

**Follow What to Speak about
Matt 10:16-20, Acts 26:19-32**

Brothers and sisters, one of my all-time favorite comic strips is “The Far Side” I like how it finds humor in situations from a quirky and odd perspective – you may be familiar with it.

And one of my favorite comics from The Far Side is this one about “*Luposlipaphobia*”- the fear of being chased by Timberwolves around the kitchen table while wearing wool socks on a freshly waxed floor.

And perhaps if the cartoonist Garry Larson had been around in bible times he might have come up with some sort of bizarre comic about “*Ovisariesapostolupophobia*” which means the fear of being sent out like sheep among wolves.

Now, you know that over the past month we’ve been talking about how Jesus intends for His Church here at Valleyview to GO OUT, and we’ve looked at how that needed to happen for the early church in Jerusalem as well and what we can learn from that.

And we’ve acknowledged that at Valleyview we’ve always been a bit reluctant to GO OUT, in part because it would be easier for people just to come IN here, and because there lots of wonderful things that happen IN here, and it’s a bit more comfortable IN here...

But let’s not shy away from the fact that we also that suffer from a bit of “*Ovisariesapostolupophobia*.” In other words we are reluctant because Jesus has admitted to us that his sending us out is like sending out sheep among wolves.

It’s dangerous out there; we will encounter people who are hostile to us because of our encounters with Jesus Christ.

They will judge us, slander us, vilify us, harass us, or abuse us.

A couple weeks ago Laurie Brenton shared her story about how she was afraid to become a Christian because in her small town because people would throw rocks at her because they thought Pentecostal Christians were crazy... sheep among wolves.

Now, fortunately we live in a society where it is against the law to attack people and discriminate against them based on their religion – that doesn't always prevent it from occurring, but it does prevent most of the time and it gives us some recourse when it does happen.

But the other reason we are afraid to GO OUT, and often the only way we can become identified as a target for the wolves, is when we open our mouths and speak.

So, not to make light of any persecution or opposition that we encounter as we GO OUT but in our current social context at Valleyview we probably suffer far more from "*Glossophobia*" that we do "*Ovisariesapostoluphobia*."

And if you didn't know "*Glossophobia*" is the fear of public speaking or speaking in public.

We are terrified of having to speak out in the public sphere, we are afraid of having to strike up a conversation with someone we don't know.

We are scared about having that awkward talk with a friend or a coworker about our "private personal beliefs."

So while it is true that there are instances in our contemporary society where Christians are indeed out like sheep among wolves and that can make us afraid – the reality for us in our particular context at Valleyview is that we are more likely to be afraid of having to speak up and speak out when we GO OUT into our community.

But – fear not. As we heard our Lord promise to us in scripture this morning; "*do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.*" (Matt 10:19-20)

When my mother was a teenager, she went on a mission trip to Salt Lake City Utah to work with a local church for a summer, helping out with Vacation Bible School, youth programs and going about doing door-to-door neighborhood visiting.

Now you may know that Salt Lake City is Mormon territory, so there was bit of irony in the fact that my mom was walking around knocking on Mormon doors and asking them if she could talk to them about the Christian faith.

And as she tells the story, it was near the end of the day and she was tired and frustrated with everyone whose door they had knocked on tell them they were not interested...

So when they knocked on the last door of that street and man who answered it told her he did not want to hear about Christianity she involuntarily blurted out *“Don’t you know that you are going to Hell!”*

Now I don’t know who was more shocked by that – this man or my mother, I know she felt terrible for having blurted that out and I think she apologized and quickly moved on.

However, before her summer mission trip was over - she somehow ended up seeing that man again and discovered

that what she had said was exactly what he needed to hear and that he had now become a Christian!

So... *“do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say.”*

Now this does not mean I recommend that we GO OUT and start telling everyone we meet that they are in danger of going to Hell.

But... it’s not because you are likely to offend people and they will think you are crazy for saying that.

Instead it’s because what you need to say in any given situation needs to come from the Holy Spirit, and not some methodology or formula that worked in one situation so we figure we should use it for every situation.

I wonder how much more effective sharing about Jesus would be if instead of training people in a communication methodology of something like... presenting the four spiritual

laws, we spent time training people in how to listen to what the Holy Spirit is directing them to say???

In fact I would say there is only one sentence that you need to know when it comes to what we will say when we GO OUT and we need to speak, and that sentence is *“Holy Spirit, please give me the right words to say!”*

Now, that’s not to say the Holy Spirit can’t work with something we have prepared to present – I mean we took a whole month looking at various ways in which we can tell our story to people, and in the reading from Acts 26 it’s important to know that Paul’s inspired speech to King Agrippa actually follows the classic presentation formula used by ancient defense attorneys.

So, we can prepare what we will say and use formats for our presentation and sharing that can help us be clear and reasonable and strategic – but in the end what makes our speech effective and fruitful is the Holy Spirit.

He will give us what to say so that we can bear witness to Jesus Christ – just as He promised we would.

So we don’t turn to methodology for our success, we rely on the Holy Spirit to speak through us - even if it is in a subtle way like Paul’s presentation to King Agrippa.

So let me draw your attention to vs. 25 where Paul says *“what I am saying is true and reasonable”*

Now we don’t catch it in the English translation very well, but the Greek verb Paul uses which gets translated as *“saying”* is *“apophtheggomai”* – and that word carries far more weight than simply stating your opinion by speaking.

It means to *“speak forth”* to *“pronounce”* or as we might say *“give the word.”* Perhaps a better translation for our bibles would be to have it read *“the word I utter is true and reasonable”* and then we would catch the subtle indication that Paul is claiming divine inspiration about the content of his defense presentation.

Thus we know Paul is relying on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit even though he is using a very sophisticated format, and We must rely on the Holy Spirit in this way as we GO OUT and we speak to people about how Jesus met our spiritual thirst.

But even though Paul relied on the Holy Spirit, he was also well prepared and ready to speak in a way that was appropriate to the particular situation he was in and persuasive to the people he was speaking to.

That's why he says the things he is speaking forth "*are true... and reasonable, and that the King is familiar with them*" (vs. 25,26)

However we might not be familiar with Paul's situation at this point in the book of Acts, so a little bit of background info here to fill us in is helpful.

Paul had been given this opportunity to speak because King Agrippa was visiting the Roman Governor Festus in Caesarea.

Two years earlier when Paul had returned to Jerusalem to report on his mission trips, he ran afoul of the Jewish leaders there and he ended up in prison, while they plotted his death.

This led to him being transferred to prison in Caesarea, partly for his own protection and partly in an effort to keep peace with the Jewish leaders.

Festus had just started his term as governor and was trying to make sense of Paul's case, so he brought it up to King Agrippa during his visit because Agrippa was Jewish and Festus hoped he could and give him some advice about it.

So this brings us up to Acts 26, where King Agrippa is listening to what Paul has to say for himself and we started reading from Acts where Paul is making the closing argument in his defense statement to King Agrippa.

And from Paul's perspective, his whole situation can be explained by what he says in vs. 22-23 where Paul says "*I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said*"

would happen— that the Messiah would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would bring the message of light to his own people and to the Gentiles.”

So we can see from Paul’s context of being engaged in the legal system for over two years that it was important for him to present his case and speak in a manner that was appropriate for that setting.

Now brothers and sisters, what this teaches us is that we need to listen and obey the Holy Spirit’s direction on how to say what we say... just as much as we listen to what we say.

That is why we looked at different ways to tell your story, and I want to tell you – congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ – that was not just another sermon series that you get to say “was interesting and informative...” and move on from it.

That instruction on how to tell your story is meant for you to use and start working on writing down your story so that you are prepared to present when the opportunity is given.

Start by writing your story according to one format, like an Underserved Grace story... but eventually you need to be able to tell your story as a Big Picture story, or a Deliverance story or a Transformation story as well.

So - I’m expecting you all to put in the work and do that – because my job is to equip you and get you ready for the opportunities the Holy Spirit is going to bring your way – and is perhaps already bringing your way... are you ready?

So – listen for the Holy Spirit’s nudge about how to tell your story in a way that is appropriate to the situation or context that you are in – and follow it, obey it.

For example, if you are speaking with someone who is thirsting for forgiveness, the Holy Spirit may say “*use the Underserved Grace format!*”

If you are sharing with someone who is thirsting for God the Holy Spirit might say “*the Big Picture story can help them see the Big Picture about God...*”

Or if you are witnessing to someone who is trapped in bad decisions the Holy Spirit might say “*use a Deliverance story or a Transformation story*” – you see how this works.

But ask the Holy Spirit to give you that guidance and insight as to which one you need to use, and be familiar with them... so you can follow the Holy Spirit’s nudge on how to say what He will give you to say.

Now, what might the Holy Spirit tell you to say - what words will He give you to speak as Jesus promises He will?

Well we don’t exactly know that do we... especially because each situation is different and unique and until we find ourselves in it we don’t know what that other person needs to hear.

However, I think we can take a clue from Paul’s divinely inspired speech in vs. 22 where Paul says he is “*saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen...*” (vs.22)

In other words this is part of the Christian confession about the person and work of the Holy Spirit where the Holy Spirit does not contradict the Word of God in the scriptures.

Whatever the Holy Spirit has Paul saying... it is not in contradiction with what God has revealed in the scriptures.

So the more familiar we are with scripture – especially scriptures where we see someone like Paul speaking the words that have been given to him – the better equipped we are to recognize what the Holy Spirit wants us to say - because it will resonate with what we know from scripture.

So what can we learn from this scripture about the anticipating what content the Holy Spirit may direct us to speak about?

Well, the first thing I guess is that it might not always be pleasant or politically correct.

Just like my mom blurted out that the fellow who answered the door stood in danger of hell – In particular circumstances the Holy Spirit may prompt us to talk about things that typically tend to get people’s backs up.

So I want you to know that this isn’t necessarily a bad thing, even though we typically try to encourage people to share their stories in ways that don’t offend people unnecessarily.

You see as Paul gives his defense he speaks about how he went around to the Jews and the Gentiles telling them that they needed to repent.

Which basically means Paul was telling them they needed to change their mind about what they believed about God.

Instead they needed to accept that what Paul was telling them about God was correct, and then they needed to prove they had changed their mind about this by how they acted and lived.

That’s not typically how we would approach people is it...

And Paul also speaks about how he taught from the scriptures that the Messiah would have to suffer and die and then would be the first to rise from the dead.

Again Paul is tell people they are wrong and correcting people’s beliefs and expectations about what the Messiah would come to do and how that would be accomplished –it would be through suffering, death and then resurrection.

Not something we tend to do in our consumer society where the customer is always right.

And finally Paul says that the Messiah would not only bring a message of light to the Jews but also to the Gentiles. So what is that message of light?

Well that particular phrase if defined more by how the Jews and Gentiles, the Greeks and Romans in particular, thought about themselves and their culture than it is on its own.

You see the Jews knew they were God’s chosen people, they alone had received God’s covenant and His law and they knew

who God was and they were the ones who were supposed to *enlighten* the nations around them, who worshipped idols, about the one true God.

On the other hand you have the Greeks and Romans – Gentile nations whose ideals and philosophies had allowed them to build a great civilization which conquered the world.

Greeks and Romans knew themselves to be open minded and tolerant and *enlightened* because they were able to overcome so many regional differences in culture and religions and impose a unity over that diversity which allowed people to co-exist under the rule of their Empire.

So the Messiah bringing a message of light to both Jews and Gentiles... well that means that the truth about who Jesus is and what God is doing in him undermines both the exclusivity of the Jews and the inclusivity of the Roman Empire.

And anyone who thinks their exclusivity or inclusivity is the pinnacle of enlightenment is going to discover they were actually in the dark all along - until Jesus enlightened them.

I think you can see how undermining exclusivity and inclusivity is going to be rather politically incorrect these days.

So it's important that we are familiar with what the scriptures' teaching on repentance from false beliefs, having our actions show repentance, the truth about who Jesus was as the Messiah and how Jesus reveals the truth about exclusivity and inclusivity because these are touchy subjects.

And if we feel the Holy Spirit nudge us to speak about these things to the people we encounter as we GO OUT... we are instinctively afraid to speak about them because we know they are politically incorrect and offensive.

And we may wonder if we really are hearing from the Holy Spirit on this because being offensive or telling someone they are wrong doesn't seem very peaceful, or loving or respectful, and we're worried that it might turn people away.

After all, when Governor Festus heard Paul say that this backwater Jewish Messiah would bring a message of light to

his sophisticated, civilized Roman Empire he could contain himself no longer and blurted out *“You are out of your mind Paul!”* (vs. 24) He was offended.

And shortly afterwards King Agrippa, with all his Jewish heritage and identity, rebuffs Paul by saying *“Do you think that you can persuade me in such a short time to be a Christian?”* (vs. 28) It was too much too soon for him.

But these reactions do show us that what Paul said in his defense was inspired by the Holy Spirit because it hit these two men exactly where they need to be convicted.

So brothers and sisters, when we GO OUT and speak to people how are they reacting? When we share our stories do they smile and say *“wow, that’s so great for you!”* If they do – don’t count it as a success.

That means you’ve said nothing that confronts them or challenges what they truly believe, and thus you have not truly born witness to Jesus Christ.

Brothers and sisters, there is much to be said for sharing our stories about Jesus in an attractive, winsome manner but when the Holy Spirit nudges us to speak something that will call to someone repentance, correct their false theology, show them the truth about Jesus and his death and resurrection, or undermine their unquestioned cultural assumptions about exclusivity and inclusivity...

We must follow that nudge and speak the words that are given to us as we GO OUT.

As Paul says in his letter to Romans 10:14 *“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?”*

Brothers and sisters – let us follow the Holy Spirit’s nudge on what to speak.

Amen.