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Talk about talking about faith ...
Matthew 27:57-28:15

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Whenever someone mentions the word evangelism, I tend to turn off my brain. I don't mean to. It just happens. I find myself picturing overdressed people in suits standing on doorsteps in the wind, offering a story or an argument that I don't have time for, or, to be honest, interest in. As I was looking for things on the internet about this, here is what I found.

That's my picture of evangelism.

Maybe, it is time for a new picture. What do you say?

Today I want to ask three questions: Why is evangelism so important? What is evangelism, anyways? And how do I go about sharing actual good news about Jesus with someone who, despite all odds, asks me what it is?

First, Why is evangelism so important?

I have a friend. Her name is Katie. She has amazing, red-gold hair. It's really quite shocking, long, curly. Very distinctive. And for the purposes of my story, important.

Katie and her hair had always longed to go to Mongolia. Her dream was to teach unreached people about Jesus. The tribe that she was looking for took several weeks on horseback to get to. When they finally arrived at the gathered tents of this nomadic tribe, a woman came up to Katie, and without waiting for an introduction said, "You are the one that can teach us about Jesus!"

Needless to say, my friend was a little bit shocked by this bold statement. So, she asked the obvious question. "How do you know me?"

The response to that question is nothing short of a miracle. The woman said that there had been dreams. Dreams in which God had visited the people. And he said that he was the God of the Christians, and his name was Jesus. He was sending a teacher to them, one who could show them what he wanted from them, how to live and worship and pray.

The people wanted to know how they would recognize such a teacher. Visitors are quite rare in that part of the world. But they didn't want to miss this person!

Dream Jesus told the people to look out for someone who had the same hair as he appeared with — long, red-gold, curly hair. Not something you see every day among the

tribal people of the Mongolians. And so they waited. For some time. Until Katie came to do exactly what Jesus had promised them she was to do.

So, that is a pretty amazing story, and one that might cause you to question my sanity. But I believe it! The message of Jesus is so important, that people have dreams about it, they anticipated it, and they long for it.

Over there. But what about here? Where you are one click away from hearing a televangelist talk about Jesus 24/7? Where if you really want to, you can hear ideas, theories and sermons about Jesus at the click of a button, and at the speed of the internet.

All of this information, just waiting for us. It seems as though everyone has made their minds up about Jesus and who he is — a good, moral teacher, someone with a God-complex, a liar, a cheat, a magician, a saviour, a faker, a God. There are a lot of stories out there.

This isn't new. Right from the resurrection, Matthew tells us about the origin of one of the false stories. If you want to follow along, it is in Matthew 27:57-28:15.

I find this story to be compelling in every way. It is laid out like a movie, cutting back and forth between two teams, the Jesus team, and the opposition team, who we will call Team Temple.

Back and forth, the scene cuts. May I have the body to lay to rest, asks a disciple of Jesus? Granted, says Pilate. Post a guard, say the priests, Lest the disciples steal the body! Thinking to himself that he just gave the body to a disciple, Pilate says, do what you need to do to make it secure! The women go to the tomb, and find the guards, and an angel! They hear one version of the event — Jesus has risen from the dead! As they go to tell the disciples, the guards make their own report, and a lie is born.

The way that Matthew does this, he lists a series of ironic situations, where what we would expect to be true is actually the exact opposite. Roman power is powerless. Soldiers are terrified and women are joyful! The legal testimony of the male witnesses is compromised, and the truth is carried by female messengers. The stability of the earth shakes. And two key ironies: the protectors of truth, the priests, actively, knowingly deceive. And the dead, are alive.

Its an amazing list of delicious irony and humor. And it has one purpose. To contrast the two stories that are being told about one event. Matthew pulls back the shroud of secrecy, deception, and deliberately blows the whistle on the corruption of team temple.

It is easy to see, then, why Jesus sends out his disciples to tell their side of the story. If they didn't speak out, then only one version of the story would have been told. If they refused to tell people who had made up their minds about God and the universe and

their place in the narrative that there was something else to consider, a game changer, then the conspiracy of the priests would have worked.

But they didn't. They talked. A lot.

It is really easy to see the similarities between that first week, and today. Today, wild theories and improbable excuses are repeated about Jesus — including, you guessed it, that the body was stolen. Imagine that.

I wonder, who is correcting the story? Who is telling the truth? Because silence allows a different story to be told.

What, then, is evangelism? It is pretty simple. The biblical word, euaggelion, means this: the good news of the coming of Messiah. In some cases, it talks about being the messenger of that good news.

It is both far more simple, and also more complicated than my picture of folks on the front step.

For the early church, it was about telling the story. It also went far deeper than that. The early church believed to their core that because Jesus lived, died, and rose from the dead, a better way of living was there to be had. Truly, they were fools if Jesus remained in the grave, because they gave everything, and suffered everything, and they refused to believe that Jesus was still dead somewhere, stolen away by those who followed him. They cared for people around them who were crushed by the brutality of life, poverty, oppression, constant military presence and war. The early church was known, because they would extend a better life to those around them free of strings and cost, simply because they took Jesus at his word, that God would abundantly provide life to all who sought after him. Evangelism, to them, was a way of life, not just a tract to hand out. It is sharing the impact of good news, of moving people one step closer to God, no matter their current stage of belief.

This is an example of what it looks like in today's world. Its a story of two friends of mine from my days with InterVarsity at the university that we will call Sara, and Kate.

We were studying the story of a paralytic being lowered through the roof of a house by his friends so he could get face to face with Jesus. Absurd unless those friends believed that being in front of Jesus was worth everything to their friend. And Sara decided that she needed to act.

You see, Sara had a friend. Sara wanted her friend to know Jesus in the same vibrant, soul expanding kind of way that she herself had discovered. That night, a spark flashed in her imagination, the culmination of all of our studies that semester. Getting her in front of Jesus would be all kinds of good. But how to do this?

Risky invitations.

So began a year and a half of inviting, cajoling, bringing, and on your face in front of God almighty praying. Gospel according to Hollywood, one of our Inter Varsity bible studies. Church to hear Sara preach on her mission trip to Sierra Leone. Be a bridesmaid in Sara's wedding. Sara invited her to it all, and she came! The best part of it was Sara experienced not just the joy of watching Mariah respond, but also the flat out fun of deepening her relationship with her friend!

Finally the day came where she ran out of questions. So, Sara began asking the questions.

"What are you thinking about church, bible study, being interested in this stuff?"

"Is waiting going to be helpful, or is it just prolonging your indecision?"

"Do you want to take that leap of faith and follow Jesus?"

"Yes! But I don't know how!"

Sara taught her Romans 10:9: Declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you shall be saved.

Sara, with prayer and courage, invited her over the threshold. And, just like every invitation that Sara had offered her, she responded.

It would be good if this was the end of the story, but why settle for good when you can aim for great?

Enter Kate, one of Sara's closest friends and co-leader with her in their small group.

Kate had grown up in a very small, very Christian community. Her first priority on coming to university was to engage completely in Inter Varsity to establish a Christian bubble and hold the secular culture shock at bay. This seemed like a good plan.

Except for her staff workers, who kept ranting at her to introduce herself to people who didn't know Jesus yet, and invite them to bible study.

Kate didn't know how to do that! Everyone in her life was Christian, and she was an introvert besides.

Then her friend met Jesus, and Sara was excited. And Kate thought to herself, "If I'd started when Sara did, I might have a great story too!" It was through this process that Kate realized that evangelism to non-Christians and being Jesus to them was simply being their friend. Authentically.

Kate had another epiphany: She'd been in classes for two years with the same students, and she didn't know a thing about them. Not their hobbies or dreams, or relationships. And they didn't know anything about her, either. Slowly, this gnawed at Kate's conscience until she decided to take action.

However, unlike Sara, Kate didn't know any non-Christians so she was starting from the beginning. She intentionally sought some out, and worked to establish trust. She shared classes, worked out with her new friends, walked to school with them. And along the way, she shared her perspective on abortion, relationships and dating, death, and everything else that comes up in the life of university students.

Here is a direct quote from her: "I'm in a place now where I haven't ever been. I think I'm finally doing what my staff workers have been pushing me to do for years. I'm establishing friendships and trust with my peers. They are ordinary *people* whom I genuinely care about. I don't see the label of "Non-Christian" anymore. I urgently want them to know Christ the way I know him. I don't care if I am the one to introduce them, but I can only pray that I'm a rung in the ladder that they climb toward the Lamb of God himself."

How do I do evangelism? It is sharing meals, movies, work, and life with those with whom you disagree, or who disagree with you. It means that through pot lucks, bible studies and prayer, you will hear ideas that you haven't thought about, as all of us wrestle with questions of faith in a secular community. It means going to Cuba to encourage and be encouraged, supporting all of the various *themes* with our finances, prayers and people. It means risky invitations, relationships with people who believe different things, all hoping that the spark catches.

Eventually, yes, it means telling the story of Christianity, the story of God Almighty, and Jesus, the only giver of life. It means correcting the false stories about Jesus that are out there.

But how do I do that?

I want to give you a practical tool. It's called True Story, by an IV staffworker named James Choung. You can look this video up on youtube.

Here is the challenge for the day. Think of one person that you'd like to connect with, in a deeper, authentic way — not a soul to convert, but a friendship to foster. And along the way, as you live life together, share what you know about the good news of Jesus. It's that simple, and it's that important.