

“PARTY PLANNING (#1): INVITATIONS”

(John 1:35-46)

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**[PROPS: (#1) "The Pizza Evangelist" Video; (#2) "Evangelism: Here I Am, Lord, Send Me" Video;
(#3) "Bless Your Neighbor Creative Ideas" Sheet for All Congregants]**

[McKendree U.M.C.; 8-11-19]

--I--

1. Read Text: John 1:35-46 and Pray.

2. How many of you like going to parties? (Most everyone.)

A--You know, whether it's a birthday, a wedding, an anniversary, a holiday, or "just because," parties are events of joy that we look forward to because they're a celebration of life itself.

B--We like the cake, the ice cream, the chips and dips, the party favors, the games, the socializing and good company, and more! Parties are just plain fun!

3. Well, it's not by accident that much of Bible describes salvation and our relationship with God in terms of a great party or celebration.

A--For example: ...

1--The "*Great Supper*" that Jesus talks about in Luke 14 where many are invited, but few respond;

2--The "*Marriage Supper of the Lamb*" described in Revelation 19;

3--And what about the 3 great parties in Luke 15 given by... the woman who loses her coin & finds it; the shepherd who leaves his 99 sheep to find his one lost one; & the father who "*kills the fatted calf*" when his prodigal son comes home

B--But if one way to think about salvation is in terms of great party that God throws for us (on our behalf), then one of the great privileges and responsibilities that WE have as Christians is *to help others experience that party* -- that is:...

1--...We're to (First) help get them there;

2--...(Second) help them feel welcome/"at home" after they arrive;

3--...And (Third) help them find their place there.

4. Now, these three practices (Invitation, Hospitality, and Incorporation) *collectively* make up what we in fancy church terms often call "**EVANGELISM**" -- something that, according to the Bible, is to be an essential part of *every* Christian's walk.

A--Unfortunately today, however, "Evangelism" often gets a bad rap and scares us to death! Let me show you what I mean...

[WATCH VIDEO: "The Pizza Evangelist" (Time: 1:29) from SermonSpice.com]

B--In the Bible the term from which we get our English word "***Evangelize***" literally means "*To announce, declare, show, or bring good news,*" ¹ and the word "***Evangelist***" comes from a term that simply means "*One who brings good tidings / good news.*" ²

C--So, in its simplest form, *biblical* Evangelism has nothing to do with button-holing or scaring people (like in this video), but instead is merely the process of sharing the good news of Jesus for the purpose of helping others find God's kingdom -- ...

D--In other words, through our words & deeds... helping others to discover & experience God's party for themselves through a relationship with his son Jesus Christ.

--II--

5. That's all Evangelism is. And it's why I'm calling the sermon series in which we'll be sharing over the next 3 weeks "**Party Planning**" where we'll be relating the Christian practice of "*Evangelism*" to the planning of a great party *thrown by GOD*, but in which *WE* play a crucial part.

A--In each of the three weeks, we'll be focusing our attention on ONE of the three different dimensions of biblical evangelism that I referred to earlier:

- 1--*Invitation* (how we invite people to God's party);
- 2--*Hospitality* (how we welcome and help them feel "at home" once they arrive);
- 3--And *Incorporation* (how we help them "find their place" and "get connected").

B--Today our focus is on the first dimension: what I often refer to as "**Invitation Evangelism**," & we find a great example of it in today's scripture reading from John 1.

C--Here we have the story of Jesus calling his first five disciples.

- 1--Three of these (Andrew, Philip, and one other) Jesus calls directly, through his own personal invitation.

- 2--But I want us to notice how the other two (Peter and Nathanael) are called -- in this story, Jesus is NOT the one to make the initial invitation to these two men.

- 3--Instead, Peter and Nathanael are first invited to meet Jesus by two of the other *three*: *Andrew* invites his brother Peter; and *Philip* invites his friend Nathanael.

- 4--And as a result of *these* invitations, Peter and Nathanael meet Jesus, and then choose to become his followers.

6. In this story I think we find a pattern for how "invitation evangelism" works.

A--Nowhere does it say that Andrew or Philip went knocking on the doors of total strangers, seeking to button-hole them or save them "in the name of Jesus!"

B--What it *does* say is that two people who's lives had been personally touched by Christ (Andrew and Philip) couldn't wait to invite their loved ones and friends to meet this man who meant so much to them.

1--And so, the "Invitations" that they sent out to their family and friends simply said (in essence), "*We have found the Messiah.... Come and see!*" ³

2--It wasn't scripted like "The Four Spiritual Laws," or manipulative and fake like the "Pizza Evangelist."

3--No. These simply were 2 ordinary men, sharing the love of their life (Jesus) in a natural way with those whom they'd had a previously established relationship.

C-- Did you know that according to a poll by the "Institute for American Church Growth," when 10,000 people were asked why they first came to church,...

2% said it was because they had a special need;

6% said it was because they liked the Pastor;

12% said it was because the church had a specific program or ministry;

But 80% said they came because a friend, relative, or neighbor *INVITED THEM!* ⁴

--III--

7. So here's the reality & challenge: like Peter & Nathanael, many (if not most) of us are both here today at church *and* have a relationship with Jesus Christ *because someone INVITED us*. So, when was the last time that you passed on the favor to someone else?

A-- That is: when was the last time you invited someone to be your guest at church with you? (I.E., maybe a family member? A neighbor across the street? Someone you work with?)

B--And more importantly, when was the last time you verbally shared your Christian faith with someone in your family & friends network? ...Perhaps how your faith helped you through some tragedy or crisis? Or how it helped you make some major decision in life?

C--That's why one of vows we ask every member of a UMC is a promise to support Christ and His church not only through our *Prayers, Presence, Gifts, and Service*, but also through our "*Witness*"-- just another word for "Evangelism" (the sharing of our faith).

8. Of course, for us to do effective "Invitation Evangelism," it's important for us (like Andrew and Philip) to *start* by inviting those who we *already know*.

A--The problem with a lot of us is that while we may know our family and friends, we don't actually know our neighbors or work-mates very well -- certainly not enough to talk with them authentically about faith issues.

B--So as we wrap up, I want us to watch one more video that invites us to consider tangible, creative ways that we can both get to KNOW and BLESS our neighbors, as we consider how to invite them to God's party.

[VIDEO: "*Evangelism: Here I Am Lord, Send Me*" (Time 1:52, SermonSpice.com)]

--IV--

9. Here's how I want us to end today: Your bulletin insert contains several creative and prayerful ideas about ways that you and I can be sent by God to "Bless Our Neighbors."

A--Over the next two months, if you are willing to do at least ONE of these activities (or one of your own making), then during our closing hymn/song, I want to invite you to come forward to stand at the altar (I'll pray over us at the end of the music).

B--Then, after you've completed your activity(-ies), I want you to email me your stories about what happened so we can share them with the rest of the congregation as a source of blessing and encouragement to all.

10. The bottom line, you see, is that God has invited US to HIS party. But it's an "**Invitation**" that we can't keep to ourselves.

A--So, God is asking each of us: "*Who will go and bless their family, friends, and neighbors? Who will invite them to my party -- to a relationship of faith through Jesus with me and with my people (the church)?*"

B--My prayer is that we would all answer God's Invitation, "*Here I Am Lord, Send Me!*"⁵

11. [PRAYER]

12. [CLOSING, 9:30am, "Send Me (Here I Am)" or 11am UMH#593, "Here I Am, Lord", during which congregants come forward to signal their agreement to do at least one "*Bless Your Neighbor Creative Idea*"]

ENDNOTES:

¹ Greek term "*Euaggalizo*," Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries, Greek Term #G32.

² Greek term "*Euaggelistes*," Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries, Greek Term #G2099.

³ John 1:41 and 1:46.

⁴ "Institute of American Church Growth Poll," reported by Wayne Zunkel in Leadership magazine, Volume 5, Number 3.

⁵ Isaiah 6:8.