

Well, it's a sad day. Football season is over. I know, I know – it's not "officially" over. We still have the Super to be played, but since the Cowboys are out of it the season is over. By the way, could you believe that debacle last Sunday? There is no way the Cowboys should have lost to the Giants, but unbelievably they found a way. I'm going to miss football season, but on the other hand, I know a lot of you are glad it's over. After all, if you live with a football fan you have lived and breathed it for the last 5 to 6 months and are probably ready for a break. Since football is over that means it's time to get into basketball full swing. March Madness is coming up as well as the NBA playoffs. And if you are not a basketball fan baseball is right around the corner. By the way all you Texas Ranger fans, I looked in the paper yesterday and the Rangers are already ten games out of first place and the season doesn't even start until April!

This year our oldest son Benjamin is going to play basketball for the first time. He has played in the backyard but has never played on a team. The thing about basketball, like other team sports, is that you have to learn how to play with teammates. I was playing with Benjamin in the backyard the other day and was showing him how to pass the ball. I showed him the chest pass, the bounce pass, the overhead pass, etc. I said, "The key to being a good basketball player is anticipating where the other players are going to be before they get there. If you are a good passer you can make your other teammates better." Basketball was my best sport growing up. I played basketball all the time, and one of the things I remember most about my childhood is going to see the Dallas Mavericks play. My dad and I had season tickets and went nearly every home game. Back then a family could actually afford to go to a game. During one two-week stretch I had the opportunity to see Dr. J., Larry Bird, Magic Johnson, and a rookie by the name of Michael Jordan. At the time I had no idea that I was watching some of the best basketball players of all-time.

While I didn't particularly like the L.A. Lakers, I loved to watch Magic Johnson play. His enthusiasm and love for the game was evident in the way he played, but what made him special was that he made everyone else around him better. He was the one who made the great pass so others could score. He set up the other players for success.

I like to think of John the Baptist the same way. John the Baptist was the forerunner to Jesus and it was his responsibility to point others to Jesus. John the Baptist could have easily gotten a big head because he certainly had

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his fair share of followers and disciples. People literally flocked to the wilderness to hear what he had to say. But instead of getting a big head, John the Baptist knew his place in the world, especially in relation to Jesus Christ. John knew that Jesus was the real deal and that by simply pointing to him he was doing what God called him to do.

In our story today John was standing around with a couple of his followers when Jesus walked in front of them. John the Baptist felt compelled to say, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" It was his way of raising a flag and saying, "There He is! There is the One we have been waiting for!" Both of John's disciples heard him and immediately followed Jesus. John apparently didn't mind that both of the disciples left him because he knew they were going to follow the Son of God himself. Had it been someone else John might have felt differently, but in this case John showed great humility and understanding.

When Jesus turned and saw these two disciples following him, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" I think that was a profound question. Jesus was essentially asking them, "Why are you following me?" I think the question should be asked of us as well. What are we looking for when it comes to following Jesus? Are we looking for a trouble-free life? Are we looking for a buddy? Are we looking for someone to dump our burdens on? Are we looking for a little insurance? We know we don't always do what is right so we might as well hang around Jesus a little bit to hedge our bets. We really don't want him to demand anything of us or change us, we just want to know where He is in case we need Him in a pinch. What are we looking for in Jesus?

The disciples didn't directly answer Jesus' question, in fact, they didn't answer it all. They simply asked, "Where are you staying." That was their way of saying, "We want to know more." In those days rabbis (teachers) would travel around with their followers and along the way the followers would learn from the rabbi. The disciples asked where Jesus was staying because they wanted to follow him and learn from him. Jesus obliged by saying, "Come and see." One of the two disciples who followed Jesus that day was named Andrew. The other disciple is unnamed. Andrew felt compelled to go to his brother, Simon, and tell him that he had found the Messiah. But Andrew did more than tell Simon about Jesus. He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at Simon and said, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas (Peter)."

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I believe right here in the first chapter of John we have the perfect model for faith-sharing. Andrew brought his brother Simon to Jesus. Andrew literally introduced Simon to Jesus. Andrew didn't give a long lecture on why he believed Jesus was the Messiah. He didn't sit down with his brother and try to explain everything about the prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures. Nor did he ask his brother Simon a thousand questions about what he believed. He simply brought him to Jesus and then got out of the way. This pattern of faith-sharing continued the next day. Jesus found a man named Philip and said, "Follow me." Philip followed Jesus and then told his friend Nathanael, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." Nathanael said to Philip, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" That would have been a perfect time for Philip to have engaged Nathanael in a discussion or debate about whether or not Jesus was really the Messiah, but Philip did the right thing by resisting. Instead, Philip said the only thing that could be said, "Come and see."

In each case faith-sharing was really just "Jesus-sharing". When we share our faith at its best we are introducing others to Jesus. The best way to introduce people to one another is to make the introduction and then get out of the way so the two people you are bringing together can form their own relationship. For example,

Imagine this scenario. You have two friends named John and Sally. John and Sally have never met, but you know both of them well. John and Sally happen to be in the same room as you one day and you decide this is the day that John and Sally should meet. You say to John, "This is Sally." John replies, "Hello Sally, nice to meet you." Sally replies, "It's good to meet you as well." At this point instead of backing away and letting John and Sally get to know one another you say, "John is a CPA and works in Dallas. John and I have known one another for years. John is married and has two beautiful little girls. John loves to play golf and ride his motorcycle. Sally is a teacher and she has three boys all under the age of eight. She likes to play tennis and loves to travel." By the time you are finished telling John and Sally about one another they hardly have any time or interest to get to know one another on their own. You have interpreted one to the other through yourself and your relationship with each of them. Instead, it would be more appropriate to say, "John I'd like to introduce you to my friend Sally." Then after you have made the introduction back away and let the two of them talk and get to know one another. For John and Sally to have

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any kind of friendship they must communicate and get to know one another on their own terms. It works the same way when we share our faith in Christ. We cannot transfer our exact relationship with Jesus to others. Our experience of Jesus will not be the same as someone else and vice versa.

There is a story about a man who was walking in the jungle one day and fell into a large pit. There was no way out of the pit and no one there to help him. He cried out to God for help and lo and behold God saved him. He pulled him out the pit. Later that same man took one of his friends to the exact spot where he fell in the pit, and pushed his friend in the pit because he wanted him to have the same experience of salvation that he did! Haven't we all done the same thing in one way or another? We may not have pushed someone in a hole but we have assumed that our experience of Jesus is universal and that everyone should have the same relationship we have.

If you have said, "You just had to be there," when describing an experience, then you know what I'm talking about. I have some friends who were telling me about going to see the Eagles in concert a few years ago. The Eagles were playing in Dallas to open the new American Airlines Center. When they started to tell me about the concert they could hardly string a sentence together because words could not describe their experience. Finally, they said, "You just had to be there." Maybe you have said the same thing about something funny that happened in your life – one of those inside jokes. If you've ever tried to explain an inside joke to someone then you have undoubtedly said, "You just had to be there." I could say the same thing about our worship service last Sunday. I think it was one of the most powerful and meaningful services that I have been a part of. When everyone came up to remember their baptism and pray there was a holy silence in the sanctuary, and there is no way that I could duplicate that moment even if I wanted to. Nor could I adequately explain the incredible feeling and presence of God. It definitely falls into the "You just had to be there" category.

It's difficult to put into words what our relationship with Jesus means to us. On one level it's so personal that we don't even want to talk about it, yet on another level it's hard not to talk about it. I think it would be safe to say that you and I probably don't verbalize what our relationship with Jesus means to us nearly enough. Chances are we fall into that category of people who have faith in Jesus but are afraid to talk about it. We are afraid of someone asking questions we don't know the answers to. We are afraid of rejection, as if we were asking for a date to the prom. We are afraid of

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talking about our faith because after all a good person from the South doesn't talk about religion and politics. Well, I've got news for you and me today, Jesus has commanded us to share our faith. Sharing our faith does not mean that we defend the Christian faith as if God was on trial. Nor does sharing our faith mean that we are solely responsible for the salvation of every person that comes our way. I believe at its core sharing our faith is sharing Jesus – introducing others to the One who has redeemed and saved us.

One of the best ways you and I can introduce others to Jesus is to simply share our story of faith in Jesus. It doesn't have to be some dramatic story. You don't have to make up some story about how you ran down the aisle one day at church and fell to your knees to accept Christ. Just tell your story in a genuine, authentic way and God will do the rest. The point is we have to be willing to share our stories and bring people into contact with Jesus. Very few of us will have the opportunity to speak about our faith to thousands of people at a time, but all of us, every single one of us, has the opportunity to introduce others to Jesus every single day. The mission field is wide open.

One of the ministries I would like to see our church begin this year is called Stephen Ministries. Stephen Ministries is a one on one care giving network within a congregation. Stephen's ministers are lay persons just like you who have gone through training to offer care to others. It might be in the area of grief, divorce, substance abuse, depression, etc., but the ministry is designed to be one on one. I was reading through one of their brochures earlier this week and at the top of the page it said, "1:1". The idea is that ministry happens one to one. I had the opportunity to meet a Stephen's minister the week before last when I visited Kathy Nutt's parents. Kathy's dad has Parkinson's and this Stephen's minister from their church has been assigned to visit with Kathy's dad every week. He comes like clockwork every Thursday at 11:00 p.m. Now that might not impress someone who wants to hear about how many First Church had in church last Sunday, but it sure makes an impression on Kathy's mother and father because they have experienced God's grace through an individual one to one.

If you think that you are not equipped to share your faith in Jesus with others then think again, because it's in the small things we say and do for others that makes the difference. We don't have to make a big splash to make a big splash.

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Fred Craddock preached a sermon about consecrating our gifts to God and said that it's not like we walk up to God's altar with a \$1,000 and slam it down and say, "Here it is! Here's my life." No, it's the opposite. It's as if God has given each of us not a \$1,000 bill at once, but a \$1,000 worth of quarters and expects us to lay those quarters on the altar one day at a time. We lay the quarter on the altar when we play a board game with the third-grader at the after-school program. We lay another quarter on the altar when offer a cup of water to an old man confined to a wheel chair in a nursing home. We lay another quarter on the altar when we say to our friend who thinks he has everything (when he really has nothing), "I would like to introduce you to someone..."