

Inviting Everyone Into a Transforming Relationship With Jesus and His Church

by Stewart Ruch

The sermon emphasizes the importance of inviting everyone into a transforming relationship with Jesus and His church, and highlights the role of the Holy Spirit in empowering believers to share the good news of Jesus with others.

Duration: 30:31

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Matthew 28:19-20, Luke 19:1, Luke 19:10

Topics: "Jesus"

Description

In this sermon, Bishop Stuart Ruck emphasizes the importance of inviting others to know Jesus. He shares personal experiences of sharing the gospel, including a conversation with an old friend and an encounter on an airplane. Ruck highlights that God is the first inviter and wants to invite others through us. He encourages Christians to imitate Jesus by having a heart to seek and save the lost, even if there may be anxiety or disinterest in evangelism. The sermon references Luke chapter 19 and emphasizes the significance of invitation in the salvation of others.

Transcript

This is Church of the Resurrection in Wheaton, Illinois. This week's sermon is by Bishop Stuart Ruck. OK, I'm going to tell a story, but before I tell the story, I just have to prepare you in this way.

First of all, the story is going to involve sharing about Jesus on an airplane. Secondly, it's going to involve me sharing about Jesus on an airplane. Now, if you're new to Res, are you new to Christianity? You didn't even need to hear that.

But if you're not new to Res or you're not new to Christianity, you're probably already thinking, oh, no, an airplane story sharing the gospel. Oh, no. Or double, oh, no, Stuart, of course, sharing on an airplane about Jesus.

So just open your heart and mind, even though I realize your defenses may already be up. OK, so I was on an airplane. Now, before I go any farther be on an airplane, I not only have the opportunity to oversee Church of Resurrection, but I helped oversee some 30 churches in our diocese, which means I get to be on airplanes a lot.

So when I get on an airplane, just so you fully understand what happens for me, I honestly and not the best part of my heart, have no interest in sharing or talking to anyone. As a matter of fact, when I got an airplane, like I did two weeks ago, or like I will this weekend coming up, I just want to be by myself is one of the few moments where I'm not with somebody that I know. I want to read.

I want to study. I want to be quiet. Every time I get on an airplane, I begrudgingly say, yes, Lord, of course, I'm open.

But what I would really like to do is have these next two hours by myself. I was in that usual cranky mood when I was on an airplane a couple of years ago. I sat down with a young woman seated by the window and she's reading a pretty difficult piece of literature that I knew.

So I just said to her, just couldn't help myself. I wasn't trying to overcome my, you know, desire to be by myself. I just said, oh, that's a pretty chewy piece of reading.

What are you reading it for? And she said, well, I'm a college student. I said, oh, you're a college student. That's interesting.

I just naturally said, well, what college do you go to? And she said, oh, you wouldn't know the name of the college. It's a small college in Ohio. It's called College of Worcester.

I went, oh, OK, Lord. Yes, I got it. I accept this opportunity.

So I said, oh, really? My brother went to College of Worcester. He did. She said, yeah, he went to College of Worcester.

I said, well, what are you studying there? She said, oh, I'm studying literature. I said, my brother studied literature at the College of Worcester. Immediately we had this connection.

So we just started chatting and talking about different things and getting to know each other, talking about books and literature. It's very easy, natural conversation. I said, so what else do you like to do at Worcester? And she said, oh, well, there's this one thing that I, I really want to do.

I really want to be a part of it. I auditioned for it. It's an improv troupe.

I didn't make it, but if I could do anything at Worcester, what I want to do is be a part of them before she could finish her sentence. I said, oh, be a part of the improv troupe. Don't throw shoes.

How do you know the name of that? I said, because my brother founded that troupe. Your brother founded that troupe, she said. Now, all of a sudden she's in the presence of the brother of a celebrity.

My brother loves this story because here I'm Christian Rock's brother. So she's looking at me. She's like, wow, your brother started the improv troupe with a couple other friends.

Yeah, absolutely. So even more openness. You see what the Lord was doing.

You see how the Holy Spirit was inviting us both into a conversation despite my reluctance and desire to be by myself. Well, the conversation just continued to develop. And as it developed, naturally, I found out that her parents had just divorced.

I said, wow, my parents divorced when I was in college. Really? Tell me about it. And as we talked very naturally, I was able to share with her.

Jesus. I was sure that there's one who has a consequential concrete love for her, for her mother and for her father. I was able to share about the good news of God in Jesus.

She did not at that point make as I could tell a decision or a conversion to Jesus and this story. Well, ultimately, it may be about conversion. I don't know where she is in her life now.

Two years later, this is a story about invitation. It's a story about an invitation that Jesus made to me in such a way that I didn't even want to say no. And thereby, in his invitation to me, he was inviting her where there was no sense of reluctance to hear from who she figured out eventually was a conservative Christian.

And I tell this story because. We, at Resurrection, are moving into a new season of focus. We're putting before you this morning what we thought God is calling us to do next as a church, a mission statement that we've taken from many, many years ago at Resurrection.

It's a mission statement we've had for 25 years. We've renewed and refreshed it. And that mission statement is inviting everyone into a transforming relationship with Jesus and his church.

This isn't our first statement like this. As a matter of several years ago, I shared with the church a focus then to build a sanctuary of transformation. Some of you will remember that.

And in that season of building a sanctuary transformation, we focused on the call for worship and the call to build up the church after many, many years prior to that of great difficulty at Church of the Resurrection, many splits and divisions. Then after that season, for the last few years, we focus on equipping everyone for transformation on the foundation of worship. We didn't set up the frame, if you will, of discipleship.

As you called others to be equipped for ministry through res groups and res kids and res youth and transformation intensive and many other ministries here for ministry. We now feel that as the foundation of worship has been set, as as as the infrastructure of discipleship is in place, that God is now calling us into just a blatant place of evangelism and mission. Just simply put, as clearly as I can put it, we simply long for more conversions here at Church of the Resurrection.

We long for more people to come to a saving belief and knowledge and life in Jesus. We are discontent with the level of conversion that we see. We do see regular adult child and youth conversion here at Resurrection, but we are discontent.

We that live in wheat should be discontent that in DuPage County with nine hundred and twenty five thousand people, a conservative estimate would be that three hundred thousand people are in church regularly, leaving six hundred thousand who are not in a relationship with the church and possibly not in relationship at all with Jesus. We are discontented by that, discontented in the community with so many gospel churches. We're all seeing so few conversions is true across the board in DuPage County, some seeing more than others.

But we gather, we meet as pastors and we cry out to God, saying, God, visit us, God, visit me. We want to open now the doors with the foundation of worship, the structure of open wide our doors and a new season of inviting everyone. We don't focus on the call of invitation because in conversion, God does

everything, but we do something.

I taught him that last week on revival. I taught him that several months ago on baptism. So to hear the work of mission is the work of the Holy Spirit.

I think that will become clear as I teach this morning, by the way, as we focus now on this statement, it is as if the former two statements are like cars that broke down and now we're getting rid of them. They're more like children that are growing in our family, building a sanctuary. Transformation is alive in our church.

The call to live for the worst of the living God's alive at rest, as is equipping everyone. We just have a third now heart and call this call of evangelism, a call of inviting everyone. What does it look like to invite everyone? We're to work on that all month.

We're in the fifth of a series on what we call our five S's here at resurrection, our five core values as a church. The first is the fully being fully scriptural. The second is being fully sacramental.

The third has to do with the fullness of the Holy Spirit. The fourth three to sacrifice our lives in the fifth and the last of this series is starting this month, focused on the salvation of others, inviting everyone. What is it like to invite everyone to Luke chapter 19 in your Bible? And we don't look at the way in which we're called to invite simply as we imitate Jesus, who came to seek and save the loss in many ways.

Evangelism is simply becoming like the Lord Jesus. Most Christians, we have anxiety or disinterest in evangelism. That's very common among us as Christians.

We get on a plane or we get in a situation we don't actually want to share. But most Christians, we want to become like Jesus. What's become like Jesus is to have his heart.

To seek and save the loss, one of the most defining statements of his entire life on Earth, given to us in verse 10 of Luke 19, where Jesus self-defines the son of man, which is a name that Jesus carried a title. Jesus carried has come to seek and save the loss. What do we do? We invite simply and we invite supernaturally.

God does everything in conversion, but we do something. We invite. But even then, we don't ever invite alone.

Let's look at this inviting simply Jesus in our Jericho, verse one of chapter 19, that's page 878 in your in your Bible. If using one of our Bibles, you know, Jericho was passing through and behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. Stop there for just one moment when you're studying your Bible and the writer of that particular book uses a proper name.

It jumps off the page. Proper names are not always used. In this case, it is and is used to draw our heart to Zacchaeus.

And this is interesting because you'll learn more about Zacchaeus. He's not one that your heart is drawn to. He is not a sentimental figure.

He's not one that you're in any way prone to like if you're reading this in the ancient Near East at the time that it was written. There was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector.

OK, now, first of all, taxes have been levied against citizens of nations for centuries upon centuries upon centuries. Tax collection in itself, most would argue, is not in itself intrinsically evil. The Bible says we're going to pay our taxes.

So what's happening here? Well, first of all, we have a tax collecting culture, which is not a culture of doing your civic duty, but actually a culture of collaboration. The tax collectors were those that were unjustly taking taxes far more than they were supposed to in a deeply, deeply unjust system led by the Romans who were occupying Israel at that time, which is to say that someone like Zacchaeus, who the chief tax collector, is a collaborator with the Roman occupation. He's a Jewish man who's collaborating with the Romans for what? For his own benefit.

He's rich. He's a chief tax collector. He's the one who primarily is in a treasonous relationship with the occupying force that has its boots on your neck day in and day out where you live in intimidation and fear.

But he doesn't live in intimidation and fear because he's collaborating with the Romans. And as he collaborating, he's clearly gaining wealth off of that. And Luke wants you to understand that about Zacchaeus.

He is a despised figure. He isn't even a forgotten figure like a prostitute might be. He's a despised figure because he's a traitor.

He's a chief tax collector and he's rich. And yet look at what it does in verse three. Zacchaeus is seeking to see who Jesus was.

Well, like a brilliant writer, he's creating conflict right away. Internal conflict for us is the reader for us is the listener. What? What? I hate him.

Yet I mean, if you're reading at this point, I'm interested in Jesus, at the very least, I don't love Jesus. So there's one that I'm hating is seeking Jesus. How could that be? It doesn't fit a stereotype of who he's supposed to be.

No, of course not, because it's a brilliant story. This, by the way, is like a short, short story. He's seeking Jesus.

Note, by the way, that it would appear at this point in the story that Zacchaeus is the one seeking Jesus, that he is, if you will, the first seeker. But we know verse 10, because it was just read to us. And in verse 10, that Jesus came to seek and save the lost.

We learn immediately that while Zacchaeus thinks he's the first seeker, that the first seeker of all of our souls is Jesus, that no one ever seeks God in a vacuum. You may be here this morning because you're seeking God. You may be thinking, oh, should I be here this morning? They're talking about me.

They're talking about me. This is awkward. You are.

I'm glad you're here. We have no secrets for those who have not yet chosen Jesus and are not yet living in the church. There's no secrets at all.

We do want you to have a transforming relationship with Jesus and his church. We'll be very upfront. We won't manipulate you.

We will not coerce you. We believe you must come to that decision on your own. But we want you to know that this is what we're about.

And this is what Jesus is about, that we are evangelistic. We are seeking to see others be converted and be transformed. But we never do that first.

We never seek God first. We're seeking God. As a matter of fact, we never invite first.

Look at this. Zacchaeus is seeking Jesus. We read that he's short.

So he runs on ahead and climbs into a sycamore tree for the rabbi, who is well known now for brilliant, engaging teaching, as well as signs and wonders. Miraculous things are happening. It is possible that Zacchaeus climbs a tree because he's short, but more likely what's happening is scholars have researched this is that Zacchaeus, who, if he held a place of title and prestige, even if he was short, people would part for him because title and position was always honored.

Instead, because he's so despised, he does what no ancient Near Eastern adult would ever do, which is climb a tree. This is not Zacchaeus hammocking right on front campus a week in college. This is this is not fun or interesting or even a cute detail to the story.

What this is telling about Zacchaeus is that he's desperate. He's starved. He's hungry.

They were like something has happened in his traitorous ways. Something is happening. He can't stand himself anymore.

And he thinks maybe just maybe there is one who is coming through Jericho that maybe just maybe would be the way out of the hell of being a traitor and being a chief tax collector. So he climbs a tree. He breaks also some more race.

He's so hungry to know Jesus. He's so hungry to see Jesus, even though any other rabbi would have quickly rejected this traitor of all traitors. He's been a bad Jew.

He's a rich sinner. And what does Jesus say? Zacchaeus, come down. I'm coming into the most intimate of places, your home.

Jesus invites himself into Zacchaeus's house, his home, the center of his life. Jesus is always the first inviter. We are called to invite everyone.

Part of our ministry and our life in Jesus is learning how every single one of us has been empowered by the Holy Spirit to invite others. But we never invite first. We never invite cold.

We never invite others out of a vacuum or from a vacuum. Jesus always goes ahead of us. Yes, it's true in this story, but we know as well that this is true about who God is, that another follower of Jesus, John, said this is love.

It's not that we first love God, but that he first loved us and gave Jesus as a sacrifice, as a way of saving us from our sins, that God is always initiating to all of us, always inviting all of us into transformation with his son and the church. We read from another follower of Jesus, the apostle Peter, who says God is slow in restoring his kingdom, that one day God will restore the kingdom on Earth. He's slowing doing so because he wants few to perish, but all to come to eternal life.

Paul said a very similar thing in First Timothy, chapter two, that what we see is it is Jesus's heart. It's intrinsic to who God is. He's the first inviter.

He's out there ahead of us, inviting others in. And that when we invite like me on that plane, what did I do that was impressive on that plane? Nothing. All I did was impressive was sit down.

That's all that I did that was impressive. I wasn't even a good attitude or a good Christian perspective about it. Do you see how God wants to invite through us constantly and consistently? This happened again for me this summer.

I was at a reunion of some very, very old friends, a whole bunch of us were together in my hometown. I got talking to an old friend I hadn't seen in 15 years. It's just a natural conversation.

What are your kids doing? What are you doing? How is your life? And it just just came out of my mouth. I didn't think about it ahead of time or even have a plan. I just said, so what's your faith journey like? And he said, oh, I've had a lot of health issues.

So my faith journey is basically about being one with the universe and working on my health. He said, I don't believe in Jesus like you do. I know that you were a conservative Christian.

That's not what I do. And I went. Oh, I didn't know what to say.

I thought, oh, Father, Matt, would we were here, he would know exactly what to say. Right. I just oh, oh, OK.

I just walked away stymied. No, that didn't go anywhere. Later, I was debriefing the event with another friend, a different friend, a Christian friend.

And she said I had the most amazing conversation with your friend's wife. I started talking with your friend, with your friend's wife, and we were talking about locally sourced food and an organic food and gardening and concern for the environment and concern for nature and the love for creation. And she was saying to me, you know, I keep reading all these blogs about locally sourced food.

And there's all these conservative Christians on these blogs and you're interested in these things. She was implying very clearly. I thought conservative white Christians only cared about Donald Trump.

But you actually care about locally sourced food and health. And my friend said, yeah, of course we do. In Christianity, your body matters and creation matters and nature matters.

And we love to think about locally like we are local. That's that's our thing. She's amazed.

She said, wow, this is so interesting. She said, because we have neighbors right next door and they're conservative Christians like you. And basically, we don't hate them.

They live in a very, very progressive part of the country. So we really like these people and they're very kind to us. And they're very curious about us.

And they keep reaching out to us. He said, you know, all this is making this kind of this competition is makes me want to know more about Jesus. I'm really interested in Jesus.

How I would have loved to hit the competition on the way home between my friend and my friend's wife. I'm into the universe, not Jesus. I'm into Jesus and locally sourced food.

Now, I walked away upset that I hadn't had a chance to share more about Jesus. And usually that's all that I ever get when I'm in a conversation like that. I just walk away going, oh, that didn't go very far because I don't get the whole story like I got that night.

But how often is that the whole story? Do you see where I wasn't the first inviter? I just made a very casual invitation. Tell me about your faith. That's all that I said.

But what God was doing, he's already inviting my friend and his wife into a relationship. He invited through my other friends' conversations. He's inviting to those neighbors who very likely prayed, hey, when our friends go out to their hometown, Lord, introduce them to some Christians, give them our TV, hear about Jesus.

Do you see how we're doing this work together as the church and that God is doing this work in and through his church and through Christians who will just say, Lord, I don't even know how to do this. I know that it happens by the power of the Holy Spirit. But I want to invite someone in some way.

Indeed, I want to redefine a win for us as a church. Now, don't get me wrong. We can invite others into saving relationship with Jesus and lead them in a prayer to receive Jesus.

That is absolutely part of the scriptural witness and part of our Christian lives. And I've had moments where I've had a chance to do that, and I'll never forget them. They're very rich.

I was there at that point to invite someone into a saving relationship with Jesus. But I've had far more moments where I haven't seen conversion, but I've had invitation and I want to redefine a win for resurrection. It's any level of invitation, invitation into a conversation, invitation to go see a game together, invitation to have a lunch together, invitation that come to your home, invitation to come to church.

There's so many levels of intensity to this invitation calling, but I want to redefine the win. And you're going to get a beautiful card that has our our new statement on the front and on the back. It'll just give me different ways to invite and to be ready to invite.

Because we invite, we invite simply, but we do invite supernaturally. Jesus is moving in the fullness of the power of God when he says Zacchaeus, maybe his name was being said by others. That's how we knew his name.

But it's unlikely to be hidden in the tree. He doesn't want to be seen. It's likely Jesus is moving in the power of God.

Then when we actually step into this, God begins to act supernaturally. I mean, really, I sit next to somebody who went to my brother's college and had a profound interest in the improv troupe that my brother started. I wasn't just inviting her.

Jesus was inviting me. So do you see that when you step into this in the power of the spirit and believe me, it is intentional that this sermon is falling on the heels of five weeks of teaching on the power of the Holy Spirit? We cannot do evangelism without power of the Holy Spirit. I mean, many of us have tried, but we didn't know the power of the Holy Spirit.

We we didn't know the importance of prophecy. We we didn't have a vision for revival. We didn't understand the authority of Jesus over demonic spirits, all things we've taught on in the last five weeks.

We did evangelism without that. We thought we were the first inviter. We thought it was all up to us.

Do you understand that we step into it as Jesus ministers at Chios? So we step into this call to not just invite simply, but to invite supernaturally that the Holy Spirit is always inviting us as he's inviting others. I'll tell you a story. That's not my story that happened this week, and it matters primarily because of what happened for somebody and their life in the story.

But it also matters for us as a church, I believe, and I share this with permission in the voice of one of our members, one of our younger members, young leader here, who I had the privilege of hearing the story from, and she's given me permission to share this. This is about inviting simply and inviting supernaturally. She writes last Sunday night, as in last Sunday night, as in the Sunday I preached on revival and the Sunday before that, that I preached on prophecy and on our same prophecy.

Biblically, last Sunday night, she said, I had a prophetic dream by that. She means if this is new to you, a dreamer. She feels like God was doing something where God was immediate and urgent in a unique way.

I had a prophetic dream that a young friend of mine, 16 years old, was pregnant, and that she was planning on having an abortion. In the dream, God told me to intervene and to raise the baby as my own child. I woke from this dream and immediately knew it had spiritual significance, but by no means did I take it literally.

It was 3:40 in the morning, but I could tell that God wanted my attention. So I got up in those early hours and I prayed for many, many things, and I prayed for God's hand of protection over the friend that was in the dream. I prayed for clarity and understanding.

I prayed I'd be bold and confident in the Holy Spirit and my heart was heavy. I was like, what are you asking of me? And then I went back to sleep. The next night, Monday night, I got a call from the same friend and my heart sank immediately.

She led me to know that she discovered she was pregnant and she was planning to abort the baby the following day. I jumped in my car and I began driving through the night to drive to where she was. And as I was driving through the night, she called me again and said, look, it's late.

You should just drive home and then come early in the morning. So the next morning, our res member got up early and drove four hours to where she was. Once I saw her, she informed me she had found herself a ride to Planned Parenthood Clinic and she'd taken a medicinal pill to terminate the pregnancy.

The nurses let her know that unless she was too far along already, the baby was too developed. The pill had an 80% chance of terminating the pregnancy. So I was heartbroken that action had been taken to give this baby.

But my time with my friend was filled with conversation that was clearly driven by the Holy Spirit. I felt was going back and forth. She was afraid of having the baby so young that she was grieving that the baby wouldn't have a chance to live.

And then I told my friend the dream and I was prepared for her to think that I was a bizarre Christian with crazy ideas regarding spirituality. And instead, my friend broke into tears and said, that makes perfect sense. You're one of the only people I know who have loved me genuinely.

I am confident that you'd be an amazing mom and probably the only person I would ever want to give my baby to. And for the first time, she referred to the baby. As a baby.

Since then, it has been five days since this young woman has taken that pill. And she's not yet started her menstrual cycle, which means she's still carrying this beloved child. Having conversations together, our member and this young woman of what it looked like to see the pregnancy through.

Ultimately, our member writes, God was the first one with the knowledge of this baby. And for all that, may the glory of God may all glory go to the Lord, the being open and responsive to him who knows everything was central to the entire situation. He was watching over this baby from conception, and I trust he will continue to cast his hand of protection over my friend, her baby and all those involved.

Now, I ask you. Did she earn that dream with that dream? Because I mean, if she did. Or was that dream an example of Jesus inviting her to then invite this young woman into a transforming relationship with him? This kind of ministry, the Holy Spirit is happening throughout our church.

And let me just be clear with you. As we go into this next season of inviting everyone into a transforming relationship with Jesus and his church, I am asking God, would you ask God that it happens hundreds and hundreds and hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of times over and over again? Zacchaeus was transformed. We see him say.

I'll give it all away. I'll take half of what I've robbed and he works it all out. He's deeply transformed.

We're not just inviting, we're inviting others into a transforming. Life altering, consequential relationship with Jesus and his church. Jesus said, I've come to seek and save the lost.

Resurrection, we're going into season where we are with greater purpose than ever joining our Lord in his ministry. He does everything. We do inviting.

Even he invites before we do in the name of the father and the son and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Thanks for listening.

Our vision at Church of the Resurrection is to equip everyone for transformation. As part of that vision, we'd love to share dynamic teaching, original music and stories of transformation. For more of what you heard today, check out the rest of our podcast.

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