

5/25/25**Why Share Our Faith?****Mark 5:18-20****Pastor David Pranga, Brewster Baptist Church**

Good morning. My name is Pastor David Pranga. I am the Executive Pastor. It is my great pleasure to welcome you to Brewster Baptist Church. Whether you are watching online or here in our beautiful sanctuary, I am glad you have chosen to worship with us today.

This morning, I am going to start out by sharing some proud dad moments. As many of you may know, my oldest daughter, Rebekah, has been living in Japan since last July. She is teaching English to children — elementary and middle school students — as well as teaching two community adult education classes.

Last month, Christy and I were able to go to Japan and visit with her. We had such a wonderful time. We spent a weekend sightseeing in Tokyo, and then traveled to her island of Shikoku. It is a gorgeous island, surrounded by mountains. Christy and I had a marvelous time sightseeing and being with Rebekah and learning more about Japanese culture. I thought that I would share a few photos. Thank you for your prayers as we traveled last month.

Our family is also in the midst of graduations. We have three kids graduating. My son, Jeremiah, graduated from Grand Canyon University in April. Rachel graduated from UMASS-Amherst last weekend. Our Elizabeth will be graduating in June from Nauset High School. Christy and I are so proud of our children.

Currently, we are in the fourth week of a series titled, **“Rooted in Faith: What Do Baptists Believe?”** This week, we are talking about the importance of missions and evangelism. I want to thank Sharon Kautz for her testimony on the importance of mission trips and how life changes happen. Brewster Baptist Church does a tremendous job in supporting missions at all three levels: locally, regionally, and globally. Last year, BBC gave over \$300,000 towards missions — which is unbelievable and awesome!!!

Today, I get to share with you about the importance of evangelism. As Christians, we are called to share the good news of Jesus — that salvation comes through Jesus Christ alone. Our hope is in Jesus Christ.

Matthew 28 reminds us of the command that Jesus gave his disciples.

“Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the

name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Jesus wants us to share the good news about Him with every people group and every generation, all throughout the world, and even, yes, Cape Cod.

Let me ask you a question. When you think about an evangelist, who do you think of? The first person who comes to my mind is Billy Graham. Churches would work together to fill large stadiums where they would bring their friends and family members to crusades. Billy Graham would share the gospel and the good news of Jesus. People would respond, leave their seats, come forward, and accept Jesus into their lives. Billy Graham spoke to thousands of people.

Some of you might have thought of Pastor Doug Scalise. Pastor Doug gets to speak to hundreds of people every week. He shares with them about the love of Jesus Christ, and how Jesus can make a difference in their life. We have seen God use Pastor Doug to reach many people who were far from God.

How many of you think of yourself? How many of you realize that God wants to use you and me as evangelists to reach our neighbors? As Christians, Jesus has given us the responsibility to share our faith. For some reason, which I do not completely understand, God chooses to use ordinary people to share the “Good News” about Jesus with our neighbors, co-workers, and family members.

Today’s Bible story is from *Mark 5*. I am going to paraphrase the story for you. It is a story about a man who was demon-possessed. This man lived with an evil spirit inside of him. He had incredible strength. Iron chains could not hold him. He would cry out among the tombs and hills and cut himself with stones. Nobody could subdue him. Nobody knew what to do with him. Nobody could help him. He lived alone. We see, in this story, that Jesus goes with his disciples and heals the man, sending the demon into a herd of pigs. When the townspeople came to see what was going on, they found the man, dressed and in his right mind. I am going to pick up the story in *Mark 5:18-20*.

“As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. Jesus did not let him, but said, ‘Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.’ So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis (region of ten cities) how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.”

When I read this story, I found it astonishing that Jesus said to the demon-possessed man, “No, I do not want you to come with me. I want you to go home and share with others what I did for you.” What does the demon possessed man do? We read that the demon-possessed man does go home and he begins to tell others about Jesus — how Jesus healed him and showed mercy to him. How did people respond? The text says that all the people were amazed! The man who was healed now shares the good news of what Jesus did in his life with others.

It never occurred to us that the man had a choice. He could share his testimony about Jesus and how Jesus healed him, or he could go back home and say nothing, and move forward with life.

This story made me think of my own life. Am I willing to share how Jesus has changed my life for the better? Or do I live my life, giving Jesus no credit at all? Or am I expecting others to do it for me?

I know my life is so much better because I know Jesus. I have seen Jesus work in my life in so many ways throughout the years. I can give you so many examples of Jesus helping me, providing for my family, taking unhealthy habits away, being a friend, and forgiving my sins. Jesus has given me hope and a future.

There are plenty of excuses for why people do not share their faith — fear of rejection, worry of not having all the answers, wanting to be liked and not seem weird, anticipating a negative response, and feeling inadequate in sharing about Jesus. Can you relate to any of these? Maybe you have your own.

A few months ago, I came across this book called “B.L.E.S.S. – 5 Everyday Ways to Love Your Neighbor and Change the World”. It was written by two pastors who lead large churches where people have come to faith, but each of them struggled with sharing their faith with their neighbors and friends.

I read this book, and I found that it was extremely helpful in my own life. Just as Jesus blessed the demon possessed man, we are called to bless the people who are around us. We should look for ways to be a blessing to people who God brings our way. It is not so much about converting someone to Christianity; it is about how we can be a blessing to people and then share the good news.

B.L.E.S.S. stands for five everyday practices that you and I can do to bless our neighbors and show Christ's love. When we do these five everyday practices, we can help change the world. It starts with one relationship at a time.

B.L.E.S.S.

1. B: Begin with Prayer

Everything starts with prayer. Before Jesus did anything major in his ministry — whether it was choosing his disciples, feeding the crowd, doing miracles, even going to the cross — Jesus prayed to God, his Father.

Why did Jesus pray? Jesus wanted to align himself with the heart of God. Jesus began every activity with prayer. Jesus prayed that he would do what God wanted him to do. Prayer led him to the right people for transformation.

If we want to make a difference, we need to pray to God and seek him out. God uses prayer to change us first, and then uses us to change the world. Everything starts with prayer. If we want to share our faith with our friends, co-workers, classmates, and family members, we need to begin to pray for them.

We need to start by asking God how, and who, he wants us to bless. We may have our own thoughts. I think it would be wise to ask God to bring people to your mind. Maybe it is a neighbor, co-worker, classmate, or family member. After asking God in prayer, be silent for a time, and let God bring people to mind. Write down the names on a piece of paper. Focus on only four to six names. You want to be intentional in who God is calling you to bless.

I would then start praying for these people by name, individually, and daily. Pray for their families. Pray — that is how you can develop a deeper relationship.

When we pray, we open ourselves to God and to the leading of His Spirit. Often, when I pray, the Holy Spirit may even give a prompt or leading. It is not an audible voice, but it is definitely a thought that comes from God.

The Holy Spirit may prompt me to pray for that person right now. It may be to send them a text or give them a call to let them know I have been praying for them. How does the person respond? They are grateful and kind. I have yet to talk with someone who tells me to stop praying for them. Often, the person will say thanks.

Sometimes, they will tell me that they are going through a challenging time. Everyone appreciates our prayers.

Everything starts with prayer. In prayer, we begin to have a heart like Jesus.

2. L: The Art of Listening

Jesus was the ultimate listener. Listening — and asking questions — was central to Jesus' life and teaching. As you read the gospels, you will see that Jesus asked many more questions than He answered.

In fact, the questions Jesus asked tells us something profound about His character. It shows that Jesus did not assume that He knew what people needed. Jesus would ask them questions, and then just listen to their response. He would let the person share their dreams, pain, and doubts. One of my favorite verses that I learned many years ago is *James 1:19*, “***Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.***”

We live in a world where everyone wants to talk, post, shout, give their opinion, and even jump into fix-it mode to help us. But very few people really take the time and want to listen.

How do we show people they are valuable? One way we can bless someone is by listening to their stories, struggles, and dreams. We can ask questions like: How are you doing? What brings you joy? What is causing you the most stress right now? David Augsburger said, “Being heard is as close to being loved, that for the average person, they are almost indistinguishable.”

When we take the time to really listen to someone, we are showing love and blessing them. Listening moves us forward in a relationship. God can use us to bless others and change their lives through the act of listening and showing support. True listening may be the kindest — and most loving — gift you can give someone. Remember, people do not care how much you know until they know how much you care. We all need to practice the art of listening.

3. E: Eating Together

Have you ever noticed that eating food and having good conversations between people will grow a relationship? There is just something that happens when you share a

meal, or even get together with someone for coffee. Some of the most powerful moments of Jesus' ministry happened around meals. Jesus had a meal with Zacchaeus at his house. That meal led to repentance and transformation. Jesus shared a meal with his disciples at the Last Supper. Repeatedly, we find Jesus eating with tax collectors and sinners; it was always around food and conversation.

One of the ways we can bless someone is by having a meal together. Our world is looking for authentic relationships. The activity of eating a meal together, or going for coffee with someone, helps break the ice and moves us into a deeper relationship. There is a bond that takes place as we get to know each other.

I have found this to be true in my own life. I will get together with someone, over coffee, two or three times a week. Christy and I invite someone over to our house for a meal twice a month. There is something that happens while we eat food together. We begin to share life with each other. We share things like sports, work, hobbies, family, raising kids, and health issues. As we enter these conversations, we begin to learn and understand each other.

Our relationship deepens with understanding and love. Our relationship changes from being acquaintances to being real friends. That is what people are looking for — meaningful relationships.

I love what Henri Nouwen wrote about the power of eating together. **“When we invite friends for a meal, we do much more than offer them food for their bodies. We offer friendship, fellowship, good conversation, intimacy, and closeness. We offer our guests not only food and drink, but also ourselves.”** The power of a meal and eating together is life changing in a relationship. Going out for coffee or tea can be a huge blessing to someone. This is an important way we can bless our friends.

4. S: Serving Our Neighbor

Who was the ultimate servant? Jesus. Jesus left his throne in heaven to come down to earth to serve. He knew that God had put all things under his authority. And yet, what did he do? Jesus set down his crown for an apron. The one who sat in the highest position stooped down to serve.

I am reminded of passages like these:

Matthew 20:28 — “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve.”

John 13 — We see Jesus kneel down and wash the disciples’ feet at the last supper.

Galatians 5:13 — “Serve one another humbly in love.”

When we pray, listen, and share life over a meal, we can begin to discover their real needs. And then we can serve them. If we want to bless people in a real way, we need to know them better.

Blessing people means helping them in real, tangible ways. It will look different for each person. Here are some examples:

- Bringing a meal for someone who is sick or going through a rough time.
- Helping a neighbor with yardwork or moving some furniture.
- Helping babysit children.
- Sitting and listening to someone who is going through a tough time.
- Driving someone to a doctor’s appointment and waiting for them.
- Sending someone a card or text to let them know you are thinking and praying for them.

There are unlimited opportunities to bless someone through the act of service. It does not have to be big or flashy. When we serve people, we can show them the love of Jesus.

5. S: Share Your Story

Every one of us has a story to share about how our life was different before we met Jesus, then how we met Jesus, and how our life is different because of Jesus. I think back to the demon-possessed man. He wanted to travel with Jesus. Jesus told the man to go home and tell his own people, share with them about his healing and how he was shown mercy.

I genuinely believe that God wants us to share our story — which is evangelism. I believe that when we pray for our friends, when we listen and eat together, when we serve them, it will allow us to have more impact as we share our story about Jesus. D.T. Niles said, **“Christianity is one beggar telling another beggar where he found bread.”**

How do you share good news? Think of these three questions when you share. We can spend a few minutes on each question.

1) My life before Jesus

- What was your life like before you met Jesus?
- What were/are some of your struggles (worry, anger, finances, marriage, job, etc.)?

2) How I met Jesus

- How did you become a Christ-follower?
- How does Jesus help you in overcoming that struggle?

3) My life since I met Jesus

- What difference did Jesus make in your life?
- How does Jesus help you with your struggle?

I believe each one of us has a story to share. We may not think our story is anything special. But every story is special. When we share our faith story, Jesus is right there with us. He is helping us along the way.

What we do know is that our friends, neighbors, and co-workers are hungry for love and hope. It may be your story about Jesus that they need to hear today. I want you to remember today that you can be a blessing to the people around you. These are just five everyday ways to love your neighbor and change the world.

Remember the word BLESS:

- (1) **B**egin with Prayer
- (2) The Art of **L**istening
- (3) **E**ating Together
- (4) **S**erving Our Neighbor
- (5) **S**hare Your Story

Let us pray.

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. What is your greatest fear or frustration when it comes to loving people and sharing the “Good News” of Jesus with those around you? How did you first learn about the love of Jesus and choose to follow Him?
2. Read *Matthew 28:16-20* and *Mark 5:18-20*. Why do you believe, as Christians and Baptists, that it is important to share our faith with the people around us? Who, in your life, has been the greatest B.L.E.S.S.ing to you in your spiritual journey?
3. Jesus gave us the primary example of the importance of prayer. After His baptism, He prayed and fasted before entering His time in the wilderness (*Luke 4*). Jesus prayed before calling His disciples (*Luke 6:12-16*). What do you notice from these examples about the emphasis Jesus placed on time alone with God in prayer? Why do you think it is important to begin with prayer for the people who God may be leading us to B.L.E.S.S.?
4. When we listen to people, we show that we care for them. Why do we have such a difficult time truly listening to the people around us? When was the last time you truly felt listened to, known, and loved? What was so special about that experience?
5. Jesus often chose to eat with tax collectors and marginalized people in His society. How do you think it made them feel to have a meal with Jesus? Why is eating with someone such an effective way to bless them and build a relationship?
6. Read *John 13:1-17*. Why did Jesus choose to wash His disciples’ feet the night before the crucifixion? Why is it important that we choose to serve people who we are ministering to?
7. Your testimony of how Jesus became real to you has impacted you greatly. If someone were to casually ask you, “How did you come to know the love of God in Jesus?”, how would you respond? Why is your faith in Jesus so important to you?