. This could be participating in feeding ministries, helping the homeless and impoverished, and working towards justice through prophetic witness of Christ’s care for the downcast. It’s quite possible that her favorite gospel story correlated more with healing than providing conventional care for the needy. This same trend exists with the other 10 respondents as well. All of this suggests that the interpretation of the evangelistic model can also play a role in how one correlates their favorite gospel story with it.

Lay participants also showed varied interpretations of their favorite stories as it pertains to the image of Jesus that speaks to them, much like the pastors did. Once again, the Parable of the Prodigal Son stood out as one of the most loved stories, and yet respondents connected with Jesus as “Liberator,” “Social Justice,” “God with Us,” “Teacher,” and “Savior.” There were six respondents who chose this as their favorite gospel story, and five of them selected different images associated with it. Six others chose the Parable of the Good Samaritan as their favorite, and only two images were noted: “Social Justice” and “Liberator.” As you can see, our personal interpretation is the key to the Jesus we identify with. Participants were also asked if there was another image of Jesus that was important to them that was not shared in the class, and the responses were: friend, quiet Jesus, forgiver, servant, and a trusted and respected companion.

### **Summary of Findings:**

My research sought to prove that our Christology shapes our view and practice of evangelism by interviewing pastors and surveying congregants from the same denomination and in this case, within the same presbytery. The data speaks for itself, as 100% of all pastors interviewed directly connected their Christology to a model of evangelism that correlates with it. The data from the laity of First Presbyterian Church of Boone, NC, also shows enough evidence for this to be true, with 45.8% of people directly matching their Christology with their evangelism practice. As I mentioned before, there were trends that came out of this research that seem to imply that one’s denominational upbringing, life circumstances, and even vocation can influence the image of Jesus one identifies with, even when their favorite gospel story and evangelistic practice match suggesting a different image of Jesus. This accounted for 15 respondents surveyed, which



if included, would change the statistics to show 77% of congregants surveyed affirm this thesis. The reason I suggest including these 15 respondents to the overall total is due to how the pastors were interviewed. They were asked only to give a favorite gospel story, an interpretation for why it's their favorite, and which model of evangelism they prefer. After the interviews were concluded, they were asked "off the cuff" to give a response based on the seven images shared with them. So, if we were to compare "apples to apples," these 15 respondents would have been included as a group whose Christology affirmed their evangelistic practice. In addition, 11 other congregants connected an image of Jesus consistent with their favorite gospel story even though their evangelism model didn't align. This could be attributed to their interpretation of the evangelism model. Nonetheless, it's evident that one's Christology does shape and influence their evangelistic practice most of the time.

It is also true that within one PC (USA) congregation and within one group of pastors within the same presbytery, that every image of Jesus was identified with, as well as every evangelism model. This affirms that the good news of Jesus is diverse and that our bias of the good news should be shared in a multiplicity of ways to engage everyone. This requires churches of every faith tradition to examine their model or models of evangelism and to consider other avenues of sharing the good news, providing opportunities for everyone to be involved. This means that a "one size fits all" model is not enough and leaves out many in our churches who are uncomfortable sharing Christ in one way. It also affirms that evangelism can be done in different ways that are still biblical, even if our own denomination or faith tradition doesn't generally practice it. Sometimes churches can focus on things that divide us rather than on the things that unite

us. Donald Posterski says, “We should appreciate followers of Jesus who are from different churches and religious traditions than our own. We have more in common with Christians from other persuasions than we do with people of the society who have no concern for the things of God. What we share in common is far more important than what tends to separate us.”<sup>76</sup>

We have much to learn from one another when it comes to evangelism, but sometimes it’s more comfortable to stay in our “own lane” as it relates to our denominational identities. Frances Adeney acknowledges seven contemporary theologies of evangelism that come from different faith traditions and contexts that have overlapping themes; I have shared these within the framework of the five models of evangelism I have presented. She views them and directs her readers to view them as complementary and not in competition with one another. She goes on to say, “Much like a symphony, each theology presents a unique composition but utilizes similar themes. Themes of proclamation/apologetics, love/acceptance, church/community, liberation, and practices/lifestyle recur in most of the theologies presented.”<sup>77</sup> Likewise, Priscilla Pope-Levinson echoes a similar message stating that out of the models she presents, that five qualities are essential to all of them: hospitality, relationship, integrity, message bearing, and church rootedness.<sup>78</sup> While the models may be different, they are all interconnected by the same important Christian qualities. And Rick Richardson recognizes that while there are certainly critiques of each model, it’s important to recognize that all these

---

<sup>76</sup> Posterski, *Reinventing Evangelism*, 108-109.

<sup>77</sup> Adeney, *Graceful Evangelism*, 94.

<sup>78</sup> Pope-Levinson, *Models of Evangelism*, 182.

models seek the same goal, stating, “I would suggest that our challenge as professors in the academy is to teach and facilitate exposure to the best examples of all these models, affirming and celebrating the gifts they bring, and appreciating them.”<sup>79</sup>

Indeed, the mission of God has a church called in unity to work together to share the good news of Jesus Christ. All of us have encountered Christ and our Christology helps us to share him with others, to evangelize based on our bias toward the good news, but we must be willing to acknowledge and accept multiple approaches to achieving the same result – making Christ known in word and deed. By practicing evangelism in a multiplicity of ways, we are reaching out to various types of people who connect by different means. In doing so, we are playing the “instrument” that God has equipped us to play, following the direction of the “Conductor,” who is directing all of us harmoniously to create the most beautiful piece of music together. And the melody we play together can draw others into the symphony orchestra too!

---

<sup>79</sup> Rick Richardson, “Evangelism and Social Capital: The Bridge-Building and Bridge-Breaking Dimensions of Different Paradigms and Practices of Witness,” *Witness: The Journal of the Academy for Evangelism in Theological Education* 28, (2014): 26.

## Chapter 5

### **How should the Church share the good news?** *Seven Points of Emphasis Regarding Evangelism*

“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many.”

I Corinthians 12:12-14

#### **Diversity is God’s Great Design:**

The Apostle Paul shares with the Corinthian church the importance of being one body made up of many members. Paul’s metaphor of the body and its parts provides a visual illustration for the church to recognize the diversity of its members and to value that diversity as God’s good design. Every member is connected to one another but also connected to the head of the Church, Jesus Christ. Each member has something to contribute, and every member is important for the body to function as it’s called. It’s true; the Christian Church is diverse – the body of Christ in the world is made up of members of differing races, genders, socio-economic classes, theological approaches, and so on. Every Christian is also endowed by the Holy Spirit with spiritual gifts to build up the body of Christ and to serve one another. And every Christian is connected to Christ and ultimately to one another. As God’s Church, together, we are called to share the good news of Jesus Christ. Because the Church is diverse, it’s also true that our Christologies and that our methodologies to evangelism are diverse as well. This too is good news, for we are representative of a large and diverse body of Christ in the world that is called by Christ to share his good news in different ways.

I have shared five different models of evangelism that fit within a larger paradigm of seven Christologies. While these models are not exhaustive, they represent a diversity

of approaches in which the gospel can be shared. They are widely accepted by scholars, and quite frankly, are not very easy to separate because they can intersect one another in a number of ways. I have taken the liberty to show this on pages 47-49, as some of the models suggested by Adeney, Pope-Levinson, Abraham, and Richardson overlap into multiple models. For instance, the Visitation model can be practiced in caring for the sick (Demonstration of God's Power) or as an extension of Christ's Church (Proclamation of God's Presence). Likewise, the Distinctive Lifestyle of the Alternative Community model can be practiced through the worship of a congregation (Proclamation of God's Presence) or in the discipleship within or outside of a congregation (Making Disciples). And the Public Proclamation of the Gospel model can be shared in an evangelistic outreach setting (Conversion), or within the worship of a congregation on any given Sunday (Proclamation of God's Presence). In fact, Mark Teasdale comments that some of these models (he refers particularly to Abraham and Richardson's models) are also associated with one or more theological traditions.<sup>80</sup> I have diagrammed them below:

1. Conversion Model: - associated with Evangelical and Congregational traditions  
     William Abraham – Public Proclamation of the Gospel, Converting  
                                     Individuals to the Christian Faith, Church Growth  
                                     and Planting
2. Demonstration of God's Power Model: - associated with Pentecostal traditions  
     Rick Richardson – Demonstration of God's Power
3. Proclamation of God's Presence Model: - associated with Eastern Orthodox  
   tradition  
     William Abraham – Public Proclamation of the Gospel  
     Rick Richardson – Distinctive Lifestyle of the Alternative Community
4. Acts of Mercy Model: - associated with Liberation and Postcolonial theologies  
     William Abraham – Public Acts of Mercy, Justice, and Peace

---

<sup>80</sup> Teasdale, *Evangelism for Non-Evangelists*, 60.

5. Making Disciples Model: - associated with the Wesleyan or Anabaptist traditions

William Abraham – Recruiting and Making Disciples of Jesus

Rick Richardson – Distinctive Lifestyle of the Alternative Community

Teasdale acknowledges that certain faith traditions tend to gravitate towards specific models of evangelism, which makes sense when you begin to look at the landscape of the diversity of the church. He doesn't list any of the Calvinistic traditions, notably the Presbyterian Church (USA), but I would suggest that most people in our denomination would gravitate toward the "Proclamation of God's Presence" model and the "Acts of Mercy" model. In fact, this holds true to the pastor group interview results conducted (p. 55) and to the congregational data (p. 59). In addition, the most recent evangelism resource put forth by the PC (USA) is called 8 Habits of Evangelism,<sup>81</sup> and after reviewing it, I find that it also fits within the five models of evangelism that I have put forth, but it leans more heavily toward the "Proclamation of God's Presence" and "Acts of Mercy" models, which reflect Christologies of "God with Us, Life-Giver," and "Social Justice and Liberator." See below:

8 Habits of Evangelism:

1. Radical Welcome: - embracing and being changed by the gifts of the other, and a reflection of the welcoming, loving God in the world.

Models & Christological Emphasis:

Conversion (Savior)

Proclamation of God's Presence (God with Us & Life-Giver)

Making Disciples (Teacher)

2. Worship: - the gathering of the beloved community (in person and virtual)

Models & Christological Emphasis:

Proclamation of God's Presence (God with Us & Life-Giver)

---

<sup>81</sup> "8 Habits of Evangelism," Presbyterian Church (USA), Accessed June 20, 2022, <https://8habits.org>

3. Sacraments: - present in the mystery of the moment; living sacramentally with intentionality and mindfulness

Models & Christological Emphasis:

Proclamation of God's Presence (God with Us & Life-Giver)

4. Prayer: - prayer life draws others in; prayers are personal, for wholeness, and exhibit a bold confidence in God

Models & Christological Emphasis:

Demonstration of God's Power (Healer & Liberator)

5. Justice: - justice is what love looks like publicly; it rights wrongs, challenges systems of oppression, and meets the needs of all

Models & Christological Emphasis:

Acts of Mercy (Social Justice & Liberator)

6. Teaching: - teaching to "know how," instead of to "know what"; a way of life modeled after Christ

Models & Christological Emphasis:

Making Disciples (Teacher)

7. Fellowship: - authentic relationships; community with God, with one another, and with the world; the way we relate to others is a practice of evangelism

Models & Christological Emphasis:

Conversion (Savior)

8. Generosity: - giving good things to others freely and abundantly; being empathetic

Models & Christological Emphasis:

Acts of Mercy (Social Justice & Liberator)

As you can see, faith traditions tend to gravitate towards models that seem to align with their own Christologies and theology, but it's also true that the Church remains diverse in its composition and in its membership. Just because a denomination or a faith tradition may lean more heavily towards a particular evangelism model doesn't mean that every member of that church identifies with it or with the specific Christology it aligns

with. Congregations are made up of people from differing faith backgrounds and can bring their own faith traditions, Christology, and evangelism practice with them, but they may also join a congregation because they are more attracted to a different way to serving the Lord. Thus, there are many variables that contribute to one's Christology and evangelism practice, but the point remains the same – every church will be made up of people who identify with a particular Christology and evangelism practice resulting in a diverse makeup of people all along the spectrum of what we've identified thus far. Just within the research data I have provided from a group of Presbyterian pastors and one Presbyterian congregation, both provide clarity that every image of Jesus and every model of evangelism was identified with. And this is just data from one church and one group of pastors from one presbytery in the PC (USA). If there's this much diversity identified within one faith tradition, it very likely points to the same truth within any tradition. Thus, a "one size fits all" approach isn't going to involve all our members in the work of evangelism; we must prayerfully reflect and implement various ways of meeting our members where they are.

### **Utilizing this Resource:**

I would encourage pastors who are interested in expanding evangelistic opportunities within their congregations to consider putting this thesis into practice with their membership. I have provided two approaches that lead to similar outcomes – group interviews, or a class that focuses on these seven images of Jesus. It's important for congregants to reflect upon their own Christology, which can help them better understand their tendencies to engage in a particular model of evangelism. One could even preach a sermon series as a complementary approach, as I have done with my congregation, so



that others who do not participate in a weekly class can still be challenged to reflect on their own. Doing this together is an opportunity for the laity to be involved in self-reflection with intentionality. This provides a roadmap and credibility for the church to prayerfully discern additional ways that the church can be involved in different approaches of evangelistic outreach. I have provided my class outlines along with the small group questions for reflection that are attached to the specific pieces of art I used as a vehicle for conversation in the appendix as a guide for doing such a class. I recognize the diversity of teaching styles that exist among clergy and would encourage this to be used as a guide to suit what works best for you and your congregation. Because the artwork is licensed and requires permission to be shared in this project, I have not included the actual pieces of art, but have listed them so that you may find them online. Once again, you may discover other pieces of art that better capture what you would like to focus on, or you may choose to use different gospel stories to pair with each specific image of Jesus. Nonetheless, my hope is that this can benefit the Church as we seek to be faithful to our calling to share the good news.

### **Essentials to Sharing the Good News:**

So, if it's true that our Christology shapes our view and practice of evangelism, how should we share the good news? Thus far, I have provided different models that give a general outline of ways in which people can participate in evangelism based on their Christology. Rather than trying to expound upon and provide particular ways this can be done with each of the five models I have presented, I want to focus on the essentials we need to keep in mind as we share the good news. This provides a strong foundation that keeps us grounded in the ways of Christ and is applicable to every model of evangelism.

Priscilla Pope-Levinson and Frances Adeney do a great job of explaining their models of evangelism and what they look like and attempting to do that here would only replicate resources that are far more capable of leading us in those directions. I would implore you to check out their books, *Models of Evangelism* (Pope-Levinson) and *Graceful Evangelism* (Adeney), as well as Mark Teasdale's book, *Evangelism for Non-Evangelists*, as a preparatory guide for the mission of evangelism. I'd rather focus on things we need to keep in mind as we seek to follow the ways of Jesus in sharing his good news. I am utilizing and expounding upon a few of David Bosch's 18 points about evangelism that comes from his constructive understanding of evangelism.<sup>82</sup> I have taken the liberty to reduce these points into what I believe are the most important things for Christians to know and practice as followers of Jesus Christ. I will share and elaborate upon seven of Bosch's points.

### **Seven Points of Emphasis Regarding Evangelism:**

1. "Evangelism involves witnessing to what God has done, is doing, and will do."

Evangelism lies at the heart of a personal relationship with God. The apostle Paul understood his relationship with Christ as being a servant, a witness, for what Christ had done for him. In Romans 1:5 he says, "I received the privilege of a commission in his name to lead to faith and obedience men in all nations." He was commissioned by Christ to share the good news because of Christ's grace. Thus, Paul sees his witness as being indebted to Christ, not as a burden, but as giving thanks by being a missionary.<sup>83</sup>

---

<sup>82</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 421-430.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 140-141.

The evangelist's first task is to speak about what God has done in Jesus Christ. One cannot witness to something that they haven't personally experienced, seen, or heard. Evangelism is not devoid of a personal relationship with God, for that relationship bears witness to the personal experience of the mighty grace and love of God. Our task is to bear witness to what Scripture teaches, but it's not a word that exists only in the past; rather, it's the Living Word that has drawn us into his story, which is both past and present and will also be future. His story becomes our story, and if that's truly good news for us, then it's our privilege and response in gratitude to share this with others. Every day is an opportunity to share what God is doing in our lives. Of course, this also requires us to be attentive in our relationship with God. And our faith life is a constant work in progress as we cling to the hope that we have in Christ's final return and consummation of the Church. As the disciples were witnesses to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, so we too are called to bear witness to this great news of what God has done for us. Evangelism cannot be divorced from discipleship because this is what Christ proclaimed throughout his ministry on earth.

2. "Evangelism is always an invitation."

The message of Jesus Christ was always invitational. Listen to his own words throughout his ministry: "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people."<sup>84</sup> "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest."<sup>85</sup> "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is such as these that the

---

<sup>84</sup> *The HarperCollins Study Bible*, Matthew 4:19.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, Matthew 11:28.

kingdom of God belongs.”<sup>86</sup> “Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet”<sup>87</sup> “Come, you that are blessed by my Father; inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world...”<sup>88</sup> “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.”<sup>89</sup> “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink.”<sup>90</sup> “Come and have breakfast.”<sup>91</sup>

Jesus was constantly inviting others to himself or even inviting himself into a boat or a home with others. Jesus doesn’t manipulate or force himself on others. He may pursue someone, but he never forces them to believe. He always offers an invitation. Pastor and author Max Lucado once wrote, “If there were 1,000 steps between us and God, He will take all but one. He will leave the final one for us. The choice is ours.”<sup>92</sup> God will not force you to believe or trust him because he loves in freedom. And Jesus doesn’t choose favorites, for he proclaims the good news of God’s love and grace to everyone – the sinner and the saint, the tax collector and the Pharisee, the prostitute and the Sadducee, and the Jew and the Gentile. It’s God who invites us to receive his grace, to accept his salvation, and to live obediently in his ways.

---

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, Mark 10:14.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, Matthew 22:4.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, Matthew 25:34.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, Luke 19:5.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, John 7:37.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, John 21:12.

<sup>92</sup> Max Lucado, *A Gentle Thunder*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 5.

Because we follow a God whose invitation is always open and whose invitation is never addressed to “current resident,” rather to individuals called by name, so we too are called not to be exclusive in our invitation to his grace. In addition, we are not to manipulate or force ourselves on others either. It is our task to continue to extend the invitation to Christ; it’s not our task to make people respond in faith. We are called to sow seeds like the farmer; it’s God who waters the seed and makes it grow. The Holy Spirit leads us to share, and it’s the Holy Spirit who opens eyes, ears, and mouths to faith. We must resist being forceful, disrespectful, or claiming superiority over any other faith at the expense of God’s invitation. We do not own or possess salvation; we’ve only been tasked to point people to it – to receive the invitation of God’s grace in Jesus Christ. In addition, we are never to close off that invitation to anyone who has yet to accept it; it’s always open – as witnessed by a thief on the cross crucified right next to Jesus.

3. “The one who evangelizes is a witness not a judge.”

As I mentioned above, our call to evangelize is an open invitation. It’s not our decision to exclude others from receiving the invitation because we deem them unworthy or un-redeemable. For this is precisely why Christ came, “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”<sup>93</sup> If we regard someone as unforgivable, then we must remember that they are exactly who Christ came to save. John Calvin teaches the doctrine of election in terms of being freed for salvation and service. Election assures us that we belong to Christ and that there’s no one who can snatch us out of the grip of God’s grace. And yet, we are also called to serve, to share this invitation of Christ’s amazing grace to everyone. This frees us from becoming judges who seek to determine who the “sheep and

---

<sup>93</sup> *The HarperCollins Study Bible*, Mark 2:17.

goats” are. In fact, Jesus’ message always turned the thoughts of those who thought they were the most righteous and deserving of God’s salvation upside down when he would say things like, “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.”<sup>94</sup>

We must refuse to sit in the Judge’s seat. As Karl Barth shares in his *Church Dogmatics*, “As such He is quite alone amongst us, the only One who is judged and condemned and rejected just as He is the only One who has come and acts amongst us as the Judge.” In sum, Barth acknowledges that Jesus is the Judge who was judged in our place.<sup>95</sup> We have not earned the right to be the Judge, nor is it our place to assume who is saved and who is not; rather, it’s our place to continue to share the good news of the gospel. We are called to be witnesses of the grace we’ve received and to extend that same grace to others, regardless of whether they accept Christ as Lord and Savior. Our witness isn’t just in what we say but also in how we live and treat others. Jesus didn’t condemn anyone, and neither should we. Instead, we are to bear witness to the unconditional love of Christ that welcomes all the prodigals and lost sheep.

4. “Evangelism is only possible when the community that evangelizes – the Church – is a radiant manifestation of the Christian faith and exhibits an attractive lifestyle.”

Evangelism is more than articulating the good news of the gospel; it’s embodying it in our lives. Jesus claims that he is the light of the world, but he also tells us, “You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid.”<sup>96</sup> The Church walks in the

---

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, Matthew 21:31.

<sup>95</sup> Karl Barth, G.W. Bromiley, and Thomas F. Torrance. *Church Dogmatics. Volume IV.1: The Doctrine of Reconciliation* (London: T&T Clark International, 2004), 237-238.

<sup>96</sup> *The HarperCollins Study Bible*, Matthew 5:14.

light of Christ so that we can reflect the glow of his light amid a dark world. It is our task to embody the kingdom of heaven on earth in the ways in which we serve, love, care for, and even forgive one another. We are a community who bears witness to the grace and love of Jesus Christ but who also must embody what that grace and love look like with one another and with everyone beyond the church walls.

The danger lies in the Church not being a radiant manifestation of Christ. Unfortunately, there are many who refuse to be a part of the Church because they have seen too many self-professed Christians live in hypocrisy or who judge and mistreat others. Jesus didn't just preach a message of love and forgiveness; he lived it to the very end. He didn't just say you should love your enemy; he did it as he prayed for his Father to forgive those who crucified him. The danger for the Church is to treat Christ's grace as cheap. This is what theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer feared. Rather than living to please Christ in all that we do, we can easily do what we want to do, expecting to be forgiven. This is not living to follow Christ but asking Christ to follow us. This treats God as a genie in a bottle rather than our Lord and Savior.

Paul says that we are ambassadors of Christ. This can be positive or detrimental based on how we choose to live. Thus, we are to live in the ways of Jesus, which means that we are to preach and to practice the good news. I believe that Bosch's sixteenth and eighteenth points, "Evangelism cannot be divorced from the preaching and practicing of justice" and "Evangelism is not only verbal proclamation," cannot be divorced from this one. Our preaching must be active in our lives as we strive to seek God's justice in the world. Thus, we work against injustices that would deny the light of Christ's love to all. When we do this, our message and our lives reflect and radiate Christ's light in the world.

The continuity of our message and our actions attracts others. This is why Jesus says, “In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”<sup>97</sup>

5. “Evangelism offers people salvation as a present gift and with it assurance of eternal bliss.”

The writer of Ephesians proclaims, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.”<sup>98</sup> Salvation is a gift, faith is a gift, and grace is a gift freely given by God. Salvation is more than eternity in heaven; it’s real life now. The Greek word, *sozo*, bears witness to life now and the life to come. Jesus has come to give us abundant life now, not just an eschatological reality that we have to wait on. This gift of real life is transformative because it changes the way we perceive our lives in perspective with God’s salvation. We no longer live for ourselves but for the One who created us, redeemed us, and who sustains us. Because he lives, so we live. And we live not just for ourselves but to share this life-giving gift with those who live without real purpose and meaning in their lives. It’s a gift to be experienced now, but also one to be shared, because we can’t own or possess it.

Our salvation directs our attention to God – to worship, to walk alongside, and to serve. Our salvation gives us hope that no matter what happens in this life, we have the promise of God of being with us to see us through. Our salvation gives us hope that not even death can separate us from God’s love, for Christ has been raised, and therefore we will rise with him. However, it’s equally important that we do not somehow view “eternal

---

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, Matthew 5:16.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, Ephesians 2:8-9.



bliss” as “playing golf and vacationing on the beach,” as if paradise is intended to make us happy. The blessing of eternity is being in the presence of God, worshiping and enjoying God forever. As the Psalmist declares, “One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.”<sup>99</sup> We will be with God forever and not only with God, but also with all the saints – the Church, which reminds us that we will be reunited with our loved ones and even surprised by some we would have never expected to be there.

Therefore, evangelism offers this gift that we can’t give, a gift that only God can grant. Because it is a gift, it isn’t earned or deserved by anyone. This puts everyone on the same playing field, for salvation is not based on race, gender, class, educational status, or anything that humans use to differentiate or separate themselves. It is based on the gift of Jesus Christ, to be experienced now and to be fully revealed when we enter his presence for all eternity.

6. “Authentic evangelism is always contextual.”

Jesus pursues humanity by entering this sinful and broken world. He leaves the glory of heaven for the scorn of earth. He becomes fully human even though he is also fully divine. He enters a specific context, born an Israelite living under the occupation of Rome. He is born a peasant and identifies with those who struggle day-to-day. His mission is not devoid of the specific context in which he lives, for he encounters real people who find themselves in differing life situations. He doesn’t call people out of the world in which they live, but he calls them into a new reality – to live into the kingdom

---

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, Psalm 27:4.

reign of God. This kingdom is different from the brokenness that exists in our world. The Beatitudes speak to the realities of those who found themselves in difficult circumstances, yet Jesus called them blessed. Jesus took this message everywhere he went to the poorest and even to the wealthiest of towns. While Jesus' ministry was limited primarily to Israel and its occupants, he commissioned his disciples to take it all over the world. Stephan Bevens and Roger Schroeder state, "The church only comes to be as it understands and accepts mission anywhere and everywhere in the world."<sup>100</sup>

The Church is not an escape from the world. The Church is called to follow her Lord whose mission is anywhere and everywhere. This means that we must be sent people, not simply gathering within the walls of the church building but also being the church in the community and the world. The Church exists to point people to the risen Christ whose kingdom seeks justice, peace, and equality in this world. Therefore, we reach out to people in their context, recognizing that there are many who find themselves in unjust situations and who desperately need the good news of Jesus Christ. Christ desires for them to be liberated from oppression and structural systems that hold them down. As Christians, we are called to not only share the good news of Jesus' love and care for all, but to embody it as we care for the least among us. Thus, we are called into different contexts that can equally know the lordship of Jesus Christ, which as David Bosch states is, "an authoritative word of hope that the world as we know it will not always be the way it is."<sup>101</sup> Thus, our authentic evangelism is always shared within the context of those to whom we minister.

---

<sup>100</sup> Bevens and Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, 10.

<sup>101</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 428.

7. “Evangelism is not only verbal proclamation.”

Sharing the good news of Jesus Christ should be done in word and deed. In 2020 I conducted a survey on evangelism and discipleship with 31 pastors and five commissioned ruling elders serving in Salem Presbytery, much as I have done for this project. That project was focused on the need for “non-traditional” ministry, which was defined as evangelism beyond the church. The survey intended to prove or disprove if mission was the primary model of evangelism practiced within the churches these pastors lead. The survey concluded that most pastors viewed mission as synonymous with evangelism and that mission was the primary vehicle for evangelism, which goes hand in hand with the Christological data and evangelism models shown forth in this project! When asked if mission work and evangelism/discipleship are synonymous or mutually exclusive, 83.3% responded synonymous, while only 13.89% responded mutually exclusive. It’s possible that the majority of pastors view mission work and evangelism/discipleship distinctly, but with the same purpose. Yet, another question specifically asked, “In our service (mission) to others, is it necessary that we share why we are serving them?” Half of the respondents did not find it necessary to explicitly speak about Jesus in their service. They viewed their service as speaking for itself. The other half disagreed, noting that serving and sharing must go hand in hand. Gender didn’t influence the outcome either, for half of all women and men were split in their responses.

Those who responded that it’s unnecessary to speak about Jesus openly as they serve others, view mission work and evangelism as the same thing. They see faith in action as a living sermon, naturally sharing Christ’s love. The quote often attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, “Preach the gospel at all times and if necessary, use words.” was

explicitly mentioned twice in the survey as a justification of such behavior. They believe others will know why they are serving, seeing Jesus through their efforts, which is an incarnational theology. Those who responded that it is necessary to share our faith, acknowledge those who are served need to know that it's Jesus who serves them and that we are just instruments of his love. They affirm we can't assume that someone will naturally know why we are serving them. They conclude the Church is not just another organization that seeks to be morally good but is called by Jesus to care for others because of what he has done for us, therefore this message must be shared. They also believe that words and deeds are complimentary and that you can't have one without the other.

Within the Church, and in this instance, just within a group of pastors from the same presbytery and denomination, you will find differences of opinion on how one should share the good news, which again shows the diversity of the body of Christ. Some would argue that verbal proclamation is the only way, while others would argue that what one does, their deeds, is the only way. The truth is that the word and the deed cannot be separated from one another; they go hand in hand. David Bosch quotes Leslie Newbigin stating, "It is the "Word made flesh" that is the gospel. The deed without the word is dumb; the word without the deed is empty. Words interpret deeds and deeds validate words, which does not mean that every deed must have a word attached to it, nor every word a deed."<sup>102</sup> It's important that our words and our deeds share the good news of Jesus; they must be consistent!

---

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 430.

In sum, how should we share the good news? The same way Jesus shared it. These seven essentials of evangelism must guide us as we acknowledge the Jesus we've come to know most clearly and as we engage in evangelistic practices that correlate with our understanding of Christ. As a diverse body of Christ, we have been called together as the Church to engage in God's mission of sharing what we know to be true – our bias of the good news in Christ. We should celebrate this rich diversity as God's great design so that we may all contribute in ways that meet people where they are, just as Jesus has met us where we are. And even though our specific denomination or faith tradition may lean towards particular evangelistic practices, we must recognize the diversity of Christologies present within our congregations and be intentional in prayerfully discerning how God may lead us to expand evangelistic practices that provide a place for everyone to participate in ways they feel called. In doing so, we live into our calling as disciples of Jesus to "tell the old, old story of Jesus and his love," reclaiming evangelism as good news!

## Chapter 6

### Reflections Upon and Evaluation of the Project

*“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,  
and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.”*

Proverbs 9:10

#### Summary of the Project:

The topic of evangelism is large and multifaceted. Trying to understand evangelism as a part of mission or trying to understand the interrelatedness of mission and evangelism is challenging in and of itself. The topic of evangelism can lead into practices (models and curricula that provide specific ways to practice sharing our faith), it can focus on evangelism within the church, or to non-believers outside of the church, and it can focus on sharing our faith with people of other faith traditions in America or in their own cultures. These are only a few examples of what exists under the category of evangelism. Metaphorically, evangelism is an ocean filled with various species of fish that represent different dimensions of it swimming in its waters.

My initial thought process for this project was tackling the ocean rather than being one fish in the sea. After conversations with my advisors and prayerful discernment, God provided clarity as I was working on a sermon one week. An independent study course with Dr. Adrian Bird helped provide the initial theological framework for this project, particularly the readings from Stephan Bevans and Roger Schroeder's, *Constants in Context*. The three typologies shared opened my eyes to see how people in the Church have differing approaches to sharing Christ based on the six constants. Christology is just one of those constants, and I believe it's one of the most influential as it pertains to how we practice evangelism. After reading Brian McLaren's

book, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, I was able to see a practical framework that complimented what Bevans and Schroeder articulated as it pertains to the seven images of Jesus that McLaren presents. Based on these two texts the question emerged, “Does our Christology shape our view and practice of evangelism?” I knew that it was true for me, and if it was true for me, it could likely be true for others. I had to self-reflect first to test out my own question before I could research it with others. In addition, I needed to research different biblical models of evangelism. Priscilla Pope-Levinson, Frances Adeney, Rick Richardson, and William Abraham provide different but similar models that I categorized into five simplified models that correlate with the seven images of Jesus.

Being a pastor, I wanted to see if my thesis was true with my colleagues, and since we pastor congregations filled with a diverse group of people, I also wanted to see if it was true for our parishioners. If true, it would open the eyes of pastors and parishioners to rethink how we do evangelism, but it would also provide clarity on our personal bias for the good news. Our favorite gospel stories are our favorite because we have encountered Jesus in them. Sharing our bias toward the good news should come naturally to us because it’s our personal testimony of experiencing the risen Christ. This is transformational for us, and it can also be transformational for others. It can also be transformational for our churches because it validates the need to approach evangelism in a variety of ways that fit into the theological framework of our people. This allows for everyone to be involved in the mission of the Church, and it celebrates the diversity of ways in which biblical evangelism can be done. This project provides context for conversation with pastors and parishioners to prayerfully self-reflect and see how God is leading them to expand their vision for evangelism. For as the writer of the proverb

states, "... the knowledge of the Holy One is insight."<sup>103</sup> In this case, it's an insight into how we share our bias for the good news.

### **Key Learnings:**

I believe there are variables that have contributed to differences in my research. Interviewing pastors regarding their Christology is different from interviewing the average layperson. Pastors are trained to think theologically about what they believe and are challenged to articulate it on an ongoing basis. All the pastors surveyed noted that their Christology is present in their sermons every time they preach. It's worth noting that because they are adept to speaking theologically, it's also easier to understand their Christology as they share their favorite stories because they articulate them well. This made it much easier to code their responses because they spelled it out in the interview even though they didn't have any foreknowledge of what I was teaching to my congregants.

On the other hand, lay persons can also articulate their Christology, but many do not often think about the Jesus they've come to know most clearly. It's buried within them, and it takes some self-reflection for them to articulate it. The Sunday school class provided a way for them to explore this. However, I recognize that my own pastoral authority may have played a role in the outcomes. I taught certain stories from my own vantage point of sharing each image of Jesus with them. While my intent was not to lead them, I do believe that it could potentially result in influencing the results. For instance, I taught on the Prodigal Son, the Good Samaritan, the feeding of the 5,000, and the resurrection account as a part of the class. Ironically, the stories that were shared as their

---

<sup>103</sup> *The HarperCollins Study Bible*, Proverbs 9:10.



favorite stories were all of these. In chapter four, I noted that of all the stories shared, the Parable of the Prodigal Son was mentioned six times, the Parable of the Good Samaritan was mentioned six times, the feeding of the 5,000 was mentioned six times, and the resurrection account was mentioned five times. That's 23 responses of the 48 participants. Is this simply coincidental? Did the class remind them of their favorite story, or did they just choose from the stories that were taught? I don't know the exact answer to those questions, but I am curious how things would have turned out had I done group interviews rather than teaching a class.

As I articulated before, some of the variables that came to light in this research were denominational upbringing, life circumstances, and even vocation as it pertained to the laity surveyed. Pastoral authority also plays a role here as it comes to denominational upbringing; for all pastors in this research admitted that their Christology influences their week-to-week sermons, thus lay persons are being led to see one specific image of Jesus on a regular basis that can shape their own Christology. In turn, this could influence the way they feel led to practice evangelism, or it could also make them think that they see Jesus in a particular light even though their favorite gospel story and evangelism model would suggest otherwise, as the congregational trend suggests in the data of this project. Life circumstances can also play a role in the image of Jesus we connect with the most; for instance, someone who has been cured of a serious illness can see Jesus as "Healer" even if their interpretation of their favorite gospel story and evangelism model may suggest a "God with Us" model. Of course, the image of "God with Us," is closely connected to healing so it's easy for some of these images to get intertwined. Vocation can also play a role in one's Christology, just as the congregant who was a lifelong

teacher connected with Jesus as “Teacher,” even though her interpretation of her favorite gospel story and evangelism model suggested her Christology is to see Jesus as “Savior.”

Further research could be done in this area as it pertains to one’s Christology over time. I did not delve into questions of whether one’s image of Jesus is consistent with the way they have always connected to him. If life circumstances can be a variable of how we see Jesus most clearly, then it’s quite possible that someone could be drawn to a specific image of Jesus but later connect to a different image of him based on the current season of life they find themselves in. For instance, can someone acknowledge that Jesus as “Social Justice” has been their primary image of Jesus until they were diagnosed with cancer, and now, they identify with Jesus as “Healer” or as “God with Us?” If so, does their evangelistic practice remain where it was before, or does it shift to align with the image of Jesus they now connect with? These are further questions worth exploring.

### **Changes in the Implementation of the Project:**

The initial plan of the project was to conduct surveys for both pastors and lay persons that would be identical in the questions asked. A survey allows for more people to be involved and takes less of their time when trying to get a large sampling of data. However, surveys can also be more difficult to gain greater clarity of insight because too often participants provide little written information that would expound upon the particulars. Therefore, it was felt that conducting group interviews with pastors via Zoom technology would allow for the flexibility of those involved as well as let them know that the interview would take no longer than an hour of their time. Asking them to only reflect on two questions for conversation also made the exercise less arduous on their already

busy schedules. The group interviews would provide an opportunity for me to ask clarifying questions, if necessary, to understand their point of view better.

As far as conducting the research with the congregation, I felt it was best to provide a class that would meet a need during the season of Lent that would provide greater clarity to what I was aiming to do. The congregation wanted to support my efforts in my research as we prayerfully discern how we can expand opportunities for evangelism in the future. The class provided an opportunity for anyone to participate as much or as little as they wanted. I was very clear that no one should take the survey at the end of the seven weeks unless they had participated in each session for the integrity of the research. I chose to provide the online survey to the laity to make it easier for them to participate. Group interviews would be more tedious and difficult to manage and more than likely would have led to less participation than my minimum target of 30 people.

This change provided mixed methods of research to provide different avenues of trying to achieve the same results. Group interviews provided a qualitative approach that required listening to pastors express the ways they interpret their favorite gospel stories and why they prefer a specific evangelistic model. Lay surveys provided a quantitative approach as it pertained to their preferred image of Jesus and evangelistic practice, as well as a qualitative approach as it pertained to articulating their favorite gospel story and why. Mixing these methods can validate research, but they can also raise more questions, which is true in this research project. Both methods proved that our Christology shapes our view and practice of evangelism. However, the limitations of different approaches result in unanswered questions with the laity involved. While less than half of the respondents (45.8%) proved the thesis to be true, underlying variables are present that

make the data more challenging to discern. Group interviews would have provided the clarity needed to compare “apples to apples,” but it was not the approach taken. The only way to evaluate such data is to measure their responses to their favorite gospel story and their evangelism model, which is what was done with the pastors. Doing this showed that 15 respondents articulated a consistent image of Jesus from their favorite gospel story that matched their preferred model of evangelism, even though it didn’t correlate with the image of Jesus they said they identified with. This increased the likelihood that the thesis is more prevalent within the laity than the original data suggests, changing the percentage from 45.8% to 77%. As you can see, the mixed method of research can be beneficial, but also challenging in understanding outcomes.

The other change to the initial project involved re-ordering two chapters. Initially, I had planned to write, “How Should the Church Share the Good News?” as the fourth chapter and then have, “Our Christology Shapes our Evangelistic Practice” as the fifth chapter. Once I began writing, I realized that the chapters needed to be flipped because sharing the good news should be understood in the context of how our Christology shapes our practice. Doing it as originally planned would have put the “cart before the horse,” and now it directly flows from the research, which provides a practical approach to how we do evangelism regardless of which Christology or model we identify with.

### **Evaluation of Content and Process:**

As I reflect on this project, I am grateful for everyone who participated in the research – both pastors and members of my congregation. Their participation has provided the data necessary to evaluate the thesis’ validity. The content of the project is based on both the theological and practical understanding of how Christology and

evangelism intersect. Brian McLaren's suggested images of Jesus provided a framework for speaking about and reflecting on the Jesus we've most clearly come to know. I changed his terminology to reflect a more biblical perspective of Jesus in the gospels, which resonates more with the average layperson. In doing so, it provided space for my parishioners to self-reflect and identify the Jesus they have come to know most clearly. This was an eye-opener because many of them had never really thought about having a bias towards a particular image of Jesus. It also provided an opportunity for them to share candidly with one another week to week which image of Jesus they were drawn to. In addition, the theological framework of the project provided an opportunity to share the goal of the project with all the pastors interviewed, which sparked curiosity and an interest to follow up once the project was completed. Many saw a practical outcome that could be helpful to their own congregations moving forward. The only challenge with the content of the project is that Jesus is Jesus and trying to divide him into different categories seems a bit like modalism. Clearly, modalism is not the goal, for Jesus is the image of the invisible God and encompasses all these images in his being, but it can present theological issues. For instance, one pastor commented that he could not choose any specific image of Jesus when asked.

The process of taking the content and formulating it in a way that provides an outcome has been the most challenging part of the project. Coding the results required synthesizing evangelistic models, which can be challenging given that some of them seem to overlap. It was important to maintain integrity in defining the models by comparing them from the different resources I've shared to validate their credibility. In addition, the seven images of Jesus had to be coded with the five models presented so

that the research data could be clearly defined. The seven images did not fit perfectly into seven different models of evangelism because a few of the images of Jesus also tend to overlap. I've mentioned this in chapter four (see pages 49-50) as it pertains to the image of "Liberator" and "God with Us" and "Life-Giver." However, once the evangelism models and images of Jesus were correlated together, it provided a clear framework to appropriately receive the data.

The group interviews I conducted with the pastors required them to articulate their favorite gospel story, and it required me to listen to how they understood the story to determine their Christology. Most of the time it was obvious which image of Jesus they were communicating, and when it wasn't, I had to ask clarifying questions without leading them to my desired conclusion. One thing I quickly learned doing the first two sets of group interviews was that someone could share the same gospel story and identify with differing images of Jesus. I did not anticipate this initially, but it helped remind me that our interpretation of the story matters and that each story can be seen differently. As it pertains to the congregational data, I am aware that a different approach and method can also provide different outcomes. I have expressed these in my key learnings above, but part of me wishes I had conducted group interviews with my congregants to better understand the variables I've discovered. Overall, I've been pleased with the integrity of the content and process that has provided the data in this project.

### **Implications for Future Ministry:**

In chapter five, I shared what I believe to be seven of the most important points that David Bosch offers within his list of eighteen points regarding evangelism, but I would like to add another, an eighth point, that he doesn't speak directly to, that is very

present in the life of Jesus and should be in our lives too. This comes from the context of my research but also from my experience in pastoral ministry, as I have sought to follow Jesus and share my own bias for the good news.

8. Evangelism is always personal and relational.

While it is true that Jesus announced that the kingdom of God was at hand, and true that he preached repentance; it is also true that Jesus invested his time with many disciples (not just the twelve) and took the time to get to know others in his community and beyond. Jesus' proclamation of good news wasn't simply an evangelistic crusade where large groups gathered, but it took place as he encountered people in need – personally encountering people with physical, spiritual, or emotional needs. Jesus wasn't trying to manipulate people to be his followers; otherwise, many of his skeptics would have followed him rather than conspiring to crucify him. Instead, he befriended those who were willing to accept him. His demeanor, his love and grace, and his teachings drew people to him. He also befriended his opponents, accepting their invitations to table fellowship even if they had evil intentions for doing so. Jesus was always relational with everyone he encountered and even with those who sought him out.

If the Church treats people as objects to be manipulated, then we are simply trying to “save souls” in whatever form or manner it takes. This becomes modern-day imperialism. These methods can take the form of scaring people out of hell, guiltning others to repent, or reducing the gospel to a wealth, health, and prosperity message that entices people to seek God for blessings. This is how evangelism has received a bad reputation. However, if we truly believe that Jesus is the good news, that through his amazing love he comes to save us, to redeem us, to lead us into God's kingdom reign,

experiencing eternal life now as we fully anticipate it after death, then evangelism has to be focused on a positive message of joy as it relates to our own experience of salvation in Jesus Christ, and as it relates to our own relationship with the triune God.

As all people matter to God, so all people must also matter to us. Therefore, evangelism cannot be devoid of relationship. We affirm that God is three in one, triune, and in relationship within God's self. God comes to us in Jesus Christ to be in relationship with us and grants us the gift of the Holy Spirit, of who is Christ's presence in relationship with us daily. Thus, the *missio Dei* becomes the church's mission too. We cannot divorce God's being and act from our call to be in relationship with others. Thus, evangelism must model Jesus' relational witness. As I stated in chapter one, "I didn't come to a saving faith in Jesus Christ apart from the Church; someone had to share the story with me so that I could claim it for myself." That witness comes from a personal relationship with someone else who has a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Evangelism must always be in the context of relationships!

In sum, the gospel is meant to be shared and every believer is called to be an evangelist. Together as the Church of Jesus Christ we are to bear witness to the good news we've experienced in Christ. If we truly desire to share the gospel and to promote the kingdom of heaven on earth as it is in heaven, we must be intentional to tell the stories of Jesus that have touched our lives and continue to mold and shape us. We can reclaim evangelism as a good thing; not as something condemnatory that focuses on our disobedience, but on Christ's obedience for us that draws us into his grace, mercy, and love, living into the abundant life in the present. In doing so, we are intentional as



Christ's Church to live into our mission, sharing our faith because it's good news that must be known and shared in a broken world filled with depressing news each day.

## Bibliography

- Abraham, William J. *The Logic of Evangelism*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1959.
- Adeney, Frances S. *Graceful Evangelism: Christian Witness in a Complex World*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2010.
- Barth, Karl, G.W. Bromiley, and Thomas F. Torrance. *Church Dogmatics. Volume IV.1: The Doctrine of Reconciliation*. London, England: T&T Clark International, 2004.
- Bosch, David J. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission*. 20th Anniversary ed. Orbis Books, 2014.
- Bevans, Stephen, and Roger P. Schroeder. *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004.
- Book of Order: *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA), Part II*. Louisville: Office of the General Assembly, 2019-2021.
- Brueggeman, Walter. *Isaiah 40-66: Westminster Bible Companion*. Edited by David L. Bartlett and Patrick D. Miller. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998.
- Coleman, Robert E., and Roy J. Fish. 1993. *The Master Plan of Evangelism*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Revell, 1993.
- Cranfield, C. E. B. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*. London: T & T Clark International, 2010.
- Dickson, Charles. "Listening to the Unchurched: Attitude Changes Needed in Evangelization." *The Priest* 70, no. 5 (May 2014): 13–14.
- Field of Dreams*. Directed by Phil Alden Robinson. United States: Universal Pictures, 1989.
- Flett, John G. *The Witness of God: The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth and the Nature of Christian Community*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2010.
- Gillespie, Thomas W. "The Historical/Cultural Setting for Evangelism: The Issues and Challenges of Evangelism Today." In *Evangelism in the Reformed Tradition*, edited by Arnold B. Lovell. Decatur, Georgia: CTS Press, 1990.

- Glory to God: *The Presbyterian Hymnal*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013.
- Gonzalez, Justo L. *The Story of Christianity, V 1: The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation*. San Francisco, California: Harper & Row, 1984.
- Guder, Darrell L. *Called to Witness: Doing Missional Theology*. The Gospel and Our Culture Series. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2015.
- Guder, Darrell L., and Lois Barrett. *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans, 1998.
- Hirsch, Alan, and Tim Catchim. *The Permanent Revolution: Apostolic Imagination and Practice for the 21st Century Church*. John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2012.
- Lewis, C.S. *Mere Christianity*. New York, NY: Touchstone, 1996.
- Lucado, Max. *A Gentle Thunder*. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1995.
- Mason, Jennifer. *Qualitative Researching*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2018.
- Matthews, Tracey. "New Wineskins for a Vintage Gospel." *St Mark's Review* 233 (October 2015): 87–102.
- McKnight, Scot. *Sermon on the Mount*, ed. Temper Longman III. The Story of God Bible Commentary. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2016.
- McLaren, Brian D. *A Generous Orthodoxy: Why I Am a Missional, Evangelical, Post/Protestant, Liberal/Conservative, Mystical/Poetic, Biblical, Charismatic/Contemplative, Fundamentalist/Calvinist, Anabaptist/Anglican, Methodist, Catholic, Green, Incarnational, Depressed-yet-Hopeful, Emergent, Unfinished Christian*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2006.
- McLaren, Brian D. *More Ready than You Realize: The Power of Everyday Conversations*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2001.
- Mitchell, Travis. "In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace." Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project. October 17, 2019. Accessed March 20, 2022. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>.
- Newbigin, Lesslie. *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1989.
- Peterson, Eugene H. *Tell it Slant: A conversation on the language of Jesus in his stories and prayers*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2008.

- Pippert, Rebecca Manley. *Out of the Saltshaker*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979.
- Pope-Levison, Priscilla. *Models of Evangelism*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2010.
- Posterski, Daniel C. *Reinventing Evangelism: New Strategies for Presenting Christ in Today's World*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1989.
- Presbyterian Church (USA). "8 Habits of Evangelism." Accessed June 21, 2022. <https://8habits.org>
- Presbyterian Church (USA). "Eradicating Systemic Poverty." Matthew 25 – "A bold vision and invitation." Accessed June 20, 2022. <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/matthew-25/poverty/>
- Presbyterian Church (USA). "PC (USA) Research Services - Church Trends." Accessed June 27, 2022. <https://church-trends.pcusa.org/overall/pcusa/membership/5/>
- Presbyterian Church (USA). "PC (USA) Research Services - Church Trends." Accessed June 27, 2022. <https://church-trends.pcusa.org/presbytery/150584/membership/5/>
- Presbyterian Church (USA). "What Do Presbyterians Believe about Evangelism?" Accessed June 20, 2022. <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/what-we-believe/evangelism5/>.
- Reese, Martha Grace. *Unbinding the Gospel: Real Life Evangelism*. 2nd ed. St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2008.
- Richardson, Rick. "Evangelism and Social Capital: The Bridge Building and Bridge-Breaking Dimensions of Different Paradigms and Practices of Witness." *Witness: The Journal of the Academy for Evangelism in Theological Education* 28, (2014): 5-30.
- The HarperCollins Study Bible. *New Revised Standard Version Study Bible with Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books*. London, England: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993.
- Teasdale, Mark R. *Evangelism for Non-Evangelists: Sharing the Gospel Authentically*. InterVarsity Press Academic, 2016.
- Tickle, Phyllis. *The Great Emergence: How Christianity is Changing and Why*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2008.
- Tidsworth, Mark E. *Shift: Three Big Moves For The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church*. Pinnacle Leadership Press, 2015.

Wang, Wendy, and Alysse ElHage. "Here's Who Stopped Going to Church during the Pandemic." Christianity Today. January 20, 2022. Accessed March 20, 2022.  
<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2022/january-web-only/attendance-decline-covid-pandemic-church.html>.

## **Appendix A**

### **Images of Jesus Teaching Outlines**

## Images of Jesus Week One Savior of Sinners

### Opening Prayer

#### What We're Doing: (5 minutes)

- This class is designed to get us thinking about the Jesus we've come to know, because our authentic relationship with Christ dictates the way we share him; we call this evangelism.
- For the next seven weeks we will look at different images of the same Jesus. I'm asking you to prayerfully discern which Jesus you most identify with. We will use biblical art to help us think about Jesus. It's important to note that not every image is of Jesus, but a story connected to an image of him.
- **Survey:** At the end of our classes, I will email you a brief online survey through Survey Monkey, asking you to reflect on what we've done together. This will provide the data needed for my research and hopefully it will prove the diversity that exists within our own church and charts a course for us to discern how to expand our evangelistic efforts to share Christ.
- **Consent Form to Participate** – must be signed by anyone who will do the survey at the end of this class! Couples can sign one consent form but will need to do separate surveys (need a separate email for this).
- **Recording on Zoom:** All classes are being recorded through Zoom and will be available for you to watch if you miss a class. It's important that you participate in all seven classes to adequately answer the survey.
- **Tables:** On your table you will find a consent form, please sign and if you are willing to allow me to use a quote by you, you can initial it as well. You will also find small group questions for our slides today in case you can't see them well on the screen. Please designate someone from your group to be a reporter to the large group for our discussion together.

### Jesus – Savior of Sinners

1. **Matthew 9:9-13** – Read together (5 minutes)

#### Image – Michelangelo Caravaggio – The Calling of St. Matthew

Cardinal Francesco Maria Del Monte helped him gain his first major public commission for the side walls of the Contarelli Chapel, in San Luigi dei Francesi. It involved two pictures: *The Calling of St Matthew* (1599-1600) and *The Martyrdom of St Matthew* (1599-1600). Both works were an immediate success and were followed by a series of masterpieces that made him the most exciting painter of religious paintings in Rome.<sup>104</sup>

---

<sup>104</sup> <http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/famous-paintings/calling-of-saint-matthew.htm>

### **Short synopsis:**

Tax collectors worked for Rome. Matthew is Jewish and is considered a traitor by his own people. A tax collector was considered a sinner by the Jewish people. They were wealthy because they could exploit the poor as long as Rome got what was required. Thus, they were shunned by their own peers. Jesus radically interacts with Matthew/Levi and invites him to be a disciple.

**Small Groups** – Questions (10 minutes)

### **Small Group Questions on the Calling of Matthew**

1. Why do you think Matthew is pointing a finger back at himself?
2. Who do you suppose Matthew is hanging out with?
3. Where do you think Matthew is hanging out?
4. What does this picture say about Jesus and his mission?

**Report Back** – (5 minutes)

**Transition to next Image**

2. **Luke 15:11-31** – read together (5 minutes)

### **Image – Ben Long: The Prodigal Son – Montreat College Chapel**

Ben Long is a contemporary artist whose known for his frescoes. Studying in Italy, he was awarded the Leonardo da Vinci International Art Award.<sup>105</sup> Much of his work can be found close to home: Crossnore School in Crossnore, NC, St. Mary's Episcopal Church in West Jefferson, Montreat College, Wingate University, and First Presbyterian Church of Charlotte just to name a few.

### **Short synopsis:**

The youngest son tells his father “I wish you were dead; give me the money you owe me.” The father gives it to him, which is not a cultural norm. The son squanders the wealth in wild living, blowing it all on himself and has nothing when a famine hits. He hired himself out to a man who had him feed pigs. Thus, he was in Gentile territory, and you must remember that pigs are unclean animals, of which the Jews were not to touch or eat. He finally decides to go back home to be a slave to his father, severing the ties of being a son. His father sees him from a distance, runs to him, which was unbecoming of a Jewish man, and treats him like royalty. He doesn't even give him time to finish his rehearsed speech. Instead, he rejoices that he's home; he once was lost but now he's found. Meanwhile the elder brother is unaware of what's taking place. When he realizes what's going on he's angry and refuses to go to the party. His father also comes to him

---

<sup>105</sup> <https://www.benlongfineart.com/accomplishments>



and explains why he should be grateful that his brother is back, but the parable ends without us knowing whether the eldest brother holds out or joins in on the celebration.

**Small Group Questions – (10 minutes)**

**Small Group Questions on the Prodigal Son**

1. Where are the father's hands in this painting? What might they communicate?
2. What's the son's posture and how do you think he feels meeting his father?
3. What does the brother's posture communicate in relation to the others pictured?
4. Why are pigs in this painting? What do they convey?

**Report Back – (5 minutes)**

**Wrap Up:**

Jesus is the Savior, he pursues an ostracized tax collector, and his parable teaches us of God's grace and patience, forgiving the sins of the wayward child. He restores him to his status as son, an heir of his estate. No one is outside the bounds of being saved and redeemed from their past.

**Closing Prayer**

## **Images of Jesus Week Two**

### **Healer**

#### **Opening Prayer**

### **Jesus – Healer**

1. **Mark 10:46-52** – Read together (5 minutes)

#### **Image – Unknown Artist – Blind Bartimaeus**

The beauty of the internet is that you can find just about anything, like this painting. As I searched to find who the artist was; I never found out who it is or a story behind it. So, this is an unknown artist who has given us a depiction of this story we just read.

#### **Short Synopsis:**

Bartimaeus is the name of the blind man, which is interesting because Mark doesn't speak the names of anyone else that Jesus heals in his gospel. He's a blind beggar who sits by the roadside day after day begging for alms. Jesus is leaving Jericho, which is probably after Luke's account of the story of Zacchaeus. This time Jesus passes by the beggar, and Bartimaeus calls out to him – well, he shouts – “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Many rebuke him and tell him to keep quiet, but he gets even louder. Finally, Jesus tells his disciples to call for him to come. He leaves his cloak behind – the only possession he has (he would have used it to collect money and to stay warm). Jesus then asks him what he wants him to do for him. Strange, isn't it? It's obvious that he's blind. Bartimaeus says he wants to see and then Jesus tells him, “Go, your faith has healed you.”

**Small Groups** – Questions (10 minutes)

#### **Small Group Questions on Blind Bartimaeus**

1. Jesus reaches out his hand to touch Bartimaeus. What does this communicate about Christ's mission?
2. Bartimaeus is also reaching out to touch Jesus. What does this communicate about humanity?
3. Although Bartimaeus is blind, he can “see” who Jesus is. What does this say about physical and spiritual blindness?
4. Does Jesus' mission include healing of both?

**Report Back** – (5 minutes)

**Transition to next Image**

## 2. **Mark 2:1-12** – read together (5 minutes)

### **Image – Harold Copping – The Healing of the Paralytic**

Harold Copping entered London's Royal Academy where he won a Landseer Scholarship to study in Paris. He quickly became established as a successful painter and illustrator, living in Croydon and Hornsey during the early years of his career. Copping had links with the missionary societies of his time including the London Missionary Society (LMS), who commissioned him as an illustrator of Biblical scenes. To achieve authenticity and realism for his illustrations he travelled to Palestine and Egypt. The resulting book, *The Copping Bible* (1910), became a best-seller and led to more Bible commissions. These included *A Journalist in the Holy Land* (1911), *The Golden Land* (1911), *The Bible Story Book* (1923) and *My Bible Book* (1931). Copping used family, friends and neighbors as models in his paintings, keeping a stock of costumes and props at his home.<sup>106</sup>

#### **Short Synopsis:**

Jesus is in Capernaum, which is close to where he gives his Sermon on the Mount. He's in a house preaching and a huge crowd gathers, so large that they are gathered outside the door. As he's teaching, the roof of the house is torn apart, and a paralyzed man is lowered down in front of him. Four men intentionally brought him to Jesus to be healed. They ruined the home (hopefully the owner had insurance) to get him there. It completely interrupts Jesus' message.

Jesus saw the faith of the men who brought him and then told the paralyzed man, "Son (child) your sins are forgiven." Seems odd since the man was paralyzed. This angered the teachers of the law, for they knew that only God could forgive sins. Jesus rebukes them because he knows what they are thinking in their hearts. He says it's easier to heal someone on the outside than the inside, but so that they may know his authority on earth to forgive sins, he tells the man, "Get up, take your mat and go home." He got up and amazed everyone. Jesus addresses a central issue when it comes to the perception of one's disabilities, and this perception is that God is punishing someone for their sin or the sins of their parents.

#### **Small Group Questions – (10 minutes)**

##### **Small Group Questions on the Healing of the Paralytic**

1. What does the size of the crowd inside and outside the entrance say about Jesus?
2. How does Jesus look at the man? How do the others look at him?
3. Do you think it was necessary for the men to go to such extremes to bring the paralytic to Jesus?

---

<sup>106</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harold\\_Copping](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harold_Copping)

4. Jesus' teaching was interrupted by the men lowering the paralytic through the roof. How does Jesus respond?

**Report Back** – (5 minutes)

**Wrap Up:**

Jesus is the Healer, the Great Physician. He heals those who have faith in him like Bartimaeus and he even heals those like the paralytic whose friends had the faith that he could heal him. Jesus longs to heal us not only on the outside but even more so on the inside. Finding restoration and peace with God is where true healing begins. Some of us have experienced the healing only God can give, whether it's spiritual, physical, or emotional healing.

**Closing Prayer**

## **Images of Jesus Week Three**

### **Life-Giver**

#### **Opening Prayer**

#### **Jesus – Life Giver**

1. **John 11:1-44** – Read together (5 minutes)

#### **Image – Eric Wallis – Raising of Lazarus**

Eric Wallis is the artist of this painting of Jesus Raising Lazarus from the dead. Eric started oil painting at the age of seven painting en plein-air along with his father, Kent R. Wallis. Trekking through mountain forests and rural farmland, the two painted together, scenes of simple, quiet, yet soulful scenery. Eric became a child prodigy at the side of his experienced father. Many awards followed through Eric's school years as he continued to find voice in visual clarity. His impressionistic style continued to develop; color and texture the focus of the experience.<sup>107</sup> Wallis paints this particular piece from the perspective of being in the tomb and looking toward Jesus, symbolizing our own resurrection from the dead.

#### **Short Synopsis:**

Jesus is close friends with Mary, Martha, and their brother Lazarus. He's outside of Bethany and gets word that Lazarus is sick. The message is intended to get Jesus to show up so that he can heal him from his infirmity. Yet Jesus doesn't do what's asked of him, instead he stays two more days before he travels to Bethany. This seems out of character for him, doesn't it? But he knows what he is doing. He knows that Lazarus is going to die, but that it will not end in death.

Jesus shows up and experiences the heartache of Martha and Mary who both exclaim, "Lord, if you had been here my brother wouldn't have died." They have faith in Jesus to heal, but this time he's let them down. Jesus reminds them that he's the "resurrection and the life," and that if they believe, they will see the glory of God. He calls out to Lazarus to come out of the tomb and the dead man (four days dead) comes walking out alive again.

#### **Small Groups – Questions (10 minutes)**

#### **Small Group Questions on the Raising of Lazarus**

1. What strikes you most about this painting?
2. Based on what you know about the story, how does this picture show a different message? What does it communicate?
3. How is Lazarus portrayed? What might the artist be communicating here?

---

<sup>107</sup> <https://fineartamerica.com/profiles/eric-wallis>

4. How does the artist use lighting to communicate the good news?
5. Jesus is wearing red. Does this symbolize anything?

### **Report Back – (5 minutes)**

2. **John 20:11-18** – read together (5 minutes)

#### **Image – Greg Olsen – He is Risen**

Greg Olson is a contemporary artist who paints mostly religious art. He says, “My paintings in many ways record what is most important to me: my feelings and experiences with family and friends along with the spiritual aspects of my life. My hope is that in these images you will find something familiar, something which will resonate and remind you of what is important in your own life.”<sup>108</sup> He tells a story about his daughter finding out about the Easter Bunny not being real, which led to talking about the tooth fairy, leprechauns and Santa Claus; he says:

“Later in the morning, I found her curled up on the couch, looking even sadder than before. Upon questioning her, she said, “Dad, does that mean that all that stuff about Jesus and Heavenly Father is just pretend?” I sat next to her, gathered her up in my arms, and told her that I was happy to say that I know that Jesus and Heavenly Father are not pretend – They are real!” This painting reflects that belief. On that first Easter morning, the risen Lord himself reassured a sad and questioning Mary Magdalene that He is real and that yes, He lives!<sup>109</sup>

#### **Short Synopsis:**

Mary comes to the tomb first and realizes that the stone has been removed. Jesus’ body is missing and so she runs to Peter and John and tells them that someone has taken his body. They get into a foot race to see what’s going on and John arrives first only to find strips of linen lying there, and the cloth that had been on his face. They returned to where they were staying while Mary remained outside the tomb crying.

She looks in the tomb and two angels appear and ask her why she’s crying. “They have taken my Lord away, and I don’t know where they have put him.” She turns around and Jesus is standing there but she doesn’t recognize him until he speaks her name. In excitement she responds, “Rabboni.” Jesus then instructs her to go and tell the disciples that he’s alive.

### **Small Group Questions – (10 minutes)**

---

<sup>108</sup> <https://www.gregolsen.com/the-artist/>

<sup>109</sup> <https://www.gregolsen.com/gallery/he-is-risen/>

### **Small Group Questions on the Resurrection Story in John**

1. How does this painting depict God's mission to us?
2. Does Mary look afraid or relieved?
3. What do the postures of both Jesus and Mary communicate?
4. Jesus calls her by name. How does she respond?
5. How does the resurrection transition God's mission to our mission?

**Report Back** – (5 minutes)

#### **Wrap Up:**

Jesus is the Life Giver. Jesus restores life to Lazarus, a man who was dead for four days in the tomb, and Jesus is raised by God to life on the third day. Jesus reminds us in John 10:10 that, "I have come so that they may have life and have it abundantly." Jesus has power over death, but he also has power over spiritual death that prevents us from truly living real life on earth. He longs to give us real life now even as we await our eternal home with him.

**Closing Prayer**

## **Images of Jesus Week Four**

### **God with Us**

#### **Opening Prayer**

### **Jesus – God with Us**

1. **Luke 2:1-20** – Read together (5 minutes)

#### **Image – The Nativity**

He Qi is a Chinese contemporary artist. He Qi Studied at Nanjing Normal University, Nanjing Art Institute in China, and Hamburg Art Institute in Germany. Now he is currently an Artist-in-Residence at Fuller Theological Seminary (CA) and a Distinguished Visiting Professor at the Art Institute of RUC (Renmin University of China, Beijing). His art has been displayed in numerous newspapers and magazines, such as the Washington Post, and Christianity Today, and has also been featured in Christian curriculums such as Faith Inkubators.<sup>110</sup>

#### **Short Synopsis:**

Only Matthew and Luke share details regarding the birth narratives of Jesus. Matthew focuses on the Magi from the East who come from afar, Gentiles who somehow know that the Messiah of the Jews has been born from reading the stars. Luke portrays a different version that focuses on Joseph and Mary going to Bethlehem due to a forced census. This would have been an economic hardship for them. Mary is very close to childbirth, so as you can imagine this is not the best time to ride on a donkey and travel 60 plus miles.

They arrive in Bethlehem and can't find a place to stay, and they are forced to stay in a stable (which is a small cave) for the animals. Jesus is born but arrives in the humblest of dwelling places. Angels appear to blue-collar shepherds in the middle of the night, surprising them and telling them this good news. They give them a sign – the child will be wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. They leave their flocks behind and interrupt the intimacy of the family to discover the Savior who has been born for them. This is a strictly Jewish narrative, as opposed to Matthew's inclusion of Gentiles to worship the newborn king.

**Small Groups** – Questions (10 minutes)

#### **Small Group Questions on the Incarnation of Jesus**

1. How do you perceive this particular image? How do the colors speak to you?
2. In this image, Jesus is not a "white American." What does this say about the gospel?

---

<sup>110</sup> <https://www.heqiart.com>



3. Notice that Mary and Jesus are the same color? What about Joseph and the shepherds? What is the artist pointing out?
4. What does this picture of the incarnation say about the mission of God?

**Report Back** – (5 minutes)

2. **John 13:18-30** – read together (5 minutes)

### **Image – Leonardo da Vinci – The Last Supper**

Leonardo da Vinci's Last Supper painting is probably his most famous piece and covers an end wall of the dining hall at the monastery of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan, Italy. The painting is focused on the Last Supper as told by John. Although John doesn't speak of the Last Supper itself, instead he focuses on Jesus washing the disciple's feet. Nonetheless, it details the scene in which Jesus acknowledges a betrayer in his group. Its handling of space, mastery of perspective, treatment of motion and complex display of human emotion has made it one of the Western world's most recognizable paintings and among Leonardo's most celebrated works.<sup>111</sup>

#### **Short Synopsis:**

Jesus had just shared the Passover meal with his disciples and in John's gospel he practices another sacrament of sorts – foot washing. A sacrament is practiced and commanded by Christ to do. We celebrate baptism, and communion as the two sacraments Christ has given us, but if there were to be a third, it should be foot washing. After he washes their feet (all the twelve,) he then gets troubled in spirit and says that one of them is going to betray him. They all stare at one another dumbfounded of such a thing and then wonder who it is. John asks Jesus who it is and then he says it's the one whom he will hand the bread to after he dips it into the dish. He gives it to Judas and after Judas received the bread "Satan entered into him." The disciples still didn't understand what was going on and why Judas left suddenly.

**Small Group Questions** – (10 minutes)

#### **Small Group Questions on the Last Supper**

1. How does this painting depict the "good news?"
2. How does this painting depict the reality of humanity?
3. As Jesus speaks of the bread and wine, who does he say it's for? (Look at Luke 22:19-21)
4. Why would the Last Supper be understood as mission/evangelism?

**Report Back** – (5 minutes)

---

<sup>111</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Last\\_Supper\\_\(Leonardo\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Last_Supper_(Leonardo))

**Wrap Up:**

Jesus is God with Us. Jesus enters our world, conceived by the Holy Spirit, and becomes a vulnerable baby born to two teenage peasants. He's not born into royalty; his birth announcement is not given to kings; he comes as a common person to show us that God is with all of us.

Jesus is God with Us as he foreshadows his crucifixion through the Passover meal reinstituted. His death is for everyone, including the betrayers – Judas and even Peter who will deny him. Jesus washes all our feet; he gives bread and wine, his body and blood for everyone who betrays him. Our sin doesn't derail him from being with us; it compels him to enter our world and to suffer, die, and be resurrected to overcome it all.

**Closing Prayer**

## **Images of Jesus Week Five**

### **Social Justice**

#### **Opening Prayer**

#### **Jesus – Social Justice**

1. **Luke 9:10-17** – Read together (5 minutes)

#### **Image – Dirk A. Walker - The New New Jerusalem**

Dirk Walker is a contemporary artist who went to Auburn University and majored in Industrial Design. While it wasn't his true calling it did provide the foundation of concept, composition, color, perspective and craftsmanship that has been critical to his art process. Walker's art includes some spiritual paintings, as well as sporting art, and landscapes.<sup>112</sup> This particular painting is based on the feeding of the 5,000 from Matthew's gospel. He calls it the New New Jerusalem, where the people are hungering for the good news as they are being fed by Jesus.

#### **Short Synopsis:**

The feeding of the 5,000 is the only miracle story of Jesus found in all four gospel accounts. Thus, it must be significant if all four writers included it. Each gospel shares the same story with different lenses of focus. Luke follows the Markan story but includes very little about the beheading of John in-between the sending out of the twelve. Luke gives the name of the remote place, Bethsaida, and shows Jesus not just teaching, but also healing those who needed it. Luke also says nothing about how tired the disciples were nor about Jesus telling them to get some rest with him.

The disciples stop Jesus as it's getting late and tell him to send the crowd away so they can get something to eat. But Jesus responds, "You give them something to eat." I'm sure this surprised his disciples. Surely Jesus was joking, right? Luke says the disciples had five loaves of bread and two fish and so they give what they have to Jesus. Mark doesn't tell us who gives the food, John says it was a little boy, and Matthew follows Luke by suggesting the disciples had it stashed away. Nonetheless, Jesus blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to the disciples to distribute to the people. Everyone ate and was satisfied. About 5,000 men were there.

#### **Small Groups – Questions (10 minutes)**

#### **Small Group Questions on the Feeding of the 5,000**

1. Where is Jesus placed in this picture? What does his position say about where he should be in our lives?

---

<sup>112</sup> <https://www.dirkwalkerfineart.com>

2. What do the people need? What is Jesus providing for them? Why does Jesus tell the disciples, “*You give them something to eat.*”?
3. Where are the disciples in this picture?
4. Do the color tones suggest anything about Jesus in relation to the people? If so, what?

### **Report Back – (5 minutes)**

2. **Luke 10:25-37** – read together (5 minutes)

### **Image – Vincent van Gogh**

Vincent van Gogh was a Dutch painter who became one of the most famous and influential figures in Western art history. In a decade, he created about 2,100 artworks, including around 860 oil paintings, most of which date from the last two years of his life. They include landscapes, still life’s, portraits, and self-portraits, and are characterized by bold colors and dramatic, impulsive, and expressive brushwork that contributed to the foundations of modern art. Not commercially successful, he struggled with severe depression and poverty, eventually leading to his suicide at age thirty-seven.<sup>113</sup>

Vincent painted his interpretation of Eugene Delacroix’s *The Good Samaritan* while living in an asylum in St. Remy de Provence only months before he took his own life. During that period, Vincent would occasionally make his own versions of other people’s canvases. He interpreted two Delacroix’s – this one and *The Pietà*. Interestingly, both Delacroix’s Vincent copied involved broken people being held by those who loved them—one, a beat-up traveler by a stranger and the other, the Savior of the world by his mother.<sup>114</sup>

### **Short Synopsis:**

Jesus is asked by an expert in the law what he must do to inherit eternal life. But after responding with loving God and your neighbor as yourself, he wanted to justify himself, so he asked, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus responded with the parable of the Good Samaritan. A man is beaten on the road to Jericho from Jerusalem by robbers and left half dead. A priest walked down that road and a Levite who both passed him by on the other side of the road. But a Samaritan stopped and took pity on him. He bandaged his wounds, put him on his donkey and took him to an inn. He offered two days’ worth of his salary to the inn keeper and offered to reimburse him for any other expenses.

Two things to note – the priest and the Levite were Jewish; the man was presumably Jewish too. His own people ignored him, not because he was hurt, but because he was unclean. They were returning from Jerusalem, where the temple was. They refused to

---

<sup>113</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vincent\\_van\\_Gogh](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vincent_van_Gogh)

<sup>114</sup> <http://russ-ramsey.com/the-wounded-hero-van-goghs-the-good-samaritan/>

make themselves unclean to help him. The Samaritan is half Jewish and half Assyrian. This was the rub between the two groups. They had different theological beliefs even though they worshipped the same God. The Samaritan is the one who should have shunned him, but Jesus radically shocks this expert in the law with this story.

**Small Group Questions – (10 minutes)**

**Small Group Questions on the Good Samaritan**

1. What does Van Gogh's color palette depict about the Jericho Road?
2. Do you happen to see anyone in the painting besides the Samaritan and the injured man?
3. Why is it so radical to believe that a Samaritan would have stopped to help?
4. What color is the Samaritan's beard? What might this suggest about the artist?
5. Who do we often think we are in this story?

**Report Back – (5 minutes)**

**Wrap Up:**

Jesus is Socially Just. He cares about the hungry who do not have enough to eat. He feeds them both spiritually and physically and calls us to do the same. Jesus tells a parable about a Samaritan to shock his hearers. How could "the other" be the one who had pity on the half dead man. Jesus reminds us that there are no barriers to our serving one another. We are to be a neighbor who loves anyone in need, regardless of who they are.

**Closing Prayer**

## Images of Jesus Week Six Teacher

### Opening Prayer

### Jesus – Teacher

1. **Matthew 4:23-5:2** – Read together (5 minutes)

#### **Image – Cosimo Rosselli - The Sermon on the Mount and the Healing of the Lepers**

Cosimo Rosselli (1439-1507) was an Italian painter who was born in Florence, Italy. As a young, aspiring artist, Rosselli painted several altarpieces for various churches in Florence. He was employed to paint frescoes in churches at Fiesole and Lucca. He must have gained a reputation and a following from his frescoes.<sup>115</sup> When Pope Sixtus IV commissioned the building of the Sistine Chapel in the papal residence, he called on Cosimo Rosselli (1480) to paint several frescoes on the long north wall.

*The Sermon on the Mount and Healing of the Leper* is iconographically traditional: in delivering the sermon on the mount, Jesus is the new Moses, delivering a new law from a mountain top. The apostles in Rosselli's composition stand in rapt attention, but the people in the foreground vary both in their dress and attention span. Some wear 15th-century clothing in contrast to the Roman drapery worn by Jesus and his first-century followers. Most of the figures are captivated by Christ's words, but two prominent figures in the foreground are in a conversation of their own. In the lower right Rosselli depicts Christ a second time: closely followed and watched by his disciples, he heals a kneeling man who suffers from leprosy (Matt. 8:1–4).<sup>116</sup>

#### **Short Synopsis:**

The Sermon on the Mount begins with Jesus teaching and healing every disease and sickness. People traveled from near and far to see him – “large crowds” followed him. Jesus goes up on the mountainside and sat down and taught them. Jewish teachers would sit to teach their disciples. Jesus addresses his disciples directly, but the Sermon is addressed through them to the crowds present. Jesus is the new Moses; his teaching is compared to Mount Sinai when Moses received the Torah. His sermon begins with the Beatitudes and preamble to the sermon itself (5:3-16), then Jesus' interpretation of the Torah “You have heard that it was said, but I say to you...” (5:17-48), his teaching on piety – almsgiving, prayer, and fasting (6:1-7:12), and then concludes with exhortations to action and warnings of judgement (7:13-27).

---

<sup>115</sup> <https://www.breadforbeggars.com/2014/02/gods-kind-of-happiness-as-seen-in-cosimo-rossellis-upon-the-mount/>

<sup>116</sup> <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/art/sermon-mount-and-healing-leper-cosimo-rosselli>

## **Small Groups – Questions (10 minutes)**

### **Small Group Questions on the Sermon on the Mount**

1. What does the artist convey about Jesus in this painting?
2. What does he convey about the people gathered?
3. Do you see multiple scenes? If so, what are they?
4. What is Jesus trying to teach us with his Sermon on the Mount? What is the good news in this sermon?

## **Report Back – (5 minutes)**

2. **Luke 18:9-14** – read together (5 minutes)

### **Image – James Tissot – The Pharisee and the Publican**

Jacques-Joseph Tissot is a French artist born in 1836, in Nantes in a seaport on the French coast. Throughout his life Tissot retained an affinity and fascination with all things nautical, and his marked ability to accurately paint rigging and shipboard scene paintings must have come from his boyhood. In 1856 Tissot went to Paris to train as a painter. Here, at the Ecole des Beaux Arts the young Tissot met the young James McNeill Whistler (1834-1903), one of the most celebrated and unusual figures in 19th century art. At about this time Tissot also met and became a friend of Degas (1834-1917) the Impressionist painter. Like Alma-Tadema, and Edward Burne-Jones, Tissot changed his name at this time to draw attention to himself. In his case he anglicized his Christian name to James. In the 1860s the painter became something of a traveler, visiting Italy, and in 1862 London. In 1864 Tissot exhibited his oil paintings at the Royal Academy for the first time, suggesting that he realized the potential of London as a source of wealthy patrons. Tissot began to concentrate on contemporary scene paintings at this time.<sup>117</sup>

### **Short Synopsis:**

Jesus's parable is presented because there were some who "were confident in their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else." Jesus shares that two men go to the temple to pray: a Pharisee – holy and righteous, and a tax collector – a fraud and sinner. The prayer of the Pharisee is directed at being better than "sinners," and acknowledging his own good works (fasting and tithing). The tax collector stood away from him and refused to look to heaven and beat his breast, praying for God to have mercy upon him.

Jesus gives the insight of how God sees them and hears their prayers. The tax collector is justified (seen as righteous). Then Jesus gives an explicit teaching: "For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

---

<sup>117</sup> <https://www.jamestissot.org/biography.html>

### **Small Group Questions – (10 minutes)**

#### **Small Group Questions on the Pharisee & Tax Collector**

1. Where are both the Pharisee and the tax collector? What do they both have in common?
2. How does the artist depict the Pharisee versus the tax collector?
3. What does the distance between them suggest to you in relation to one another and to God?
4. What's the difference between their prayers offered to God?
5. Why do you think Jesus' teaching is perceived as being radical to his hearers? How do you think they responded to it?

### **Report Back – (5 minutes)**

#### **Wrap Up:**

Jesus is a teacher like no other. He teaches as one with authority and even commands, "You have heard it said... but I say to you." Jesus is the living word of God who teaches us what God desires so that we don't focus on the rules but follow the rules out of love for God. Jesus warns us not to think too highly of ourselves in relation to those who are the "known sinners" among us. As teacher, he reminds us that we are all sinners who approach a holy and gracious God.

#### **Closing Prayer**



## **Images of Jesus Week Seven**

### **Liberator**

#### **Opening Prayer**

### **Jesus – Liberator**

1. **Luke 4:14-21** – Read together (5 minutes)

#### **Image – Greg Olsen – Jesus in the Synagogue in Nazareth**

Greg Olsen is a contemporary artist who paints mostly religious art. If you remember, we looked at his painting of Mary and Jesus when Jesus was resurrected, taken from John's gospel. This painting captures Jesus in his hometown of Nazareth reading from the scroll of Isaiah.

#### **Short Synopsis:**

In Luke, Jesus announces his formal ministry in his hometown of Nazareth as we he worships in the synagogue there. Prior to this Jesus has been baptized by John in the Jordan River, he's been tempted by Satan in the wilderness for 40 days and then he comes back to Galilee in the "power of the Spirit." He's probably been visiting various synagogues throughout Galilee before he comes home to Nazareth. He is given the scroll of Isaiah to read, and he happens to read from Isaiah 61. It was customary for the reader to expound with a teaching of the Scripture, but Jesus doesn't do this, instead he sits down and announces that this reading has been fulfilled in their very hearing.

Jesus proclaims himself as the anointed One by God to proclaim good news to the poor, to set the captives free, to restore sight to the blind and to free the oppressed. Jesus inaugurates his mission before any liberation begins in his ministry. Of course, Luke follows this story with Jesus casting out a demon, and then healing all kinds of illnesses. In Jesus, people experience the reign of God on earth as it is in heaven.

#### **Small Groups – Questions (10 minutes)**

#### **Small Group Questions: Jesus in the Synagogue in Nazareth**

1. What does the lighting in this painting indicate to you?
2. How are the people responding to Jesus' message?
3. Where is Jesus looking and why might he be looking there?
4. Why might Jesus' message not be well received?

#### **Report Back – (5 minutes)**

2. **Mark 5:1-20** – read together (5 minutes)

**Image – Arthur Robins – Jesus Evicting a Demon**

Arthur Robins was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1953. He began painting, sculpting, and drawing at the age of two and a half. He attended art schools throughout his childhood, receiving many awards and scholarships. After attending Pratt Institute, he supported his art through woodworking, including cabinetry and furniture making, while showing in galleries and public spaces. Arthur has shown his art on the sidewalks of New York City, as well as major Art Galleries and Museums.<sup>118</sup>

**Short Synopsis:**

Jesus enters Gentile territory and upon getting out of the boat he is met by a man who is demon possessed. This man was living in the tombs, and no one could bind him – not even with a chain. He had been chained before, but he would break the chains and the irons on his feet. This man would torture himself by cutting himself with stones and crying out at night. The man who tortured himself, came and fell on his knees in front of Jesus and begged him not to torture him.

“What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?” The man acknowledges who Jesus is and he falls at his feet begging for his life. Of course, he’s possessed not by one demon, but by many. Jesus asks him his name and he replies, “Legion.” Like a military invasion, this man is possessed by many demons acting as one. The demons beg Jesus not to send them out of the area. So, he drives them into a herd of pigs, and once possessed they jump off a cliff and drown in the lake. The man was healed and was dressed and in his right mind, which scared those who lived there. In fact, they begged Jesus to leave them! The man begged to go with Jesus, but Jesus commanded him to go and tell everyone what the Lord had done for him, which is exactly what he does.

**Small Group Questions** – (10 minutes)

**Small Group Questions: Casting out the Demon**

1. What strikes you most about this picture?
2. How is the kingdom of God/God’s mission depicted here?
3. What does the man’s posture suggest? What does the demon’s posture suggest?
4. What does Jesus’ posture communicate?
5. What does the color palette communicate?

**Report Back** – (5 minutes)

---

<sup>118</sup> <https://poolpaintings.com/about-2/artists-biography/>

**Wrap Up:**

Jesus is the Liberator, the One who comes to release people from the bondage of oppression – whether it's economic, social, political, addictions, demonic activity, or even illnesses that plague them. He comes to bring good news, to restore the sight of those who are physically and spiritually blinded. Jesus releases us from the bondage of sin and death and restores us to live into the kingdom reign of God. Those who are liberated must be willing to participate in Christ's liberating work in the world.

**Closing Prayer**

## **Appendix B**

### **Images of Jesus Lay Survey Questions**

### **Images of Jesus Pastor Group Interview Questions**

**Images of Jesus: Christology and Evangelism**  
**Lay Survey Questions**

**Name:**

**Gender:**

**Age:**

**Race:**

**Based on our weekly classes together, which Image of Jesus do you most identify with? I have listed the stories taught with each image of Jesus during our classes to refresh your memory. Please only choose one:**

1. Savior – (Prodigal Son; Calling of Matthew)
2. Healer – (Blind Bartimaeus; Healing of the Paralytic)
3. Life Giver – (Raising Lazarus; Christ's Resurrection – "Abundant Life here and now")
4. God with Us – (Incarnation; Last Supper)
5. Socially Just – (Feeding the 5,000; Good Samaritan)
6. Teacher – (Sermon on the Mount; Pharisee & Tax Collector)
7. Liberator – (Casting out the Demon; Scroll of Isaiah)
8. None of the above

**Why do you identify most with this image of Jesus? In other words, why is this image of Jesus good news for us?**

**If you answered none of the above to the images presented, explain here which image of Jesus you connect with and why.**

**Choose which method of evangelism you feel most drawn to (choose no more than two):**

1. Conversion/sharing the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection and the importance of a personal relationship with him. This could be prison ministry, one on one conversations, personal visitation, mentoring, proclamation of salvation – evangelistic crusades, big tent revivals, etc....
2. Demonstration of God's power/speaking and emphasizing Christ's miracles and power over things that oppress or hold us captive. This could be praying for the sick, laying on of hands, healing and wholeness services, caring for those who are ill, or grieving, helping fight addictions, and seeking revival through the Spirit's power.
3. Proclamation of God's presence with us in all of life's situations, including hardship and death. This could be an incarnational ministry – being with people where they are, extending hospitality by preparing and giving food, committing to a prayer ministry, sending cards and notes as an extension of Christ's Church, and inviting others to church to encounter the good news of Christ through worship.

4. Acts of mercy, justice, peace/caring for the marginalized, poor, needy, and those who cannot help themselves. This could be participating in feeding ministries, helping the homeless, impoverished, and working towards justice through prophetic witness of Christ's care for the downcast.
5. Making disciples/focusing on becoming disciples and followers of Jesus, which includes imitating Christ's ways and living an alternative lifestyle. This could be Inviting others to church to participate in classes designed to share Christ like Alpha, or leading small group bible studies that invite those outside the church to participate and learn about Christ.

**During the class, Pastor Jeff has shared several stories that present a particular image of Jesus. It's important to note, that he has shared these stories through his lens of seeing Jesus in them. It's quite possible that you could see another image of Jesus through the same stories shared. Interpretation is key for all of us. With that in mind, what is your favorite gospel story and why? What image of Jesus do you see most clearly in this story? *(Are there other factors that make this story personal for you such as life experiences (good or bad), upbringing in a particular faith tradition, or even your current faith tradition?).***

**Is there an image of Jesus that wasn't presented that you feel should also be acknowledged? If so, please share.**

**Images of Jesus: Christology and Evangelism**  
**Group Interview Questions**

**Questions for Reflection:**

**What is your favorite gospel story (*could be about Jesus or a teaching of him*) and how have you come to know Jesus most clearly through this story? (*Are there other factors that make this story personal for you such as life experiences (good or bad), upbringing in a particular faith tradition, or even your current faith tradition?*).**

**Considering the question above and based on your relationship with Christ, of the five evangelism methods listed below, which method are you most led to practice? Would you say there's a correlation between your relationship with Christ and the way you do evangelism?**

1. Conversion/sharing the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection and the importance of a personal relationship with him. This could be prison ministry, one on one conversations, personal visitation, mentoring, proclamation of salvation – evangelistic crusades, big tent revivals, etc....
2. Demonstration of God's power/speaking and emphasizing Christ's miracles and power over things that oppress or hold us captive. This could be praying for the sick, laying on of hands, healing and wholeness services, caring for those who are ill or grieving, helping fight addictions, and seeking revival through the Spirit's power.
3. Proclamation of God's presence with us in all of life's situations, including hardship and death. This could be an incarnational ministry – being with people where they are, extending hospitality by preparing and giving food, committing to a prayer ministry, sending cards and notes as an extension of Christ's Church, and inviting others to church to encounter the good news of Christ through worship.
4. Acts of mercy, justice, peace/caring for the marginalized, poor, needy, and those who cannot help themselves. This could be participating in feeding ministries, helping the homeless, impoverished, and working towards justice through prophetic witness of Christ's care for the downcast.
5. Making disciples/focusing on becoming disciples and followers of Jesus, which includes imitating Christ's ways and living an alternative lifestyle. This could be inviting others to church to participate in classes designed to share Christ like Alpha, or leading small group Bible studies that invite those outside the church to participate and learn about Christ.