



# The Trinity Pulpit



## The Human Factor

Luke 1:67-80

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In the Saphur Village in the Pana District of India, there, people are all Hindu. There, in that village, there were people who were facing a great problem of drinking water. You and I know that we are very spoiled, for unlike so many in the world, we think nothing of turning on our water faucet and drinking water that we can count on being healthy for us. We can go out and buy drinking water in bottles that in some cases is just water from someone else's faucet. Drinking water has never been an issue for us. Yet, in places like Saphur Village drinking water is an issue. Although there were some personal wells there was no central well for everyone in the village. Many people lacked good drinking water. They lacked the ability to have water daily and to have water for celebrations like marriages and festivals.

The people of Saphur approached a Southern Baptist church planter who was working on sharing the gospel with the village. When he learned of the need of a common well and drinking water, he began the process of seeing how the well could become a reality. The request was made through the North Carolina Baptist Convention and the Missions Committee; Sunday School classes of Trinity Baptist Church responded and a well was dug. This well provides water for over 100 families. At the well there is a marble slab with the inscription "Jesus is the living water." Now, the people not only have drinking water, but there are 50 people meeting for prayer meeting, and a literacy program has begun. People are hearing the good news of Jesus Christ, and they all know that they have clean and accessible

drinking water because Christians love them and care for them.

What has made the difference in the Saphur Village in India? It is the human factor. The human factor is the difference between talking about the gospel and living the gospel. The human factor is what God chooses to use to proclaim to the world that God loves the world and has sent Jesus to the whole world. The human factor is needed now this Advent and Christmas, and it was needed the first Christmas as well.

Peace

Christmas is the celebration that God became human in Jesus Christ. Jesus is God's human factor of love. Yet, there is another story of the human factor in the Christmas story; it is the part that

John the Baptist would play in preparing the people for Jesus. There are many stories that are a part of the Christmas celebration. Most of the time we think about the angel's appearance to Mary or to Joseph, and we sometimes forget the parallel story of Zechariah and Elizabeth. They also have the appearance of angels to tell them that Elizabeth would have a baby, although she had been barren. Their child would not be the messiah but he would be the forerunner. He would be the human factor that would prepare the people for Jesus. His name would be John.

Zechariah's story is an interesting one. Zechariah was a priest and while he was serving in the temple, the angel appeared to him to tell him of God's blessing of a son – a son who would be the great prophet. But

Zechariah did not believe the angel and so Zechariah was struck mute. Zechariah would not speak again until John was born. So, while Elizabeth was pregnant, Zechariah could not speak until finally John was born. After John's birth, Zechariah speaks and he proclaims the great prophecy that God would send Jesus.

Zechariah, describing Jesus, tells us that God would send a deliverer for his people; that God would keep his covenant that he had made with his people. Jesus would be our salvation. Yet, that was not the end of Zechariah's prophecy. Zechariah says of his own son, John, he would be a prophet and John would prepare the way for Jesus. John would bring knowledge of God's salvation for those who lived in darkness and guide our feet in peace. That is the role of the human factor. It is preparation, knowledge and peace.

I want to submit to you that this is our role. Our role in sharing the gospel is to be the human factor. It is not our job to save or deliver people; only Jesus can do that. It is not our job to convict people or make people feel guilty; that is the role of the Holy Spirit. It is not our job to complete salvation; that is the work of the God. Our role is to be the human factor. Our part is to do as John did with Jesus. Ours is the role of preparation, knowledge and peace.

Today, on the day we focus our thinking on sharing the gospel with not only those we know but the world, let's think about what it means to be the human factor.

First, it means our role is to prepare others for the good news of Jesus. John would prepare the way for Jesus. John would preach the need of repentance of sins. John's ministry would predate Jesus' ministry. Even some of Jesus' disciples followed John before they followed Jesus. John was part of their preparation.

How do we prepare others for the gospel? First we need to understand the importance of the human factor in preparation. Now it is true that there are some times that God works independently from any one. There are many people who come to salvation through God's spirit independent from human in-

volvement. However, those moments are few compared to those who come to salvation as the result of individual after individual sharing Christ in word and deed.

It is estimated, by those who study evangelism that most people come to Christ after 8 to 10 personal experiences with Christians, or hearing the gospel 8 to 10 times. Most people do not respond the first time but later on. This is why Jesus says of us that we reap where we have not sown and we sow where we do not reap. Ours is not really to worry about reaping and sowing but more about doing our part in the process. That is the role of preparation.

Brian McLaren once said that the time has come to start counting conversations as much as we count converts. What he was trying to get us to do is to realize the importance of the human factor. We really do not know how much God can use what might seem to us a small act or a passing word to lead people to Christ. It might be kindness shown during Operation InAsMuch or helping a family during WHIN. It might be a listening ear at work from a co-worker who is struggling. It might be a kind word to someone at school whom others ignore. It might be a card of encouragement or a meal during grief with a neighbor.

What we need to understand is that preparation is part of our role as the human factor. Preparation occurs when we take the initiative to be like Christ to those around us. Bill Hybels calls it "a walk across the room." His book of the same title speaks of ways that we build friendships and, little by little, lives are prepared to be open to the good news of Jesus. It all begins with intentionality of caring and sharing.

In his book, Hybels tells the story of meeting a man at a gathering that changed his thinking about evangelism. Across the room there was this large African-American man whom Hybels assumed was a Muslim. During the event, the man told Hybels how much he enjoyed Hybels' Christian books. Hybels was intrigued as the man told his story. He said

I guess you are wondering why I said this, because I know that you assume I am a Muslim. A few years ago you would have been right. I grew up in the church, but because of the judg-

mental attitude of Christians I knew I chose to leave the faith and became a Muslim. Living in the South, this has meant that I have been ostracized and find myself many times alone in social settings. Then one day, while in a social gathering, I found myself again alone and left out of conversations when a man noticed me, walked across the room, and introduced himself to me. We talked about family and profession and finally faith. When I shared that I was a Muslim, he said the he was a follower of Jesus; then, he began to ask about being a Muslim. He asked if he could meet me for coffee to discuss my faith. I accepted and that began a series of meetings of me talking and him listening. He was genuinely interested in who I was and what I thought and what I believed. He did not force his faith on me but simply listened and answered my questions when I asked them about his faith in Jesus. I had never known a Christian like this. Then, one day it happened. I was all alone at home and knew I needed to pray. I got down on my knees and began to pray to Jesus. I asked Jesus to be Lord of my life, and since that moment, everything in my life has changed. It was not the first conversation or the second or the third... it was one man's walk across the room that began the preparation of another man's eternal life.

It all begins with the human factor, which is our understanding that our role is simply preparation through love. How can you, this week, help prepare others to be receptive to Jesus? You can be kind, you can respond in love, you can be a friend, you can be a person with hope... you can prepare the hearts of people to hear good news.

The second action of John was to share the knowledge of salvation for those who lived in the shadow of death or those who were in darkness. Another role for the human factor is to share what we already know and that is our salvation. John would proclaim to those who would hear him preach and who would come to him for baptism

that there was one coming after him who would baptize them in the Spirit. Jesus would bring salvation for those who were in the darkness.

One of our roles is to prepare lives, but a second role is to share the salvation we have experienced through Jesus. One of the reasons we do not tell others about Jesus is that we fail to understand our own salvation experience with Jesus. One person said that he did not share his faith, because he did not want to burden anyone with God. The problem with that statement is that this person had a poor understanding of God. God is not a burden, but One who sets us free. God is not a burden, but One who proclaims good news.

***“Our role in sharing the gospel is to be the human factor.”***

Jerry Rankin, who is the retiring president of the Southern Baptist International Mission Board, recently said that for too many people the message of Christianity is about judgment and going to hell or not going to hell. “What happened,” he asks, “to the good news of Jesus being good news?”

When Jesus was born, the angels appeared to the Shepherds at Jesus' birth; they declared, “I have good tidings of great joy.” We have good news that brings joy. The salvation that Jesus brings is good news. It is the news the God loves all people. It is the news that God is with us. It is the news that God forgives us. It is the good news that every day God brings purpose to our lives. There are many who just do not know that what Jesus has to offer is good news. Tell others what Jesus has done for you. What difference does Jesus make in your life and in my life? Tell others of the good news of salvation.

Our third role as the human factor is to bring peace. The guide our feet in the path of peace. Peace in the Bible is more than absence of conflict; in fact, most of the time it is a quality of life even in the midst of conflict. The path of peace is the ability to live life no matter the circumstances or events in life. It is to not measure life by what happens to us but who is living within us. It is to find peace, well being no matter the moment. It is, as the Apostle Paul put it, “to be content in plenty and in want.” It

is to know in our hearts that no matter what happened in the past or what will happen in the future there is nothing that separates us from the love of God. We have good news of salvation and the promise of the path of peace.

Zechariah proclaimed that John would be the human factor as the forerunner of Jesus. You and I are also the human factor of the gospel. We help prepare lives for God's spirit to work. We tell the good news of Jesus. We lead people to the path of peace.

On this world mission-emphasis day here at Trinity, I also want to encourage you to be the human factor in not only sharing Christ in our own community and in our lives but with those all over the world. In just a few moments, we are going to have our Mission Walkdown. Our offering is \$50,000. You might ask why you should give something beyond your normal giving to the church for this offering. It is because when we give, we support missionaries who are out there sharing Christ. When we share so others can be saved we become the human factor to the world.

So, what is your giving doing? It is preparing the world for the gospel. Your giving in the past meant that not only the well in Saphul has been dug, but directly, from gifts given by Trinity members, 33 wells now exist in Indian Villages. Most villages have 300 people in them. Our gifts support this work, but also the works of Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in places like India. Sam Bandela, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship missionary to India, shared with us Wednesday night that due to our giving to the missions offerings, there are thousands of boys and girls who are Hindus learning about Jesus in Christian schools. In other places, young women who were bound for prostitution have been saved from such a fate and are now trained with a skill. In one situation, they are given a sewing machine as a gift to have their own business. These young women now have choices where there were none. They not only have sewing machines but also Bibles. The children not only have an education, but they have Bibles and are hearing the good news of Jesus. When you

give, whether it is a well or a sewing machine people's lives are being prepared for the work of the Spirit.

We have good news for those who are in darkness. Do you know that there are living in areas, where there is less than 2% of the population who are Christians, 3.9 billion people? That accounts for 6,454 different people groups. Listen to that figure again. There are nearly 4 billion people living on the face of the earth where less than 2% of the population are Christians. There are literally billions of people living in darkness. They are bound there by culture, war, poverty and ignorance. Are you telling me that we cannot give \$50,000 – a drop in the bucket for sure, but at least a drop – so that someone might hear of the good news of Jesus? There are those who are living in the darkness in the shadow



How will we respond to such a great need? We give, we guide people to the path of peace. We give, people hear that even if they are in war, Jesus loves them. Even when their lives are with fear and disappointment, Jesus loves

You have heard the old story of the little girl who was crying in her bed at night. The father went in to comfort her and she said that she was afraid. The father said "You don't need to be afraid. God is always with us. When you are afraid, just pray to God." The Father left the room only to hear the little girl crying out again. When he went into the room, he said to the little girl "Did you not listen to what I said? You don't need to be afraid God is with you." The little girl said "Yes, Daddy, I know that God is with me, but I need someone with skin on."

We don't fully understand it, but God chooses to reveal himself and the love he has through Jesus by using us. We are the human factor that prepares lives, shares good news, and speaks the word of peace. Let us be the human factor this Advent Season. ❀

