

I Love to Tell the Story

by Pastor Helga Jansons Director for Evangelical Mission

It is my guess that more Lutherans would prefer to sing the hymn *"I Love To Tell The Story"* than to actually tell the old, old story of Jesus and his love. We are "Shy Lutherans" who do not want to impose our faith in a pushy way. We want to be authentic, and while we worry about the decline of our beloved churches, we do not want to be self-serving Christians who just care about "church growth". Many of us have been Lutherans since the "cradle" (or crib) and we have a culture of a long-standing tradition without the excitement that new Christians feel. After a conversion experience people tend to be on fire.

Another reason Lutherans hesitate to "tell the story" is that many feel poorly equipped to talk about their faith and the Bible, and therefore would find the following verse scary: 1 Peter 3:15 *"Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands of you and accounting for the hope that is in you; yet, do it with gentleness and reverence."*

There is a lot to know about the Bible and Lutheran theology and so it is easy to feel inadequate. But I have found that Lutherans know more than enough to tell the story of Jesus' love. It's not like we need a "lesson plan" to talk with someone! You could probably say something about God and Jesus, and even the Holy Spirit. If asked "Why is God central to your life" you may be able to answer that. Or, why do you go to church? You may know your favorite Bible story or verse, or at least basically how it goes. A favorite hymn? You might even be able to say why you are a Lutheran. Any of these are enough to begin a conversation about God with someone. Plus, it is just as important to listen to someone else's faith journey or struggles, as it is to say anything at all.

To develop confidence talking about God takes practice for anyone, even pastors. Lutherans tend to shy away from the word "evangelism" thinking that there are certain people who have the gift of sharing their faith. But even though I am comfortable talking about God with anyone, I have had to think about what I most wanted to say. People are not ready for a sermon on the tennis court! Or at the store. It has also been important to think about the scripture that most speaks to my life, makes a difference or shapes my life, and why. Matthew 28: 20, the last verse of the gospel always brings me to the edge of tears. But why?

Since God matters so much to me, I need people to talk to about the ups and downs of my faith. People whom I can trust, are mature, and are able to handle my questions and thoughts, and have a willingness to share their own. As a result of many conversations about faith, I have developed a comfort level in talking with people about God. It impacts the way I visit people as a pastor too. It is more important to talk about our faith journey than a person's medical condition since I am not a doctor or nurse.

I know that my faith wavers even within one day. My beliefs may seem constant when it comes to my basic theology. But in my daily life when I am wondering what on earth God is up to, it is still a "reverent best guess" (Franklin D. Fry's term). And while I may say to myself "Trust God 100%" that is not how I always feel. Getting through a day can be hard. I don't think any of us have faith "in the bag". It is not that static; there is no "I'm saved" and that is all there is to faith.

But I am convicted by the words from Romans 10:14 *"But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?"* Unless we tell the old, old story of Jesus and his love we will have lost an opportunity to share what matters most to us, with someone who needs it.

