

Being a Contagious Christian
Acts 2:36-47, Philippians 4:15-23

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, if you take the time to think about it, it is rather amazing that the gospel of Jesus Christ was spread, and the early church was established across the most powerful empire in the known world and beyond its borders within 60 years of the completion of Jesus' earthly ministry.

The scripture passage we just read from Paul's letter to the Philippians, which bible scholars say was he wrote in 61 A.D. while in prison in Rome, make reference to the Apostle Paul's missionary travels where he Went Out from Israel to Macedonia, and the major city centers in that region such as Thessalonica and Philippi.

And Paul implies that there were a number of churches established in other major cities in that region as well – we know this because the bible contains letters to some of those congregations – such as 1st and 2nd Corinthians.

And as Paul closes this letter to the Philippians with a rather includible statement... he says *“All God's people here send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household.”*

Now that is incredible friends because it means that within sixty years, the gospel of Jesus Christ had travelled over 2300 km – from Jerusalem to Rome...

And it had spread from a group of poor, back-country fisherman right up into the highest classes of the Roman Empire – the very household of Caesar, the Emperor of Rome.

And this is amazing because all of this happened without the help any of the modern transportation and communication technology that we have come to depend on.

Travel was by mostly by foot, or horse or ship if you were able to afford it. It was dangerous and difficult and covering distances that would take us hours - would take days, weeks, even months.

And there was no telegraph, no newspapers, no magazines or direct mail advertising, no radio, no telephone, no email... there wasn't even any Wi-Fi!

So – you realize this means that people weren't able to use their smart phones or tablets to go online and blog, or update their Facebook status with a funny video or meme that could go viral and spread.

But yet the gospel of Jesus spread, more and more people were putting their faith and trust in Him, and the church was growing!

People from every race and nation and segment of society were turning away from some other religion and idolatry and were being baptized into the early Church and becoming a part of Jesus' body.

How did this happen? How did this spread?

Well brothers and sisters – these pandemic effects were the result of **Contagious Christians** who were filled with Holy Spirit and were infectious with their faith.

Because being human means that we are contagious; we affect and influence each other in all sorts of ways – from the obvious area of health where we can pass on viruses and infections to each other; all the way to our attitudes, opinions, belief and habits and so on...

We human beings have an influence on other people; we pick things up from each other.

Now, aside from the health concerns – what sorts of things are contagious to others? I looked online for what people had to say...

One person said "loud talking" is contagious, because has a co-worker with a voice that really projects, and whenever he talks with him at work he feels compelled to talk just as loud.

Someone else said Texanisms, because whenever they were spending time with their customers in Texas, they would start twanging a little and saying "y'all".

A number of people said happiness is contagious. When someone is very happy and exuberant - everyone else around them starts to get happy, and conversely negativity is contagious and can spread from one person through a whole group of people.

Of course the scriptures also affirm this contagiousness that we have. That's why Proverbs 22:24-25 warns us about who we make friends with. It says *"Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn his ways and get yourself ensnared."*

So we see that this aspect of affecting and influencing each other is part of how God created us, and we are aware of how it can be detrimental to us – in catching colds or being influenced by bad attitudes and anger.

But in our efforts to be obedient to our Lord's command to *"go and make disciples"* do we give much thought as to how we can leverage this "contagious" factor for good?

We certainly will spend a great deal of time trying to figure out how to leverage the latest communication technology, making sure we have a web-site, a Facebook site, that we are pod-casting and live streaming in order to make sure we are reaching people...

But remember – the gospel first spread and the early church was established without any of that.

Now- you know, that as a Reformed Christian and pastor I'm the last person who would say we do not utilize technology for the spread of the gospel – all these things belong to God and are part of His creation and we need to redeem them and use them.

My point is – that maybe we need to think a bit more about something that can spread the Christian faith that is more

“built in and natural” to who we are, and is easily available to us – like how we can be influential and contagious.

As the saying goes *“the Christian faith is more caught than taught!”*

So let me give you an equation which Willow Creek Church in Chicago uses to explain how being Contagious can work.

High Potency + Close Proximity + Clear Communication = MAX IMPACT

So our little congregation at Valleyview will leverage this natural contagion to have maximum impact on the people around us if all three factors are in place.

A person with an authentic powerful faith in Christ won't do much good if they are not in close proximity to other people.

And, even if they are... if they are not clearly communicating about that faith then nothing will happen.

But when you have people who are full of the Holy Spirit and have faith in Christ, who have close relationships with other people, and who know how to clearly communicate this... then you have a group of Contagious Christians who will have a maximum impact on those around them for God's Kingdom.

And Acts chapter 2 gives us a clear picture of how this looks when all these things are in place.

So, let's start by looking at what was made these early Christians Highly Potent?

Well, vs. 38 shows us they had repented, and had been baptized, which means they had been worked on and then filled with the Holy Spirit.

Secondly in vs. 42 it says *“they devoted themselves to the Apostle's teaching”* – and in the following verses it describes how they lived out that teaching.

So we read in vs. 46 that they worshipped together – it says *“everyday they continued to meet together in the Temple courts”* and they celebrated the Lord’s supper together... vs. 46 continues saying *“They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts”*

Vs. 45 describes how they cared for each other, it says *“They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.”*

And it’s hard – no its impossible- to be a highly potent Christian without an expectation that the Holy Spirit will move in power to demonstration God’s Kingdom – so we read in vs. 43 that *“everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles.”*

So these were highly potent Christians, and we know they were in Close Proximity to other people because this was taking place in the city of Jerusalem; they worshipped in public at the Temple and in vs. 47 it says *“They enjoyed the favor of all the people.”*

And being in Close Proximity to others gave them the opportunity to Clearly Communicate the message about Jesus Christ being the promised messiah.

And – even though this scripture passage doesn’t give us specific examples of these early believers clearly communicating the gospel (though we do see examples of the Apostles doing this) we know all the parts of the equation were there – High Potency, Close Proximity, and Clear Communication, because in vs. 47 we see the **Maximum Impact** .

It says in vs. 47 *“And the Lord added to their number daily – those who were being saved.”*

So without any modern communication technologies or clever marketing campaigns – the gospel was spreading and the church was growing and people were receiving salvation and eternal life because the early followers of Jesus had no problems with being Contagious Christians.

But what about us at Valleyview? How are we doing at leveraging this equation so that we are used by the Holy Spirit to become contagious have the maximum impact on our community?

Let me suggest the following ways in which our church, and you as individuals, can begin to put this equation to work in your life so that you can become contagious.

We must be Highly Potent – Now, I’m not talking about not showering for a week, or trying to pass yourself off as some kind of highly energetic, outgoing motivation dynamic speaker type of person who is always super hyped about everything.

Instead, as we saw from in our passage of scripture, a Highly Potent Christian is someone who has heard and responded to the call to repent of their sin, believed in Jesus Christ, and has been baptized in His name – by the Holy Spirit.

Secondly they are devoted to the following things.

1. Reading and studying the scriptures;

2. Regular attendance and participation in worship and prayer;
3. A sensitivity to help and care for others, esp. fellow Christians;
4. A desire to hang out with other Christians and build relationships with them;
5. The expectation that God will do amazing things in their life.

So you can be an extravert or an introvert and still be devoted to living a Christian life in this way. God works with all of us in the unique ways that he made us.

So what might the Holy Spirit be prompting you to do to become “more potent” and what are you going to do about it?

Are you going to attend worship more consistently? Are you going to join a Christ Care group to study scripture and build relationships with fellow Christians? Learn about the 3 Colors of Spirituality and engage in Level A and B growth?

Whatever it is – just do it! No excuses – be obedient and take action.

So let's look at the next part - Close Proximity. Who are we, who are you, in close proximity to - both physically and relationally?

Well – there is our surrounding community... our family, our friends, our co-workers, neighbors, work-out partners, the list could go on right?

We need to begin to see all these people as those whom we can be contagious with.

What are we spreading to them? What influences do have in their lives? If we truly are highly potent Christians - are they catching anything of the Christian faith from us?

Every time you are around someone you have an opportunity to let them catch something from you, because you are naturally such a Highly Potent Christian.

So what should they catch? Or what is it that you should be communicating?

Well first let me say that people first need some time to be able to observe you and notice that how you live matches up with who you are – assuming that they know who you are?

Friends - if you are a Christian, those who are in close proximity should know that about you – right?

Brothers and sisters, when it comes to making disciples I think we're very comfortable with wanting to grow as Highly Potent Christians...

We're ok with being in Close Proximity to other people – as a Church this something we're working on with “Going Out”

But – as we learned last week, we need to be encouraged to speak, and I believe that for most of us **the hardest part of this equation is clearly communicating to those who are in close proximity to us.**

So, not wanting to take away the role of the Holy Spirit in giving us the right words to say, but rather to help us “keep-in-

step” with Him... I offer the following reflections on clearly communicating.

1. Be Intentional - We need to be intentional about it, we need to be thinking and looking for the right opportunities to share things with people, we can't just leave it to chance, or hope that people will get it because they'll see our lifestyle, and somehow figure it out.

As Paul says in Colossians 3:23 *“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord.”*

2. Be Wise – But in being intentional we can't be foolish. We must be wise in choosing the times and places and the sorts of things we say to others so that our communication is natural, genuine and not forced or fake.

It's generally not wise to invite your friends over for dinner and sit them down and say; “thanks for coming over -now we're going to communicate the gospel to you.”

But it could be wise to invite your friends over for dinner and say: “before we eat it's our practice to say thanks to Jesus in a prayer – would you mind if we did that?”

It might not be wise to start a conversation with your Muslim co-worker by telling him that he needs to believe that Jesus was the Son of God or there's no hope for him – but it would be wise to start a conversation by asking him if he has certainty that God has forgiven him of his sins.

As Paul says in Colossians 4:6 *“Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.”*

3. Be Gentle - So when we are being intentional, and wise with our communication it's also important that we do so in a gentle manner, which I think also means humble.

Nothing will kill our communication faster in our post-modern context that coming across as superior, or knowing it all etc...

So we must initiate our communication with people in a gentle way that shows interest in who they are, and what they think and we must not ridicule or mock what they share with us.

As 1 Peter 3:15 says *“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect”*

Remember the scripture teaches us that Faith in Christ is a gift from God; it’s not something that you or someone else would come up with on their own. (Eph 2:8-9)

So we are in no position to feel superior with those whom God is searching for, those who have not been found yet?

Remember we needed to be found as well.

So, **what do we communicate with them?** Well I think we need to communicate a number of things.

That the Christian faith makes sense, that the Christian life is fulfilling, exciting, satisfying, that it is worth suffering and going through hardship for, that it is more than what this world has to offer us.

And finally as the verse in 1 Peter suggests we need to be willing to give **our reason for the hope we have** - which is Jesus as the scriptures present him to be - the Son of God, the forgiver of sins, the new humanity without sin, our everyday substitute and the only way to receive life in the new heavens and the new earth.

We need to share and explain this with people communicating it clearly and confidently.

As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14:8 *“if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle?”*

Which brings us back to making sure that we are Highly Potent – because only Christians who are devoted to studying and understanding scripture and what it teaches about Christ and

salvation and are experiencing the Holy Spirit making this a reality in their lives - will be able to communicate this clearly.

So where are you in terms of leveraging this equation to help spread the gospel and grow the church?

What are the people whom God has put in close proximity to you catching from you?

Because brothers and sisters – we naturally have an impact and an effect on those around us – let us cooperate with the Holy Spirit and leverage that influence so that we become Contagious Christians!

Amen.