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*Romans 12:1-8*

*I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

*For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgement, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.*

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I’ll begin this sermon with an anecdote that I know some of y’all have already heard me share.

Growing up at First Presbyterian Church of Dalton, Georgia, as a young child I always looked forward to being greeted by a man named Elbert Shaw before or after worship. It was a ritual well known to all of the kids of the church. Elbert would come around the corner and in his hands, as always, was a plain brown paper bag. We would run into Elbert’s arms and he would give us a great bear hug. He would then look directly in our eyes and say, “God loves you and I love you.”

He would then reach into the bag and pull out a five stick pack of Wrigley’s Juicy Fruit gum and place it in our hands. This simple, elegant ritual, performed countless times over my childhood, made enough of an impact that here I am nearly 30 years later telling y’all about it. Elbert was not a trained theologian. He had no seminary degree. I’m pretty sure he didn’t know biblical Hebrew or Greek (although he certainly knew his Bible!). Elbert was a disciple who understood the importance of sharing his faith with the young disciples of the congregation he so loved.

I’m here today and, chances are, you are too, because someone decided to share their faith. In ways both large and small, God has placed in my life certain people, like Elbert, whose faith has made an impact on me. A strong enough impact that it compelled me to attend a private Presbyterian college in upstate South Carolina and then proceed to seminary to become a trained minister. That is how God’s call has crafted my life through other people sharing their faith with me. And though that has been my path there are countless other paths that can be laid out before us thanks to others sharing their faith with us.

But sometimes sharing our faith with others can be intimidating for a number of reasons. And here I’m focusing primarily on sharing our faith with people outside of our congregation.

1. We live in an increasingly secular and pluralistic society.
2. Christianity is in the news a lot these days - and rarely for the things we’re doing “right”
3. Political polarization
4. We don’t know how to articulate what it is that we believe
5. Differences in generational views of institutionalized religion

Now, some of these mitigating factors are well outside the bounds of our control. And, nevertheless, in the midst of a time when it feels that progressive-leaning mainline denominations such as ours are swimming upstream, Christ still calls us to go and make disciples. How do we do that? I’ve crafted this sermon series to be nothing if not practical so I offer what I so frequently call “rules for the road” when it comes to sharing our faith.

1. **Stick to the stories**. What are the stories of scripture that mean the most to you? What claim do they make on your life? How do the truths that they tell you impact the way that you live your life?
2. **It’s ok to not have all the answers**. As Presbyterians, we don’t believe that faith is about having all the right answers; it’s about having the courage to ask the right questions, to wrestle with scripture, and to discern what God is calling us to do as a community, and not strictly as individuals.
3. **Don’t just emphasize what we’re saved “from,” but what we’re saved for**. There are wide swaths of Christianity whose primary evangelical focus is about saving people *from* hell, or *from* damnation, or *from* sin.
4. **Don’t force. Invite.** Nowhere in the Gospels do I see Jesus forcing or coercing anyone to follow him. He always invites. Some people accept that invitation; others don’t. That’s how it’s going to be when we share our faith with others.
5. **We don’t all have to share our faith the same way**. Today’s passage from Romans says the following: *For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.* Y’all, we’re all part of the same body, but we don’t all function in the same way. That’s the gift, and the challenge, of living together as a neighborhood. Some of us, like me, share our faith by getting up every week and preaching the text. Others of us share our faith by inviting our neighbors to come to church. Some of us share the faith by volunteering on the boards of local non-profits whose values and missions align with those taught to us in scripture. Others share the faith via casseroles and cards. Others still through planting flowers or telling stories at VBS. The Body of Christ has so many parts and it takes each of us working together to build up the neighborhood.
6. **Don’t overthink it**. One of the reasons that I kept this sermon short, sweet, and simple is that sometimes I think that we overthink sharing our faith. If you remember nothing else from this sermon, remember this: sometimes sharing our faith in Christ’s name really is as simple as a hug

…and a five-stick pack of Juicy Fruit gum.

In the name of God the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, may all of us, God’s children, say: **Amen.**