

The Witnessing Church
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Acts 2:47

(From Chap 1 Tony Compolo The kingdom of God is a party.
Tony lived on the East Coast and had to travel to Honolulu for a conference.
If you've done that you know that the time difference
makes 3:00 A.M. feel like 9:00 A.M.

Not only did he find himself up and ready to go in the
morning when everyone else was still sleeping BUT

He also found that he craved breakfast when
nearly everything on the island was still closed.

3:30 one morning in Honolulu, after arriving in Hawaii
the day before, Tony found himself up and looking for
a place for something to eat.

Up a side street he found a little place that was still open.
It deserved the name "greasy spoon" because he found
himself afraid even to touch the menu it was so grimy.

The fat guy behind the counter came over and said,
"Whaddya want?"

He told him he wanted a cup of coffee and a donut and
then was sorry he did as the man wiped his face with
his hand, then wiped the hand on his filthy apron before
reaching over and grabbing a donut which he slapped on
a piece of waxed paper and set down in front of Tony.

There Tony sat at least drinking the cup of coffee at 3:30 in the morning when the
door of the diner opened and in walked 8 or 9 provocative and boisterous
prostitutes.

The diner was small and they sat on both sides of him as they carried on
their loud and crude talk.

Tony was just about to make a getaway when he heard the woman on
one side of him say, "Tomorrow's my birthday, I'm going to be 39."

The woman on the other side of him said with a nasty tone,

"So what do you want from me? A birthday party? Whaddy want? Ya want me to get you a cake and sing Happy Birthday?"

"Come on," said the woman sitting on Tony's other side.

"Why do you have to be so mean? I was just telling you, that's all. Why do you have to put me down.

I don't want anything from you. I mean, why should you give me a birthday party? I've never had one in my whole life. Why should I have one now?"

Tony said, "When I heard that I made a decision."

He waited until the women all left

and then he called over the guy behind the counter and asked "Do they come in here often?"

"Yeah" he answered.

"The one who was sitting here, does she come in every night?"

"Yeah, that Agnes, she comes in every night, why do you want'ta know?"

"Because I heard her say that tomorrow is her birthday,"

Tony said, "What do you say that you and I do something about that? What do you think about us throwing a birthday party for her - right here - tomorrow night?"

The waiter got a cute smile on his chubby cheeks and said that he thought that was a great idea.

He shouted to his wife in the back room and told her to come on out front because they had a great idea. "Tomorrow's Agnes's birthday and this guy (pointing at Tony) wants us to throw a party for her right here.

The man's wife came out all smiles and said that Agnes deserved that because she was really nice.

So Tony told them that he'd come back at 2:30 the next night and would bring things to decorate the place. He'd even bring a cake.

But the owner said, "no way. The birthday cake's my thing. I'll make the cake.

The next night by 3:30 the place looked great.

Even a big banner that read "Happy Birthday Agnes!"

The man's wife had gotten the word out so that by that time the place was filled with every prostitute in Honolulu - it was wall to wall prostitutes and Tony.

At 3:30 on the dot in walked Agnes with another woman.

Tony had everybody ready and they all sang "Happy Birthday"

Never had Tony seen a person so flabbergasted, so stunned.
Her mouth fell open, Her legs seemed to buckle.

Her eyes filled with tears and then when the cake was brought out with the candles burning - she lost it and began to cry openly.

The owner held out a knife and told her to cut the cake so they could all eat it but Agnes looking down at the cake slowly and softly said, "Look, Harry (that was the fat guy's name) is it

all right with you if I...

I mean is it O.K. if I kind of..

what I want to ask you is...

Is it O.K. if I keep the cake a little while?

I mean is it all right if we don't eat the cake right away?

Harry shrugged and said, "Sure, it's O.K. Keep the cake if you want to. Take it home with you."

"Can I?" she asked and then she said that she lived just a couple of doors down the street and she'd be right back.

She got off the stool at the counter and holding the cake like it was the Holy Grail, she walked slowly to the door and out.

Tony said, we all stood there motionless in silence as she left.

When the door closed behind her, the silence persisted and not knowing what else to do, Tony said,
"what do you say, we pray?"

Tony prayed for Agnes, for her salvation, that her life would be changed and that God would be good to her.

When he finished, Harry leaned over the counter and said,
Hey Tony you never told me you was a preacher.
What kind of a church do you belong to.

Tony with words that were just right for the moment said,

"I go to a church that throws birthday parties for prostitutes at 3:30 in the morning"

Harry said, "No you don't. There ain't no such church - If there was I'd join it."

How many others are there who would become part of the church if God's people reached out in the kind of creative love that Tony did?

From Acts 2:42-47 we have seen over the past several weeks a description of the kind of church that God called His people to be.

In Acts 2:42 we saw that this Jerusalem church was a learning church - "devoted to the Apostles 'teaching"

In Acts 2:46 and 47 we saw that they were a Worshipping church - "meeting together and praising God"

In Acts 2:42 and 44-46 we saw that they were a "caring church" - "devoted to fellowship, and sharing as anyone had need"

But what we see in the last part of this passage - vs. 47 - is that these people were not so preoccupied with themselves that they forgot their mission.

They were not so involved in worshipping, caring, and learning that they forgot why they were still here.

Look at verse 47 - " the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved".

Folks that is Evangelism!

This Jerusalem church was an evangelizing church and so must ours be. That is the 4th of the Four-fold purpose of this church taken from the description of this Jerusalem church.

We are to be a Cultivating(learning) church
a Celebrating (worshipping) church
a Caring (loving) church
and a Communicating (evangelizing) church.

These people in the Jerusalem church, "ate, breathed, and slept" communicating Jesus to others.

The word "communicate" in the minds of too many of us

implies talking. But even in the dictionary the definition of "communicate" never once mentions anything verbal.

In fact the words used are:

"to make known, to display, to manifest,
to spread to others, to express oneself
in a way that is most clearly understood."

Evidently these Jerusalem Christians were clearly communicating, clearly displaying, Jesus, because daily people were being saved and added to the church.

In fact, while Cultivating, Caring and Celebrating are key purposes of the church it must be noted that in the book of ACTS it is Communicating that demands the most attention.

(from Stott pg 86) One theologian wrote,

"Acts is governed by one dominant, overriding and all-controlling motif. This motif is the expansion of the (Christian) faith through missionary witness in the power of the Spirit... Restlessly the Spirit drives the church to witness and continually churches rise out of that witness. The church is a missionary church" Look with me at Acts 1:8 Here is the Mission.

2:22 And that is what they do - witness

to Jesus. Who he is and what he did

4:31 spoke the word boldly

5:14 many believed

5:42 in spite of persecution never stopped

8:1 persecuted

8:4 All except the apostles went out

11:19-21

13:2 Paul sent out and on it goes

These people had a MISSION!

It is conviction that compels us to action.

Those things about which we have real conviction we act on.

These people saw themselves as Paul called them "Ambassadors"

Many years ago, Napoleon Hill wrote a book called,
Think and Grow Rich. It is a book on how to become a
financial success.

Since 1937 the book has been issued in 42 editions.
Millions of copies sold.

Basically what Hill said was, "If you want to become wealthy you must develop an obsession for money. You must meditate on it, plan for it, and sacrifice anything to get it. Money must become the top priority in your life.

Though the book and it's philosophy are as ungodly as you can get, the basic observation is correct:

"Today's obsessions become tomorrow's realities"

Out of conviction comes action.

The Jerusalem church had a conviction about their mission of communicating Jesus to others and they acted on it.

Today, too many of God's people are embarrassed by what others would call a religious imperialism.

Evangelicals get cast in the same light as Islamic Fundamentalists - Narrow minded, bigoted, doctrinaire, and out to convert everyone else to their way of thinking.

The theology of the day is to "live and let live". It doesn't really matter what religion or even if there is a religion at all.

(from Dec 17, 1990 Newsweek)

A recent ad campaign for the Unitarian Universalist Church (the granddaddy of anything goes religion) says "Instead of me fitting a religion, I found a religion that fits me."

But as the current Newsweek says, "It is not easy making one size fit all."

At Boston's historic Arlington Street Church, a unitarian universalist church, the Rev. Kim Crawford Harvie tries to invoke several traditions each December by celebrating

winter solstice

Hannukah

Kwanzaa

and Christmas .

"At our best, we really try to celebrate diversity,

says the Reverend Harvie, a lesbian and single mother. But even she has been criticized for using the word "humankind" because it leaves out animals and plants."

Such ridiculous attempts at inclusiveness are vapid at best and damning at worst.

We cannot say all religions lead to God or all gods lead to heaven.
No! we cannot take a "live and let live" attitude
because that really is "die and let die".

Today there are people all over this country crying out that the Federal Drug Administration is "criminal" for not telling the public about certain drugs for terminally ill patients.

When there is a drug, not yet even proven, that they think might help save a physical life, evangelists for that drug demand that it be told about.

"Don't keep those drugs from the people", we are told.
"Lives are being lost."

In ACTS 4:12 Peter said, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." And he was speaking of Jesus.

If Peter is right about Jesus, then we cannot be stopped by charges of Religious Imperialism, we must let the truth of Jesus be made known so that much more than a physical life can be saved.

If the message of Jesus is true then it is criminal to keep it from the people.

Any shred of human decency would tell us so.

I am impressed by the way the apostle Paul summarized it in Romans 1:16 "I am not ashamed of the Good News of Christ for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.

These Jerusalem Christians had a mission and a message and so do we!

But I want to put you back in mind of that opening illustration of Tony and tell you that these Jerusalem Christians also had a method.

Look again at 2:47 where it says, the believers, were

"enjoying the favor of all the people"

Look with me at 5:12-14 (read).

The believers were highly regarded by the people

Like Tony, these believers acts of love were so attractive that people were drawn to Jesus.

The Christians were living lives in such a way that people around them were attracted to the Lord.

I like the way Joe Aldrich, President of Multnomah College puts it: "We can compare the (attractiveness of the Christian's life) to music. Many evangelistic training programs (in the church) concentrate on the words (we will speak). Few teach us how to play the music -that beauty of character God wants to play out through our lives. People need to hear this music then they will respond to the words. And they need to hear (the music) before they hear the words." from Jan 7, 1983 C.T.

The Jerusalem Christians "enjoyed the favor of all the people".

I have a question for us. You ask it of yourself:

"What impression do others have of Jesus by watching me?"

What impression do others have of Jesus by watching me?

People, we have a Mission: It is a matter of life or death

People must hear. It is criminal not to tell.

and we have a MESSAGE: Jesus is the Christ, there is salvation in no other name.

The world may not like it but there is only ONE WAY - and Jesus is the Way.

and our method is clear: The gospel message must be demonstrated in our lives before it will be believed by our words.

When are you going to throw a birthday party for someone?

Maybe not a birthday party at 3:30 in the morning - BUT

I'm serious what are you going to do this week

to make the Good News of Jesus attractive to someone.