

Luke 9:1-6
Luke 10:1-9

CHOOSING YOUR SIX

Seven commitments of the Christian Life. That has been the theme for several weeks now. Some of you think it has been for far too many weeks. I warned you not to try to take on all of the commitments at once. This is not something we do to get saved, to earn God's love. This is something we do in response to God's love because we want to grow and make progress on the Christian WAY. There is no great hurry about getting perfect, you know, or God would not have given us eternity. It's just that we get tired of old ways that do not fit right or feel right. So we do it because we want to, or at least most of that which is within us wants to. The five commitments so far: PRAY every day, read and study the BIBLE, find your VOCATIO, choose a MENTOR, get into a DISCIPLE BAND.

The sixth commitment is the commitment to be an EVANGELIST. Oops, I just used an "E" word, which bothers some of you even more than a "B" word. So much baggage hangs around the word "evangelism" that, for the most part, we choose not to mention it at all. The only problem is, by not mentioning it, we have also stopped doing it, and more and more the concept itself is lost to us. But the concept is not entirely dead yet. One of you *has* used the word once in the nine months that I have been here, though not in an entirely positive manner. My friends, when evangelism dies, the church dies. That is fact. There is no escaping it. Sometimes it takes a few years, but nevertheless, the fact is that a church which has no evangelists does not survive for very long. And we have scores of UCC churches all over the country proving it.

Our problem with "evangelism" and "evangelical" and being "evangelists" is not with the words themselves, I think, but with some of the people we have encountered with whom we associate these words. But we must stop letting others steal our best traditions and disciplines just because of the way *they* do things.

What is the difference between an angel and evangel? Or an evangelist? Well, in Greek, *angel* means messenger. An *evangelist* is one who announces or proclaims glad tidings – good news. In other words, if you want to be an *angel* – a messenger of God – you have to be an *evangelist*. Now, indeed, you do *not* have to use the Greek words for it. I just think you should stop being afraid of them, or of the concepts they stand for.

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There is no escaping the sixth commitment if we care about the Christian Faith. We know this is true. If we do not carry the Message ourselves, we lose the Message. That's on the inside. If we do not spread the Word, we shrink and die. That's on the outside. Think of the justice and rightness of that. If we are not turned-on enough to bring others into the Faith – and into the community that tries to walk it and support those who want to live it – then why should we go on taking up space here as a Christian church? Why would God *want* to support or bless us if we are not interested in spreading the Message or honoring the Kingdom? And why would God want to send people here if he knows they will never find any spiritual support or life or growth here?

The sixth commitment is the commitment to be an evangelist – to carry the Message – to invite people into the faith family that shares and ponders and tries to walk according to what is revealed in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. There is a lot of mystery in Christianity, but there is no mystery here. The Fifth Tradition of Alcoholics Anonymous, for instance, states: “Each group has but one primary purpose – to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.” They know what they are about. Do we know what we are about?

It is impossible to be in recovery from alcoholism and not want other drunks to find sobriety. I don't care how crass, selfish, mixed up, or confused a recovering person might be, if they see another person still caught in that wretched whirlpool, that horrible bondage, they cannot help but feel a deep yearning to invite that person into the program – into a different way of life. It is a logical and practical impossibility to know something wonderful and not want to share it. We have to carry the message, or we don't really have the message.

If you see an absolutely marvelous movie, read a book that moves you greatly, or find an exceedingly pleasant restaurant, you tell your friends. It just comes out of your mouth. When any related subject comes up, all at once here it comes, flowing over the lips. Of course, you pick the people and the times when it seems appropriate. *You are supposed to!* When it comes to evangelism, some people in other traditions do not do this. They put it out there all the time, appropriate or inappropriate, and they seem to have no other interests, as if God had not made all the rest of the world, just their little eight-by-ten-foot cubicle. They reach a lot of people we will never reach, by the way. Let it be. It is none of our business.

But we *will* reach a lot of people they can never reach – people they only offend. Accept that. Know it to be true. Learn your own truth, and your own way to proclaim it. And I would like to suggest three precepts:

1.) The very first promise Jesus made to Peter as he became a disciple was that Peter would become a fisher of men (a catcher of people instead of fish). In some churches, they fish with nets, trying to haul everybody in. You do not do that. It is not your way. It is not *supposed* to be your way. You are fly-fishermen. Think about that: It is an art. You have to practice. It is always one at a time. It does not work the same way twice. Brochures and pamphlets and one-phrase formulas will not work with the fish you are after. And you must “be one” with what you are doing.

2.) You are never responsible for the results. If what you try *has* to work, you cannot do it well. God does not coerce. Your job is to get the offer and the invitation clear. What somebody does with it after that is up to them, and to the Holy Spirit. Sow the seed; do not keep digging it up to see if it is growing. The church in our time is full of the “business manager” mentality: goals, procedures, and control; make it happen; force productivity; if it doesn’t work in two months, trash it. Does that sound peaceful, comforting, loving? Does that match the Message? It leaves no room for the Spirit. All we get that way is a human institution, full of underlying fear and pressure. No, we just want to keep our commitments, and leave the results to the Holy Spirit.

3.) Evangelism is not head-hunting. Obviously it often can be, as evangelism has often been turned into a numbers game. But I am suggesting that it must *not* be for us. When it is, the method does not match the Message. If you fly-fish and the fish bite – and our analogy breaks down here, but nonetheless – they do not land in the skillet, they land in the fellowship of the faith family. At least that is what is *supposed* to happen. We are not out fishing for trophies or scalps (though some people go at it that way). We are not in charge of the results, remember. But when it works – when the Spirit brings the connection and it “takes” – what we get are brothers and sisters in the Faith, dear friends, fellow pilgrims with whom we share and walk the Way.

What this means is that if we do not want to love somebody, we ought to keep quiet about the Gospel, at least when we are talking with them. After all, the Gospel is the Word of LOVE. What that means, in turn, is that you cannot evangelize very many people. If somebody gets

excited about the Message you carry, then you have a whole new relationship. You need to spend a lot of time with them. There is a lot to talk about, much to share. You have a new friend in Christ. How many of those can you keep up with? We are not talking about theory, where you are supposed to love everybody, but so little that nobody will ever notice, least of all them. We are talking about real-life relationships that take time and energy, and make a real difference. Space and time are the two great limitations of life. You cannot be a significant friend to very many people at the same time.

Some of you can hardly believe your ears. I am telling you that your evangelism must be limited to only a few people. That's right! I am not saying that I am correct. I am saying that you heard me correctly. You do not have space and time enough to be a true evangelist to very many people.

I believe that Jesus asks a lot less from us than most people think. Most people talk as if we are each supposed to save the whole world, love everybody, feed everybody, heal everybody. Then they try to persuade us that if we would just band together and coordinate our efforts correctly, we could build organizations that would actually be able to do this. I think that is mistaken. "*My yoke is chrestos [easy]*" – it fits right. The whole world and everybody in it with any needs? That does not fit right. I cannot do that. Neither can you.

I also happen to believe that if we would stop being grandiose and do the simple yet profound things we are asked to do, it would have far greater impact on the world in the long run. Quality, not quantity, is the mark of our Path.

The sixth commitment is to be an evangelist. If you want to be a real evangelist, concentrate on six people. Members of your immediate family do not count. (Of course they count greatly, but not as part of your six.) So you watch and pray and speak to people about your Faith and the Way you try to walk, until six people have responded. Then you stay with those six, nurture the friendships, show them into the church (not to – INTO). And you go on building your friendships with them until they die or move away, or you do. If you get a vacancy, fill it. Keep choosing your six. That is your primary evangelical task.

Never ever feel guilty about not doing more. If you keep faithful to your six, you will eventually train them to choose their own six. And if you do that, you will transform the world. You will do it faster, more authentically, and more deeply than everything all the churches are

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doing today – all put together. And you will not be nearly so stressed and busy. You will also have a lot more joy and fulfillment on the Christian Path than you could possibly have otherwise.

Jesus sent out the twelve to do what He had been doing. (Luke 9:1) It worked wonderfully. Then a little later (Luke 10:1), Jesus sent out seventy-two in the same manner, for the same purpose. Where did the seventy-two come from? Jesus chose twelve, and He was the all-time pro and was doing it full-time. I am suggesting that He instructed each of the twelve to choose six. Six times twelve is seventy-two. Seventy-two additional disciples, each one in real relationship, each one personally cared about, each one part of the movement and choosing their own six. What were the disciples doing with their time? Well, I think they were keeping up with Jesus on the one hand, and each dealing with their six on the other hand. Why do you think the movement was spreading so quickly and powerfully?

Nothing, of course, ever works with precision. But suppose it takes a year to get things rolling. After that, let's suppose it takes three years for each new person to come into the movement, learn something of what it is about, and then choose their own six. **In twenty-five years, there would be more than twenty million people in the movement!** And not because anybody was trying to play hero or save the whole world, but because each person was paying attention to his or her own SIX! And because each new six felt truly included and valuable, and knew they were also part of the Kingdom – and were one of its evANGELS.

Not with precision or perfection, we all know, but something like this is what must have happened with the early church, or they could never have engaged the Roman Empire – which had decided to exterminate them – and, without lifting a sword, win over the greatest Empire in the world in less than three hundred years. Twelve ... who chose six ... who chose six ... who chose six ... Keep it simple. Keep it real. And really mean it.

One Saturday night, a pastor threw up his hands and said to himself, "There's no way I can finish this sermon and face that congregation tomorrow morning. I'm going golfing." So he phoned the associate pastor, told him he was feeling really sick, and asked the associate pastor if he could please put together whatever sermon he was working on and take the services tomorrow.

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The pastor got up bright and early Sunday morning, put his clubs in the car, and drove off to a distant golf course where he thought no parishioners would see him. The sun was shining brightly, the day was crystal clear. It was beautiful, and the pastor felt wonderful. But up in Heaven, Gabriel nudged God and said, “Hey Lord, do you see what your servant is doing down there? And how he lied about it and everything?” And God said, “Mm-hmm.”

Gabriel said, “Lord, I don’t think you should encourage this sort of thing with beautiful sunny days and wonderful feelings and such.” And God said, “Don’t worry about it, Gabe. I’ll fix it.”

Just then the pastor stepped up to the tee. He teed up his ball and suddenly felt an incredible flow of peace and harmony. His energy and his consciousness flowed together and he seemed almost to merge with the universe around him. When he was ready, his swing seemed effortless, yet he could feel the flow of power – and oh my, what a shot! The ball soared with the grace of an arrow, straight down the fairway – no wobble, a nice slow spin, like the sun hurtling through space. It was far and away the best drive the pastor had ever made. And as he watched in near disbelief, the ball landed on the green and rolled straight toward the flag. The pastor ran all the way to the green to see if the shot could be at all as good as it looked from afar. Sure enough, the ball had rolled straight and true and into the cup! He danced and whooped around the flag. His very first hole-in-one, and on a very difficult course, to boot.

Gabriel looked at God with a face not quite describable and muttered, “I thought you were going to take care of this guy.” God looked back at Gabriel with a steady, unhurried gaze and said, “Hey Gabe, who’s he going to tell?”

There are those who believe that the Good News of God’s LOVE, and his desire for relationship with us ... that news of the Kingdom, and the spiritual dimensions unseen, yet all around us ... that New Life in Christ Jesus – are far more exciting than any hole-in-one could ever be. The question is: Who are you going to tell?

The sixth commitment is the commitment to be an evangelist. Time to choose your six.

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THE MATH

Do less – get more.

Or: How we can mind our own true business and still do more for the Kingdom than ever before ...

1st Year -	12
4th Year -	72
7th Year -	432
10th Year -	2,592
13th Year -	15,552
16th Year -	93,312
19th Year -	559,872
22nd Year -	3,359,232
25th Year -	20,155,392

28th Year -	120,000,000
31st Year -	720,000,000
34th Year -	4,320,000,000