

Go tell it, smell it

The aroma of good news comes through you

I remember feeling defensive, frustrated and scared. I didn't know what to say or how to convince her to believe in God.

At that time I misunderstood what sharing your faith really means. I thought it was about convincing someone to believe, when it's really about letting your life speak. I thought it required intellectual debate, when in reality sharing faith is about sharing life with someone. What I had to say was important. But who I was as a person mattered more.

Psychologist Les Parrott often tells parents that "who you are matters more than what you do." The same holds true for us as Christians — as we find ways to share our faith, who we are matters even more than what we say.

You stink in a good way

"This car smells like you," Nathan said as he sat down in my passenger seat. I wasn't sure if this was a compliment or a criticism.

"It does?" I asked.

"Yep. It just has a unique smell," he said.

It was kind of like someone saying, "That was interesting." It's all in the vocal inflection.

Could he have meant that I smell like a Christian? The apostle Paul wrote that as God's people "we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing" ([2 Corinthians 2:15](#)). Our unique scent reminds people of God. When ancient church theologian Origen reflected on this verse, he encouraged Christians to "put an altar of incense in your innermost heart. Be a sweet aroma of Christ."

Researchers from the University of Southern Brittany in France recently tested the theory that smells influence altruistic behavior. They asked four volunteers to stand outside a bakery and another four to stand outside a clothing store. The volunteers were told to rummage in their bags before dropping a glove, handkerchief or packet of tissues in front of passers-by.

In the 400 times this procedure was repeated, researchers found that 77 percent of the time people would stop and help retrieve the item from the ground in front of the bakery. Outside the clothing store it was a different story: only 52 percent of people helped. The key difference between the two locations was the strong smell of fresh baked bread.

You are what you eat

If God's people smell like Christ, could this help us draw people to the living God in Jesus? Could the smell of the word in our living as faithful Christians help us make the world a better place?

Scientists will tell you, and some of us know from experience, that certain foods affect our smell. When ingested in large portions, asparagus, garlic and cumin, for example, produce their aroma through us.

So by ingesting the bread of life regularly, Christ in the sacrament, could we begin to smell more like the bread of life? What if we didn't simply read or hear God's word? What if we allowed it to fill our very lives? Would we begin to smell even more like the grace of God found in Jesus Christ? I think so.

Before sending Ezekiel out to speak to the people of Israel, God commanded: "Eat what is



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offered to you; eat this scroll" ([Ezekiel 3:1](#)). The prophet ate it and then began speaking God's word to the people of God. In case you're wondering, Ezekiel said it tasted like sweet honey ([3:3](#)).

So our first step as Book of Faith people is not to read the word but to eat the word. When we allow these nutrients to course through our souls, our lives become living witnesses to God's grace and our words become God's words spoken to the people around us.

We don't have to struggle to find something to say to our non-Christian friends or any friends in need — the word is already inside us and flowing through us. God's word isn't simply a book to be studied or a moral code to live by. These are words we are meant to ingest, digest and live in the present moment.

Fittingly, Martin Luther encouraged believers to be "little Christs" to their neighbors and not "little theologians." Little Christs tell the good news by living out the gospel in their daily lives, in their words and in their deeds. Unfortunately, many of us think we're required to be the kind of theologians who debate God's existence, the mystery of the Trinity, the reality of the cross and more. No wonder many of us avoid or don't want to share our faith with other people.

Jesus didn't carry around a Hebrew scroll wherever he went. He embodied the word of God. When you and I eat the word of God, we deepen our faith and become more of a little Christ to the people around us.

Walk like a cowboy

While teaching a "walk and talk" improv class for 10-year-old boys and girls, I stumbled upon a new way of looking at the Christian life.

"Walk like a cowboy," I said. Immediately the kids began walking with knees bent as if they had just hopped off a horse. Some twirled imaginary lassos.

"Now cowboys and cowgirls," I said, "tell me about your love for rainbows." And words about rainbows tumbled spontaneously out of their mouths.

"Now walk like the king or queen of England," I said. The children transformed themselves into regal people who walked slowly and deliberately, heads held high.

When I added, "As king or queen, tell us why you love to have cookies and a cold glass of milk in the middle of the night." Again, without hesitation, the kids volunteered short monologues.

But what if I asked you, as I asked the youth, to walk like a Christian? How would being a Christian inform your face, your head, your feet, your fingers, your knees and your eyes as you walk? And if I asked you to stop and as a Christian talk about your love for God, would you have an easy or a difficult time saying something?

In most cases, I'm certain that you wouldn't have a difficult time. Why? Because when we know who we are, when we are committed to being that person and showing it to others, words flow

naturally.

There are times we must talk about our faith. The Christian life is not show-or-tell, but show and tell. Psychologists have found that one of the major factors in helping children embrace a relationship with God is parents — parents talking about prayer and why it matters to them. Words, coupled with a faith lived authentically, are powerful.

Paul wrote to the Christians in Ephesus: "Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise ..." ([Ephesians 5:15](#)). Peripateo, the original Greek word we translate as "live," can also mean "walk." Paul was encouraging Christians then, as he encourages us today, to pay attention to how we conduct our lives. When we commit to being a Christian, our walks and talks will change.

Consider the ancient words of theologian Clement of Alexandria, reflecting on Jesus' life: "By washing the feet of his disciples with his own hands as he sent them forth to noble deeds, the Savior manifested an excellent way their journeying to bestow graces upon the nations. He purified that journeying in anticipation of his own power. The perfume left its aroma after it, and suggests the sweet-smelling accomplishments that reach everyone. The suffering of the Lord, indeed, has filled us with its fragrance."

So be encouraged, rather than worried. You may be the only Bible some people ever read. You may be the only hope someone hears. And you may be the only Christ others ever smell.