

Grace and peace to you from God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Shortly before Martin Luther died, a piece of paper containing his handwriting was found in his pocket. Among other words on the paper were these: “This is true. We are all beggars.” During his lifetime, Luther had come to see the holiness and justice of God. He realized he had no righteousness whatsoever to declare him acceptable to God. Luther only had Christ. Yet in having Christ, he had everything: assurance of heaven, peace with God, and a calm heart before the Law of God. Simply clinging to Christ alone, Martin Luther inadvertently turned Europe upside down in the 1500’s.

Some years ago, D.T. Niles, a missionary to Ceylon, put it a different way. He said, “Evangelism is one beggar telling another beggar where to get food.” Think about that! “Evangelism is one beggar telling another beggar where to get food.”

In the 1930’s—during the Great Depression—those words had special meaning. In those days, many people went to bed hungry at night. Men “rode the rails”—hitching rides on freight cars in an attempt to find a place where they could find work—food—hope.

Some people thought of those men as “bums”, but others felt compassion. They said, “There, but for the grace of God, go I.” They answered a knock at the door with a sandwich and a cup of cold water. When that happened, often the “bum” would put a mark on the fence or barn—a mark that meant, “You can find food here.” It was one beggar telling another beggar where he could find food. I remember my Grandmother Chrisman recalling the thirties and how they couldn’t figure out why these men came to their door and not their neighbors. Then my Grandfather found the mark on the fence. And then they knew, one beggar told another, and another, and another.

Again, D.T. Niles said, “Evangelism is one beggar telling another beggar where to get food.” What comes to mind when you hear the word “evangelism”? For some of us it might bring to mind a knock at the door and an unwelcome visit by a sectarian group. While we don’t want to be rude, we resent the intrusion—and we wouldn’t want to intrude on other people in that way. So let me reassure you that this sermon is not intended to introduce a program of door-to-door evangelism.

But the word, evangelism, is a good New Testament word. The New Testament, of course was written in Greek, and word was euangellion (pronounced *you-on-GEH-lee-on*). Euangellion means “good news” or “preaching good news”. The idea is simple. When you find something that brings you joy, you want to tell other people about it. That is what eungellion—evangelism—meant in the New Testament—sharing joy!

We live in a world full of people who are starved for attention—people desperate to find something more than another dollar or another cheap thrill—lonely people—kids hooked on drugs—people with an empty space at the center of their lives. We who have Jesus at the center of our lives need to share the good news. Evangelism is one beggar telling another beggar where to get food!

In the Gospel lesson today, Jesus sends out seventy disciples to spread the good news. A little earlier, he sent the twelve apostles, but now he widens the mission. By sending a large group—seventy people—he shows us that spreading the good news is something that all Christians can do—not just preachers.

But note what Jesus tells these seventy disciples to do:

First, He tells them ENTER GENTLY! Say, “Peace be to this house!” Let them know that you come as a friend—as someone who respects them and comes in peace.

Second, BE GRACIOUS! When people extend hospitality, accept it graciously. Don’t be always on the lookout for something better—like a host with a nicer house. Focus, not on finding a richer host, but focus on being a better guest. Eat what they set before you and be appreciative.

Third, DO SOMETHING SUBSTANTIVE TO HELP. Jesus said, “Heal the sick”. Maybe we can help others who are ill, but there are other gifts as well.

°Who among us cannot visit a friend in the hospital?

°Who cannot contribute money to help disaster victims?

°Who cannot take a moment to ask, “How are you doing?” in a way that shows we care?

°Who cannot take time to listen to someone who is hurting?

°Who cannot extend a bit of hospitality to a person in need?

There are a good many people today who think that they cannot do those things because:

The world says “You have to be tough”. The world says, “Take care of number one.” The world says “No time for charity”. The world says, “Nice guys finish last”.

We live in a world that celebrates coarseness—that rewards aggressiveness—that encourages people to do whatever they feel like doing. But think about this. When you live in a coarse, tough, aggressive, selfish world, what must you do to stand out—to be noticed? How can you move from being ordinary to being extraordinary? Well let me tell you!

--To stand out in a COARSE world, BE CIVIL!

--To stand out in a TOUGH world, BE KIND!

--To stand out in an AGGRESSIVE world, TURN THE OTHER CHEEK!

--To stand out in a selfish world, LEND A HELPING HAND!

“But you can’t do that”, they say—“the world will grind you up and spit you out.” But I don’t believe that. People today are HUNGRY for a smile and a kind word—EAGER to find someone they can trust—DELIGHTED to find an employer who takes an interest in them—GRATEFUL to have an employee who will give his or her best.

The person with a smile and kind word, the person who can be trusted, the person who takes an interest in others, the person who gives his or her best—that person will not lack for friends, that person will not go hungry. I am convinced that, in the long run, that person will come out ahead of the coarse, aggressive, selfish person. In some case the aggressive person might get richer—but they will never be happier.

But aren’t there sharks out there? You bet! Lots of sharks! Be careful of the sharks! I know, sharks may sometimes help you—like the TV show—but they are out for their own interests first. Don’t be like them. Jesus put it another way, he said, “I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves.’ It’s two thousand years later and some things haven’t changed.

--Jesus calls us to be peaceful people helping others.

--Jesus calls us to be gracious to those who help us.

--Jesus calls us help others. Each of you have been given gifts to share. Use them to help others.

And then—once we have earned the trust of others, we can share out faith story.

We can invite them to church. We can tell them where to find spiritual food.

Luther said, “We are all beggars.” Let us be serious about evangelism—about sharing our faith—about telling people where they can find spiritual food. It starts with one beggar telling another where to find food, Just like at my Grandma’s house. Once they find they are welcome, they will tell another, and another, and another. Amen.