

Have you noticed it yet, the elephant in the room? The elephant in the room is one of those things that's very obviously there, but something we'd like to go as long as possible without being forced to talk about. Today is the day we have to address the elephant in the room. The elephant is one of God's commands that is very simple and clear. He states it in a dozen ways in a dozen places, but it's a command we find exceptionally easy to forget about and pretend it doesn't exist.

Maybe it's because this isn't one of God's commands where he says, "Don't... do whatever...steal, have sex outside of marriage, murder." Those are sins of commission because we are committing the thing God told us not to do. On the other hand, some commands God gives us are things he wants us to do. When we don't do them, those are called sins of omission, because we are omitting or failing to do the things God asks us to do.

So what is the command we have to talk about today? What's the elephant in the room? It's been staring at you for the past 4 weeks. Maybe you were just biding your time as we went around the Logo wheel, hoping somehow we wouldn't get there. Maybe Judgement Day will come before then! The elephant's name is SHARE. Did you feel the shiver down your spine? No, Pastor, No! Don't make us talk about SHARING, or the other even scarier word- EVANGELISM! Those are scary words!

Maybe at this point in our Family Growing in Christ series, you're thinking, "I can get on board with WORSHIP. I can sit in the pew and listen. STUDY, sure I can come to Bible class and sit and listen. SERVE, sure I don't mind shining around every so often to help out. But SHARE...? That's where you lost me. SHARE my faith? That's risky! SHARE words that talk about God? Pastor, you know I'm not really the outgoing type. That's for the extroverts. Or isn't there a board of Evangelism for that? Don't we have 4 pastors for that? Don't we have like 20 school teachers who do that with the kids?

This elephant has been hiding right there in plain sight for the last month. It's been on the bulletin for years right at the bottom of the logo- SHARE. It's a one-word summary of God's command, "Share the gospel!" or as the gospel writer Mark says, **"Preach the gospel to all creation."** It's obvious alright, but it's one of those commands we'd like to pretend doesn't exist or if we're forced to acknowledge it, at least this elephant better just live here at church on the banners and the bulletin. That's his home.

Maybe you know exactly what I'm talking about. Maybe you're feeling the tension. If you're not convinced yet, let me give you an example. Last week, remember we did the SERVE week and we had the big volunteer fair over in the new commons for people to think about how to get involved and sign up. There was a sign-up with a particularly scary title, "EVANGELISM AMBASSADORS". Only one name signed up, somebody who had already been serving this role for a long time. Now I don't say that so I can stand up here and stare down my big long nose and point my big long finger at you. I say it because it reveals a truth about us that we need to grow in as *A Family Growing in Christ*.

There are a few people God made for whom sharing their faith is a natural gift. If that is your gift, then by all means, use it to the full. But if for many of you it doesn't feel like one of your top strengths, and I would include myself with you in that group, then we need to talk about how to grow and get better at it, after all it's the first thing on our mission statement. ***"The members of Mount Olive Evangelical Lutheran Church use the gospel in Word and sacrament to win the lost for Christ..."***

Your spiritual leaders who drafted that mission statement long ago did not just pull that out of the clear blue sky. They were putting on paper what God has made true about each and

every person he has saved. God has made you an Evangelism Ambassador, whether you signed up on the sheet or not. Here is what he says in 2 Corinthians 5. **“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.”**

We are Christ’s ambassadors! Every saved soul is an ambassador to every soul Christ died to save! Since Christ died to take away your sins, and you know how many sins you have. That makes you extremely well qualified to tell others about how Christ takes away all of their sins too! What a great message! So why is it so hard to share? Why do we get so clammed up at the thought of it? Well, sometimes we make it harder and scarier and more complicated than it has to be. So at last, with our eyes focused on growth, let’s turn our attention to the story of a little girl through whom God worked wonders.

It was not a good start to a story; actually it was downright terrible. A young girl was captured by a band of enemy raiders. Human trafficking has been an evil reality for a long time. In all likelihood, they killed her family and they hauled her back to their homeland to be a slave. Now she was forced to serve the wife of the commander of the enemy army who ruined her life. How would you have been doing as that little girl? Angry at everyone you were now forced to serve? Bitter at God for letting something so awful happen to you? How could this be part of a plan? It’d be hard to blame her for a little outrage after having to go through something like that.

In this girl, we see why the Bible holds little children up as the example of great faith. In spite of everything she’s going through, she still finds a way to live as an ambassador of the God she serves. She finds the strength to speak up in a world where her voice meant nothing. She was a young girl in world ruled by men. She was a foreigner, and she was a slave. Not exactly the powerful diplomat type to be bringing messages to the high and mighty commander Naaman. But she knew her God had something to offer Naaman, who had leprosy. So **“She said to her mistress, ‘If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy’” (5:3).**

One sentence is all it took. The word travels up the chain. Her mistress tells her husband Naaman, and he believes her enough to risk telling to his master the king what the little slave girl said. And the king says, **“By all means, go!” (2 Kings 5:5).** If there’s a chance somebody can save you, do it! So king of Aram sends a letter to the king of Israel and Naaman leaves with a large fortune which he is prepared to offer in exchange for his healing. And now we see the God’s plan unfolding before our eyes. The terrible start to the story has produced an opportunity for a young girl to share her faith, which then produced an international opportunity for kings and rulers to see who the true God is and witness his power on display.

There was one problem though. The man who was supposed to be the leader of God’s people, the king of Israel, King Joram, had his head so buried in the sand, he couldn’t see this amazing opportunity to give God glory when it walked up and slapped in the face. All he could think about was his own power and kingdom. So when Naaman comes to him seeking to be cured of leprosy, he immediately tears his robes and thinks, **“Why does this fellow send someone to be cured of his leprosy? See how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me!” (2 Kings 5:7).**

Thankfully, Elisha the prophet hears about it, he chews the king out with this message, **“Why have you torn your robes? Have the man come to me and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel.” (2 Kings 5:8).** So Naaman goes out to Elisha’s house with his parade of

wealth and power, and Elisha doesn't even bother to come out. Instead he sends a servant, he sends a vicar, not as a slight, but as a statement of who is at work: God not Elisha. The servant says, **"Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed."**

Naaman's outraged because this ain't what he expected. He's expecting a big glorious show, **"I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy."** And another thing! The rivers back home are cleaner than this little mud puddle, so I'll just see myself back home and wash in some real rivers. He's storms off in a rage.

Time for some lowly servants to step up again. They help their master see things clearly. **"My father, if the prophet told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, when he tells you (something simple), 'Wash and be cleansed.'" (2 Kings 5:13).** Simple words from the lowly can make a big difference.

Naaman comes to his senses, lays his pride on the bank, and washes in the Jordan. And what happens? Exactly what the servant girl and God's servant Elisha said would happen. **"His flesh was restored and he became like that of a young boy."** (2 Kings 5:14) But this was only half the transformation, and the less important half. Naaman went back to Elisha the man of God and said, **"Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel"** (2 Kings 5:15). The simple witness of the captive slave girl sent Naaman on a journey that resulted in his salvation. Simple words with God's power behind them are what he uses to save souls!

So what do we take out of this story to help us grow in our SHARING efforts? First Point. No one is too small or too inconsequential or too socially awkward to be God's ambassador. Actually, that's the way God prefers to work, through the small and weak things of this world. Naaman didn't get the flashy show he was looking for. He got a simple command, "Wash and be cleansed," which sounds a lot like the gracious way God makes us his children through baptism, **"Be baptized and wash away your sins" (Acts 22:16).**

Point Number 2: The message is simple. No one who knows what God has done for them can say they don't know enough to share the Gospel. It doesn't have to be complicated. It doesn't have to involve knocking on the doors of strangers. All the little girl said was, "I know a guy who can help you!" And if at the beginning, that's all the words you can get out, that's fine! Tell them you know a guy who can help, and then bring them here or give their address to your pastors and we'll go see them with you.

But remember we also said this is an area we all want to grow in. Sharing is a goal we want to work to get better at as we find the words to apply to their hurts and needs. Sharing is something that each of us wants to think about in everything we do, so that it's not just some tiny compartment of our lives that we only think about on SHARE week.

When you share with your children the truths of the faith you hold fast, you equip them for a lifetime of sharing with a lifetime of people. When you come to usher or great at church or you sing in the choir, your sharing with people a welcoming, beautiful, organized worship experience that brings the gospel message to their hearts. When you stand at the coffee café and smile and pass out coffee, or when you shovel the sidewalk in the dead of winter so that nobody slips, when you fix the boilers so the place isn't frigid, when you dress up in a goofy costume for "Trunk or Treat" so people have fun on our campus, you are working towards our combined effort to share the gospel here at Mount Olive. And did you notice I never once mentioned having heated doctrinal disputes with raving enemies of Christianity? You might run into something like that down the line, but don't think you have to start there.

To help us as a congregation reframe the way we think about SHARING, we've scheduled something for our whole congregation to be a part of. Don't look at the person next to you. I'm talking to you! It's a weekend where we evaluate how our congregation is doing in this area, where we think about the way we currently do this and who does it, and come out recommitted to being an ambassador of Christ to win the lost. Mark your calendars for February 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>. It's called Everyone Outreach. Everyone means everyone! Every saved soul is an ambassador to every soul Christ saved. That's why our Family SHARES the gospel. Amen.