

Sixth Sunday of Easter  
Wicker Park Lutheran Church  
Rev. Jason S. Glombicki  
May 21st, 2017

Like it or not, we're living in a social media culture. Research shows that 81% of the US population has a social networking profile.<sup>1</sup> Across industries, social media went from something "nice to have" to an essential strategy.<sup>2</sup> Places that aren't social media-friendly are quickly finding their doors shuttered. Yet, before we share something on social media, we must first have an experience worth sharing.

We call sharing our experience evangelism in church speak. In our most recent ministry evaluation survey, members gave the lowest ranking to how well WPLC "equips members to share their faith with others." This congregation isn't the only one who struggles with this, though. Lutherans have long been hesitant in sharing their faith. We're not like the Evangelicals who are social media junkies. Instead, we Lutherans tend to be social media lurkers. You know what I mean, we sit back and watch everyone else post and then we wonder why we only have a handful of friends in the pews. If you were here on Easter Sunday, however, these pews were packed! During that sermon, I said something really important. I said, "once you experience resurrection you'll tell of it, you'll be an evangelist for resurrection." You see, sharing is born from resurrection. In fact, resurrection is a prerequisite.

In today's reading from Acts, the story about Paul gives us a framework for sharing our faith. To start, Paul paid attention to details. In verse 23 he looked "carefully at the objects of their

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/273476/percentage-of-us-population-with-a-social-network-profile/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/04/6-ways-social-media-is-changing-the-world/>

worship” in Athens. He discovered that they believed their deity was physically-stationary like gold, silver, or stone, which was formed by humankind.

If we’re honest, we are probably most like the Athenians in today’s reading. We Christians tend to get possessive of buildings, baptismal fonts, carvings, and crosses because we think that God is present in them specifically. We also have the tendency, like the Athenians, to take one aspect of God and make it God’s full essence. At times, we only focus on Jesus’ crucifixion and forget his teachings; or emphasize the God’s creative powers while ignoring the continual presence of the Spirit. We idolize God’s gift of money and make it our primary concern. We idolize our physical appearance made in the image of God. We adore success. We worship the Bible. We venerate sex, security, knowledge, and law. We have taken the gifts of God and turned them into idols – making a part of the expression of God the whole of our existence.

It is from our experience with idolatry that we begin to share our faith. Because before you can share, you first have to experience resurrection. So, I’m going to help guide you on this process of learning how to share your faith using Paul’s example. Find the sheet in your bulletin to get us started.

Step 1 – Identify your primary idol. In other words, what is your highest priority? What do you spend most of your time thinking and obsessing about? Be honest. Is it money, shopping, the bible, the law, your physical appearance or your job? Once you’ve got it, put it in the “identify” box at the top.

Step 2 – Ask yourself “why?” We all idolize things, but why that particular idol? The downward arrows are asking you figure out the yearning behind the idol. // If you’re having trouble with this, let’s take something that is prevalent in our society, namely “success” (that’s step 1). We may idolize success in our career or as a parent. If we dig deeper we might discover that

success “proves our value” (that’s the first downward arrow). If we ask “why?” again, it might be that success and “feeling loved” are deeply intertwined. So, what we really yearn to have is a “feeling of love.” If that’s not your idol’s yearning it might be control, security, or something else.

Okay, let’s admit it, two steps into this process and idolatry feels heavy. However, instead of being pulled down by this weight, Paul puts it on a pulley system and lets this weight lift us up. You see, after Paul notices the idol, he used it as a means to talk about a life-giving force. He said in verse 28, “In [God] we live and move and have our being.” Paul said, look wider. He called them to notice that God is more than a stationary item, like stone. Instead, God animates our actions and birthed us. And that’s step 3.

Step 3— God’s response to our yearning. To name the response, we need to grasp God’s voice. It takes all the things we looked at two weeks ago – learning God’s voice in the scriptures, in fellowship with the faithful, in breaking of the bread, in prayer, and in using our wealth for the community. When we know God’s voice, then we can put it in conversation with our yearnings. So, look at your “step 2 yearning,” and see if you can discover how God might meet and respond to it. What would God say to that yearning? (Take a moment to think.)

If you’re having trouble with this step, that’s okay because it is a symptom that can be treated. Now, this treatment takes some commitment. You’ll need to take one part of awareness in the world, three parts of scriptures, and two parts each of water, bread, and wine. Then, mix all that together with your God-given reason and time spent in community with people of faith. Drink deeply of this medicine often. It’ll take time for it to work, so don’t rush it. You might even start with a smaller dose of scripture reading and build up. Once you’ve begun treatment for this chronic condition, called idolatry, you’ll be able to better engage step 3 by articulating God’s response to your yearning.

To make step 3 come to life, let's look back to my previous example of "success." With that yearning for love, I could acknowledge that in baptism I was named God's beloved child and I was marked with the cross of Christ forever. In that, I am reminded that regardless if I am successful or not, I am loved.

You see, once you get to the point where you can articulate how God's voice speaks to your yearning, then, if you're like me, you have an experience for a social media post, and you get to step 4 –recognizing resurrection. When you realize that God speaks directly to your yearning, reminding you that there is nothing you *have* to do; when you discover God's grace that says you are loved as you are and at the same time you are called to be better than you've been before, it's in *that* moment that you've experienced resurrection. In that moment, you cannot and will not ever be the same. For when you understand the ways that your idol is liberated by God, and when you discover that God is in all things and beyond all things, then your mind will be blown and you'll be powerless to sharing. It'll be like you're tweeting non-stop because you've experienced resurrection, and like those Mary's on that first Easter morning you'll tell about. So, step 4 – it's the touchy-feely step - how do you feel or what do you notice different when God speaks to your yearning? In church speak, what does resurrection feel like to you?

Then, once you've experienced resurrection you'll share it. You'll post about it. You'll tweet. You'll upload photos. So, step 5 – how will you share your story? In resurrection, you've discovered a whole new way of seeing the world, a different way to react to the world, and you are liberated from your idol. You're liberated to serve God and others. In resurrection, you are called to something more. For you, that might look like sharing you story of feeding hungry bellies. Or maybe you'll tell of resurrection when you gather at an interfaith dinner. Perhaps you'll write your representatives about important issues of your faith, like immigration or budget spending. You

might even find yourself more deeply partnering with this congregation in our liberating work together. That is step 5. That is how you share and live out your faith.

Well, there it is. Again, we learn from the early church how we can come to experience the resurrection *and* how we can share it. We found ways to challenge ourselves to speak of our faith. Today we gathered, we learned through scripture, and we were reminded that God is with us, in us, among us, and works through us to share our faith in word *and* action. Thanks be to God! Amen.