



transforming church
for all ages

Evangelism

Sermon Outline

Evangelism: Acts 17: 16-34

Do you find that children and young people just don't seem to want to know about Jesus?

Our response might be that they are not interested; that the children and young people of our communities simply do not want to know about Jesus. Is the reality, though, more that we are not committing to communicate effectively the difference that knowing Jesus can make? The challenge is that we are one voice in what is becoming the ever-overcrowded global village that we live in, although shouting louder is not the answer.

How will we connect with the children and young people of our communities and equip the children and young people of our churches to share their faith.

We need to be building relationships with our communities, getting to know the people within them - and not simply so we tick them off our list once they've said yes to following Jesus. As a church we need to take seriously the challenge that is before us, but not be deterred by it.

Furthermore we need to recognise that the children and young people within our church are best placed to share the difference that knowing Jesus makes, with their friends and with their peers. We need to equip them to live out and to speak out, supporting them, not molly-coddling them, but helping them see the part they can play in telling others about Jesus.

The notes below are offered as suggestions to prompt your own thinking rather than as a ready-made sermon structure.

Background

Paul would have known of the city of Athens prior to his arrival, and its standing both socially and economically, even though this was his first visit to the city. Although he was waiting to meet with Silas and Timothy (v15), we're told he was 'greatly distressed to see the city full of idols' (v16). This causes Paul to begin reasoning with those within the city.

Although our villages, towns and cities might not be full of idols in the same way as Athens was when Paul visited, there are endless idols of a different kind, not necessarily having the same 'religious' value or position though. Furthermore they range in size, value and prominence, from large houses to small items of jewellery.

The challenges for us in speaking into such a culture are different to those Paul faced, but at the heart of it there has to be the desire to share the difference knowing Jesus can make.



The sermon – questions and suggestions

- » One of the meanings of the word evangelist is 'an announcer of good news'.
- » The point of connection for Paul was the idol 'to an unknown God'. What are the points of connection for us amongst children and young people today?
- » Having sought to 'connect' with the context of his listeners, Paul swiftly moved on to share his message with them (v23b). Is there a danger we emphasise the connection with children and young people, but not the communication of the message – similar to the challenges found within 'friendship evangelism'?
- » Paul was clear about the message he was sharing. Can we say the same thing?
- » Not everyone was captivated by Paul's words and wanted to know more (v32). How do/can we respond to children and young people who hear the message, but are not interested?

What does it look like to reach children and young people with the gospel?

- » Firstly, it is about connecting with children and young people today. Obvious as it may sound, we need to find the point of connection as Paul did in Athens. What is essential though is that the point of connection is just that - a point to connect. This involves asking serious questions of where the children and young people of the community meet, what they do, and whether there are wider social forces that we need to take on board. It is important that connecting is not the same as communicating; building relationships is key.
- » Secondly, it is about communicating effectively. Having connected with the children and young people of our community, we need to communicate the gospel amongst them. This raises the question of what is the gospel today to children and to young people? Is it any different from that for adults, or what it was 50 years ago? Furthermore, how the gospel is communicated is not only guided by its very message, but also by whom we are communicating amongst.
- » Thirdly, it is about developing a culture of faith-sharing amongst our children and young people. It is essential that we play a key role in reaching out to the children and young people of our communities, but it is also important that we equip the children and young people within our church to be able to share their faith. How do we model evangelism as a church? What importance is put upon it, and what examples are children and young people seeing? It's about inspiring them to want to tell others about Jesus.

Questions for further thought and discussion

- » To what extent is evangelism amongst children and young people on the 'whole church' agenda? If it isn't, how will we rectify this?
- » How are we supporting children and young people as they seek to live out and share their faith?
- » How are we listening to the voices of our children and young people in terms of the challenges they face and the ideas they have as to how children and young people can effectively hear about Jesus?



Notes and illustrations

You might want to have a selection of different envelopes. Use them to illustrate that there are many different means by which a piece of information is sent through the post. Develop this by referencing printed media, conversations, email, text messaging, social networking sites, phone calls etc, as some of the different ways we can communicate things - helping people grasp that there is not a 'one size fits all' way of evangelism.

Give everyone an envelope to take home with them at the end - try to have many different types and sizes.

You might want to encourage break-out discussion groups for people to share what they see as some of the 'idols' in our world today.



Children's Session

Evangelism: Acts 17: 16-34

How can we tell others about Jesus?

Introduction

These sessions are designed to complement the sermon outlines that are part of this resource. These sessions use the same passages to explore the same themes in a way that is relevant to children, and to enable to cross-over in terms of discussion between children and their parents.

Each session is divided up into eight sections: Welcome, Game, Quick Quiz, Bible Story, Thought, Activity, Prayer response and Finish. Apart from the activity, about five minutes should be allowed for each section. The activity is likely to take longer, nearer ten minutes.

The session outlines are not intended to be rigid programmes you must stick to. If there are regular elements to the times when you meet with the children in your group, include these, and do not be afraid to add in extra games or activities that you think would further enhance the session.

It is a good idea to plan ahead in order to ensure you have the resources needed for the session. If there is a rota of people who teach the children's groups at your church, it would be a good idea to get together ahead of the sessions so you can ensure as much continuity, and an overall sense of unified direction in terms of what you will be communicating.

Please note that these sessions are written to be used with children aged 5-11, however some elements may need to be adapted to suit younger children.

Welcome

As the children gather have the banner/poster from the previous sessions for them to decorate together. With the words 'Today...not tomorrow - Transforming the church for all ages' written on it, provide colouring pens or pencils for the children to use, remembering that this does not have to be completed in one session, but is designed to take the six weeks.

As the children gather and start to colour, begin by asking how they are doing that day. Once they've had a chance to share briefly, ask them the following two questions:

- » What colour would you use to describe the week you've just had?
- » What was one really surprising thing that happened this week?

Share with the children how, over the next two weeks when you meet you will be looking at different topics that will help everyone think about the phrase on the banner and what it means.



Game

Depending on the size of the room you are meeting in, there are two options to this game:

- a) Spot tag – give each child a selection of little coloured dots, between 10 and 20 (these can be bought cheaply from most supermarkets or stationery shops). The game works on the usual tag rules, only the idea is to stick the coloured dots to the back of the other children. It's important to set out some rules as to how this is to be done. When everyone's stickers have gone, get them to count up how many are on their backs.
- b) Chinese whispers – ask the children to sit in a circle and then whisper in one of the children's ear a phrase or word, tongue twisters work really well and there are a number of lists that can be found simply by doing an internet search for them. That child then whispers it to the next child, and so on, until it comes back to you. Invite the last child to say what they heard and to see if it matches what you said at the start.

Share with the children how today you are going to be thinking about telling other people something, specifically about telling others about Jesus. This is often called evangelism and is in part what being a disciple is all about, although that doesn't mean there is one set way we communicate the difference knowing Jesus makes.

Quick quiz

The following three questions are designed to help get the children thinking. You may simply want to ask them for their response, you could get them to write them on post-its and stick them up, maybe talk with the person next to them or something else.

- 1 How important do you think it is to tell others about Jesus?
- 2 Do we ever think about telling other people about Jesus, and if so how easy is it?
- 3 Do you think it is a job for everyone in the church or only some?

Bible Story

Before you read through the story of Paul in Athens, explain to the children that in Athens people believed in a lot of different gods, and for each one there would have been an idol. Using different coloured playdoh create different 'idols' – these can literally be lumps of playdoh placed on a table, nothing special, but helping the children to visualise what Paul would have witnessed in Athens.

Read the story to the children, removing the playdoh models as you go through so none are left at the end, thus visualising that none of the gods they were worshipping were the real God, our God.

Thought

The thoughts are split into three subsections; the 'Grab' serves as an introduction and something to 'grab' their attention. The 'What does it say?', refers to the bible passage and brings out something of the teaching from the bible directly. The 'What should we do?' then applies the teaching to their lives, helping them think through what difference this should all make in their lives.

Grab

Show the clip from the film *Ice Age 2* where Fast Tony is telling everyone about the impending doom of the ice melting.



What does it say?

Explain to the children that the way Paul communicated to the people in Athens was to use things they could understand. Go on to say that the danger with this way of telling people about Jesus is they may get distracted by the very things we are using to tell them about Jesus.

What was different with Paul, though, was that he was living out what he was saying. Share with the children briefly what we can read in Acts 9 about Paul's transformation from Saul to Paul.

What should we do?

Ask the children what they thought about the character Fast Tony from the *Ice Age 2* clip. Would they have believed him? The problem for Fast Tony was that, even though he was telling the truth about the melting ice, no one believed him because he was always making up stories and trying to 'sell' people the latest gimmick.

Share with the children that if they are a friend of Jesus, believe in him and are trying to live for him, then they need to think about how they can share him with others. This involves both our words and our actions though, as we learnt from Fast Tony's example. Encourage the children to share what difference being a friend of Jesus makes and how they can share this with others.

Activity

Explain to the children how they are going to make paper chain people. Each child will need a piece of white or coloured paper, half the width of an A4 sheet, but its full length.

- » Invite the children to draw the outline of a person at one end of the piece of paper. Make sure that the head touches the top edge and the feet touch the bottom edge of the piece of paper
- » Fold the paper accordion style. Make sure that the width of the folds are the size of the outline of their person, with the person's hands touching either side.
- » Cut out the person, leaving the folds intact at the hands (and possibly the feet also) so the chain does not break.
- » Unfold the paper to reveal the people.
- » The children can now decorate each of the people. Encourage them to think about their friends or people they see around where they live – the kind of people we can tell about Jesus.

Prayer

As you draw the session to a close, ask the children if there is anything they would like to talk to Jesus about, to pray about. It could be about something from the session today or something else. Make sure the children are given a chance to share and do not belittle any of their requests, however trivial we might think them to be.

Having given them all a chance to share, explain how you will now have a time talking to Jesus and any of them who would like to talk out loud can do so, although they can also talk to him quietly in their heads. You might like to pass a bible round at this point so the child holding the bible prays, although ensure they know that they can pass it on without saying anything. It is a good idea to start and end the time of prayer by praying yourself.



Finish

As the children go, leave them with the challenge:

- » How might they share the difference that knowing Jesus makes (assuming they know Jesus) this coming week - either through something they say or something they do?



Youth Session

Evangelism

Introduction

These sessions are designed to complement the sermon outlines that are part of this resource. Because youth groups may meet during the week and may also hear the sermons, these sessions use different passages to explore the same themes in a way that is more relevant to young people.

Each session is divided into four sections: Welcome, Worship, Word, and Witness. This approach has been used to provide a simple structure which lends itself to involving young people in leading. With support, young people (especially older ones) can be encouraged to lead a section of the session; or the whole session could even be shared out amongst them. For this to happen it is worth planning ahead to think who can be asked and how they can be best supported to do their bit. It may be appropriate to meet with them in advance, or communicate in some way about what is required.

Another reason to plan ahead is in order to ensure you have the resources needed for the session. For example, this session requires a Pictionary set and a couple of adults who are not usually involved in youth work to join you. You will also need a way to play video clips from the internet.

At the end of the session are a number of additional resources. There is a song suggestion (with YouTube link) and an optional movie clip for each session should these be appropriate. There are also some suggestions for making the sessions more active – particularly for younger groups or those who just enjoy more physicality. There are also books listed which may be helpful to young people interested in exploring further and who like to read.

Welcome

As people arrive, play a few rounds of charades or Pictionary. Follow with a brief discussion about the challenges of communicating, which the game raised.

Move on to ask people to share the best bit of news they've had that day. Following that, ask what the best news they've ever received is.

Say: Tonight we're going to be thinking about sharing the good news about Jesus with others.

Worship

Show the great video from: <http://gospeljourney.com>

Ask people to feed back their reaction to this.



Print off the cards from http://media.dare2share.org/pdf/gospel_journey_4_up.pdf so everyone can have a copy. Hand these out, and ask for volunteers to pray – praising and worshipping God for the good news of the gospel.

Word

Read Acts 11:19-26

Say: When we read the book of Acts we see that it focuses on the adventures of a few individuals. It's easy to miss that the mission of the church was not just about them!

Ask:

- » What does this passage tell us about who was involved in spreading the good news about Jesus?
- » Was it just the experts or the whole church?
- » Do you think there was a clear strategy in place for this work?
- » Does the fact that different people were doing different things (verses 19 and 20), and that Barnabas had to be sent to find out what was going on (verse 22) suggest that things might have been a bit chaotic?!
- » If they didn't have a plan, were they just very good at spotting opportunities and taking them?
- » How good are we at doing that?
- » What stories can you tell?

Ask:

- » What does this passage tell us that shows us why they saw so many people come to know Jesus? (They had suffered persecution and been scattered, they actually spoke to people and told them the good news, the Lord's hand was with them, they were 'true to the Lord with all their hearts' – also in Barnabas we see his fruitfulness linked to being 'full of the Holy Spirit and faith').
- » Are any of these things true for us?

Read the last sentence of verse 26. Explain that the word 'Christian' means 'little Christ'.

Ask:

Why do you think they were called this?

What should our lives look like if we are 'little Christs'?

Following on from the worship, ask everyone to think about what the gospel, ie 'the good news about the Lord Jesus', is. This is important to know if we are going to share it! Refer to the cards handed out earlier and discuss whether this is the gospel or whether there is more to it. Discuss how this good news might be actually communicated to their friends. It would also be good to talk about how the wider church could help and support them in this.

Witness

Invite a couple of adults from the church, who the young people might not know so well, who have shared the good news and seen others believing and turning to the Lord. Ask them various questions and allow the young people to ask too.



Finish by praying for each other to be able to share the good news and pray for specific friends - that they may believe and turn to the Lord.

Other resources

Song: Beautiful News by Matt Redman: <http://youtu.be/Gwgizqwa45E>

Movie Clip: This clip from the movie *Planes, Trains and Automobiles* could be used to discuss some of the challenges of sharing the good news to friends when they don't want to listen! www.wingclips.com/movie-clips/planes-trains-and-automobiles/wrong-way

For younger (or more active) groups

Welcome: Split into two groups and make the communication game into a competition. To add extra movement, add a relay element where they have to run to the furthest point in the room to get the word(s) they have to communicate.

Word: Using the points on the cards, split into smaller groups and ask each group to prepare a brief role play exploring how they might share this message with their friends, and what their reaction might be.

Books: Two books looking at mission and evangelism which are helpful and reasonably easy to read for young people are *Smack Heads and Fat Cats* by Chris Duffett (Gilead Books, 2009) and *Big Hearted* by Chris Duffett and Simon Goddard (Gilead Books, 2012).

