



Series: B-sides

Sermon: Who Are You

Luke 1:1-4

Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.

Acts 1:1

In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning.

Monday: Read Isaiah 6:1-8

This passage from Isaiah reminds us of our shortcomings, all of the ways we fail to love God and neighbor, all of the ways we care more for ourselves than our neighbor, all of the ways we “call evil good and good evil.” The prophet Isaiah finds himself in worship when God shares a divine vision and Isaiah is brought low by his and all of Israel’s sinful nature. Israel has forgotten what it means to follow God’s teachings. In this moment, Isaiah feels unworthy to serve the LORD Almighty. Yet this is the very time when God redeems, transforms, and call. And Isaiah’s response? “Here am I; send me!” When have you been brought low by your own disobedience? How have you responded? In what ways have you allowed God to use your life as a witness?

Prayer: “Here am I; send me!” Amen.

Tuesday: Read Psalm 105:1-8

Memory is one of God’s greatest gifts and so very precious; it often defines who we are as a person. We often act or hope or believe because of our past. As we read the Psalms and the Old Testament, we learn so much from the people of Israel’s journey of gradually coming to recognize God. In this psalm the message is clear: we must remember the stories of God, so that we can share those stories. It’s the only way to know of the goodness and faithfulness of God. Finding the reasons for spiritual insights and praise and thankfulness to God requires a mindset that acknowledges that God is always active in the world, in nature and in creation itself. What reminds you of God’s Holy Presence in the world around you? How do you respond to the goodness and faithfulness of God in your life? How can you make God’s deeds known among all people?

Prayer: Faithful God, help me to pay attention to your presence in this world, so that I might share of your wonderful works. Amen.

Wednesday: Read Acts 10:1-35

Peter has been preaching the Gospel, witnessing the Spirit’s work among the Gentiles. But he finds himself conflicted, torn between custom and conviction. Peter was raised a devout Jew, discipled by Jesus, and all of God’s people followed the law. And yet the formation of Peter's character through this text, indeed the need for formation, arises from ethnic prejudices that Peter was slowly beginning to shake. It appears that the Holy Spirit was steadily whittling away the hardness of Peter's heart toward those he had been taught to avoid. Sometimes we, like Peter, are called to a ministry of proclamation and proximity. It is difficult to measure who received the greater blessing: Cornelius or Peter. What we can be certain of is that God was at work, through the Spirit, to tear down ethnic barriers so that God's very Word could be heard. This Word has the power to re-negotiate our preconceptions of others, about what they can or cannot do. More importantly, the Word has the power to transform our own character by leading us into proximity of the others whom God loves. How might God be calling you to shift your expectations so that more people might hear the Good News? How is the Spirit speaking a fresh word to you today? Who needs to hear the stories of God that you can share? How might you shift your life to bring yourself into proximity of those persons?

Prayer: Spirit, reveal your truth so that I might share God’s love with those I encounter. Amen.

Thursday: Read John 1:35-51

Evangelism can be a scary word. Whatever the reason, many of us not only have little experience in evangelism but are downright frightened of it. And that, of course, cripples our ability to reach out with the good news. That may well be one point of this story from John’s Gospel -- that when it comes to our relationship with Jesus, our primary job is to see and share. Not threaten, not coerce, not intimidate, not woo or wheedle or plead, but simply to see and share. John does that here. He sees the dove descend upon Jesus and tells others what he sees. That’s it. Andrew later does the same. He tells his brother what he and John’s other disciples saw -- the person they believe is the Messiah -- and invites Peter to come along and see for himself. Could it be that simple? At its heart, evangelism is noticing what God is doing in our lives, sharing that with others, and inviting them to come and see for themselves. What is God doing in your life? How can you share that with those around you? Who might you invite to come and see for themselves?

Prayer: God help me to notice you. Give me words to share and courage to invite. Amen.

Friday: Read Luke 10:1-9

The early followers of Christ saw themselves participating in this great climax of hope. They bore witness to the miraculous work of Christ’s teaching and healing and they were willing, eager even, to take part in the holy work. They knew it would be difficult, but it was worth any sacrifice. I wonder if the invitation to join the movement of God’s kingdom does not sometimes work like this. It is not about selling a brand name like ‘Christian’ but instead, sharing a vision of change in such a way that means participation in making it real in the here and now. It’s not easy, but it’s vital to the world around us. For the disciples, it was all about being bearers of this hope. What if we could be convinced we were participating in God’s initiative to bring hope? How might that shape what we do and how we live? How might we invite others to join that work? In what ways do we “say” to those around us “the Kingdom of God has come near to you?”

Prayer: Help me, O God, to be a bearer of your hope to those I encounter. Amen.

Saturday: Read 1 Corinthians 9:19-23

For Paul, the proclamation of the Good News ought to be "free of charge." That is, the gospel he proclaims does not come with strings attached, with obligations to care for or cater to his needs. Instead, the reverse is true. Paul relinquishes his "rights in the gospel" for the sake of those he hopes to reach. Paul describes a radical way of life in which he walks alongside all kinds of people in order to draw them to God, sharing the stories of Christ in ways that speak to his audience. Paul realizes that evangelism is carried out through relationship. One person meeting another person where they are at this moment in time. It requires thoughtful reflection, deep commitment, and often intentional sacrifice, and yet, Paul makes himself a slave to all so that he might share the blessings of the Gospel. What motivates us to share the good news? What shapes our proclamation? How might we prayerfully consider our audience before we share? In what ways might that shape the stories we tell?

Prayer: Holy God, help me to be who I need to be for the sake of the Gospel. Amen.