

Green Eggs and Ham – Taste and See  
August 13, 2017  
Psalm 34:8

“Taste and see that the Lord is good, blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.”

*The Cat in the Hat* and *Green Eggs and Ham* are two Dr. Seuss best sellers. Both of these books were inspired by a literacy challenge. In 1955, an English Professor named Rudolf Flesch published *Why Johnny Can't Read*, which criticized children's literature and promoted phonics to teach reading and writing. There was great concern that children in the United States were falling behind in educational achievement. Geisel was approached by a publisher with a challenge. The director of the publishing house, William Spaulding, identified 348 words that first graders should know and then he asked Geisel to write a book using only those words. And...it had to be colorful and captivating. *The Cat in the Hat* fell short of using all 348 words, using 236 different words, but those 236 words became a bestseller.<sup>1</sup>

Emboldened by his success, Geisel accepted a 50-word challenge from another publisher and produced *Green Eggs and Ham*. People like to speculate about meaning. Is it about irrational prejudice? Is the deep moral that we should try something before we knock it? Is it about friendship. One thing I find interesting about the story is that it opens with the other character saying, “I do not like YOU, Sam I am.” But Sam I-am is not deterred. He persists in offering green eggs and ham. The story ends with the unnamed character's arm around Sam saying, “Thank you, thank you, Sam I-am.” Perhaps that is the power of green eggs and ham – reconciliation, turning adversaries into friends. Maybe it is about sharing something you love. Maybe it is about rhymes and words we should know as we learn to read. Maybe, all the above.

What sticks for me is the image of Sam I-am so passionately and persistently offering his tray of green eggs and ham. All week long I have been trying to figure out - What is our green eggs and ham? What are we serving here that we are desperate for others to try? The eight points of progressive Christianity don't seem to fit very nicely on the platter.

The answer to this question is becoming increasingly more important to me. Are we offering anything here that speaks to threats of nuclear strikes and alt right rallies of white nationalists promoting violence and spewing vile words of hatred? What is it we are serving that speaks to injustice and hate? Are we serving anything that will rid this world of violence and fill our hearts with love? Is there anything on our tray that will change us? Is there anything here that we can get excited about sharing with someone else?

As a general rule, Progressive Christians stink at evangelism. Most of us have had the experience of someone trying to shove Jesus down our throats. We have been threatened with hell. We have been told we have to believe certain things, stay away from certain people, and live a certain way. We have witnessed the effects of colonialism and read in our history books about the decimation of cultures because of God-fearing Christians trying to impose their religion while at the same time taking land and exploiting resources. Evangelism is likened to bullying and threatening laced with arrogance and prejudice. If that is evangelism, forget it.

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<sup>1</sup> Priceonomics.com, “The Statistical Dominance of Dr. Seuss”

And we have – we have just forgotten it. We don't believe everyone must become a Christian or else. We certainly do not want to appear to be pushy. We are concerned that we are not articulate enough to talk in depth. We don't know what to do when people quote scripture at us. We don't want to incite arguments or make others uncomfortable. We certainly do not want to offend. We'd much rather walk the walk than talk the talk.

I love the story about the woman who learned that fish oil would make her dog's coat shinier and healthier so she forced fish oil down its throat every day. She held the dog against its will, forcibly squirted fish oil in its mouth, and then held the dog's mouth shut until it swallowed. It was a struggle every day, but she persisted. Then one day she accidentally knocked over the bottle of liquid fish oil. While she turned around to grab something to clean it up the dog came over and licked it up. The dog didn't have a problem with the fish oil, just her and her tactics.

Evangelism doesn't have to be like that. Evangelism doesn't have to be in your face or intrusive. Evangelism doesn't mean talking about something incessantly or being as obnoxious as Sam I-am. But it does require a degree of intentionality – and a desire to share that which gives your life meaning, inspires you to love, and calls you to sacrifice for a greater good.

If we eat a great meal, we take a picture of it and share it with the world. If we stumble upon a product that does amazing things, we have no problem sharing our experience with others. What about Jesus? At some point in our lives, most of in this room made a decision to make Jesus the Lord of our lives and follow his example. When we emerged from the waters of baptism we joined our hearts with Jesus in preaching the good news of the kingdom of God. Together we are the body of Christ and a community of faith. We aren't perfect – but following Jesus means something to us. The call to follow Jesus directs our steps and shapes the words that come out of our mouths. The way of Jesus gives us hope for this planet because it is the way of love and has the power to do what guns and bombs and threats cannot. The ministry of Jesus is good news for the poor, release of the captives, sight for the blind, and compassion for those who have been pressed down and shut out by systems of injustice and to follow him is to never lose sight of those on the margins.

When we are ready to give up on humanity we remember what love can do. Love can change the heart of a corrupt business man like Zacchaeus. Love can turn a fisherman like Peter into a leader. Love can roll away the stone that seals us in tombs of despair and darkness and let the light of God shine in.

The way of Jesus – this way we have chosen to walk – inspires us to be generous, it inspires us to practice radical hospitality, it inspires us to make sacrifices for strangers, work for justice, love our enemies. It's not normal...it's Jesus.

You'd think we might have something to say about that...something we might want to share with others. Because of Jesus, we see the love of God at work – even now – and it gives us hope and courage and even joy. Have you told anyone about that?

What we are serving here is a loaf of King's Hawaiian Bread and a cup of Welches grape juice – and it is for us a taste of Jesus. “This is my body,” Jesus told his disciples as he handed them bread, and for Jesus, body meant the whole of his life. When he shared the cup, he called it the blood of the new covenant. That cup reminds us that following Jesus is difficult and may cost us our lives. That cup reminds us of God's unconditional love for all – the love with which we love our neighbor. All

are welcome. Everyone has enough. No one is better than anyone else. It is grace and hope, challenge and direction, hospitality and justice, served on a plate and dipped in a cup. And it is good!

But to people who have not tasted it – it looks like green eggs and ham.

What are we serving here?

Do any of your friends, neighbors, or co-workers know? Why not?

They might just like green eggs and ham.

There are lots of folks who think that what we are doing here is irrelevant, silly, boring, oppressive, rule-bound, self-serving, institutional religion. And yet the Jesus we serve here is on the front lines of love and peace in Charlottesville. The Jesus we serve here is the Jesus that dismantles hate. The Jesus we serve here is the Jesus that invites us to join him in healing brokenness and mending relationships. The Jesus we serve here is the one that confronts injustice and speaks truth to power. The Jesus we serve here is the Jesus that lays down his life for the sake of others.

It's time to start inviting people to taste and see that God is good.