

Date: May 10, 2026 (Easter 6)

1. Texts: Acts 17:22-31; Ps. 66:7-18; 1 Peter 3:13-22; John 14:15-21.
2. Subject: evangelism.
3. Topic: one method of evangelism.
4. Aim: educate, encourage.
5. Proposition: "Build your Christian theology upon the connection with their personal theology."

## MAKING DISCIPLES

Once I was talking with a cousin, who remarked about how the "universe" was guiding and supporting her. I commented about how close she was to becoming a Christian. She nearly bit my head off. She is so anti-religion and maybe even anti-Christian. We have since repaired our relationship, but only by total silence on all things religious. It was a clear reminder that even biblical processes won't guarantee success.

I did exactly what St. Paul would have done.

Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, "Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you."<sup>1</sup>

And Paul did this because it is what Jesus commanded disciples to do.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you."<sup>2</sup>

So, even though it won't work with every potential new disciple, it might do us some good to think out loud about St. Paul's method for making disciples.

Paul started out by knowing his target audience. He actually investigated the religious culture of Athens. He studied and learned something about their existing theology.

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 17:22-23.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 28:19-20.

Then, Paul connected their theology with Christian theology. He created a bridge between what they already thought as Greeks and Christian thoughts about God and Jesus. That bridge didn't work for all the Athenians. But some thought it worth further investigation and a few others were converted outright.

I created a bridge between my cousin and Christianity. Like most of those Athenians, she rejected it. But that doesn't mean the approach was wrong. It just wasn't right for that individual.

So now, let's see how we can make St. Paul's approach fit our circumstances.

First, making disciples demands that you listen to people, but with a special purpose in mind. You're not just listening for content to fuel your response. You're listening to hear the spiritual assumptions behind the conversation. You're listening for clues about God's current work in their lives. Here's the thing.

You're unlikely to be the first voice of God speaking to that person. God is always speaking to everyone. He is always calling us to a saving faith. Long before God looked to you to make new disciples, he was already using others to call people to faith.

So, listen for echoes of God's previous work in their lives. Listen for their spiritual assumptions and even tentative steps towards faith. Listen for evidence of the Spirit working in their lives even before any clear statement of Christian faith.

Part of truly listening to people will also be praying for people. You pray for yourself, asking God to make you open, receptive and compassionate. You pray for your acquaintance, asking God to gently reveal himself to them. Prayer is part of the process of disciple-making.

Then, see if your relationship is strong enough to bear the weight of even a small step towards faith. In my example, the universe was being portrayed as a loving, personal force that guided my cousin towards fulfillment and happiness.

Obviously, when I said she was on the way to being a Christian, that was too much weight for our relationship. I underestimated the strength of her rejection of the Church. I hadn't listened long enough or well enough. But the method was still valid.

We listen for clues to the person's personal theology about the universe and any vague notions about God. We listen intentionally and without any aspect of judgment. We are listening for God's whispers to come out of their mouths.

Then we start to build the bridge. We can use phrases such as these:

- "That makes me think about a time I realized something similar..."
- "I used to think..."
- "Once I had to..."
- "That sounds a lot like what we think about God..."

With each statement, you open the door on your own experience of God through Jesus. You allow your acquaintance to see into your soul, so that they might see God at work in you.

When your relationship has developed enough, you can begin to add more direction to your comments.

- "How long have you been thinking about this?"
- "It sounds like you..."
- "Have you ever wondered..."

Who knows? Your relationship may progress to the point where you can say,

- "It sounds to me like God is calling your name."
- "Maybe it's time for you to ask me some questions."
- "How do you think we should move forward with all this?"

It seems to me as if a key element in this process is patience. That was really my failing. I moved too quickly and didn't allow for enough exposure to God's presence in my own life. I introduced her to the spectre of faith before she could even begin to see it as legitimate. Patience will be key. After all, patience is actually a sign of love and compassion, which are pillars of the Christian faith.

The failure did not belong to the process itself. I was too anxious to make the sale, as it were. St. Paul's method is valid.

1. Know the person with whom you're speaking and for whom you are praying. Listen for God's voice to come through their words. Listen for their own operating theology.
2. Draw connections between their personal theology and Christian theology. Allow people to see those connections in your own life and faith practice.
3. Encourage the first steps towards reframing their theology in Christian terms. Enable them to take tentative steps towards the Christian faith.
4. Invite the person to walk alongside you towards the Christian faith and commitment.

**Project onto screen or post on flip chart.**

These are some steps towards fulfilling Christ's command to make new disciples. Such are some ways we can be faithful to the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

AMEN.