



Sermon: Sunday, June 15, 2025

“5 Es”

SCRIPTURE: 2 Timothy 4:4-5 ⁴In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: ²proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching.

SERMON

Much of the discussion at any church is "How do we attract more people, younger people, people who don't represent our demographic?"

In other words, what would be effective evangelism? And the answer is usually, "Something has to change." Mainline churches are loathe to change. "It has worked for decades." or "We don't need to change."

If you want to evangelize people who have been dead for decades, you shouldn't change. But to attract the living, that doesn't work. One of our saints, who has joined that crowd, once said, "We're handing out coffee cups in a water bottle world!"

I often find inspiration for the messages I deliver in unexpected places. Today it is the book "Fans First" by Jesse Cole. If you don't know Jesse, he and his wife took over a struggling baseball team (Savannah Bananas) that didn't get more than 400 fans in a 4,000-seat stadium. At one point they didn't have enough money to meet the payroll. Emily, Mrs. Cole, said that to save the franchise, they would need to sell their house and go many thousands of dollars into debt. Do you want to talk about chasing your dream? They wound up sleeping on an air mattress in a bug-infested rental house.

Now, that team, that completely turned baseball on its head, sells out every game that they play and tickets are sold many months in advance.

So how did they do it?

They started running the business of the team with the Five Es

1-Eliminate friction

2- Entertain always

3-Experiment constantly

4-Engage deeply

5-Empower action

Would this plan work for a church?

Is it biblically based, or even “base-able” on Scripture?

I dug out my concordance to try and match up those five Es with the Word. That proved harder than expected. There were no entries for friction, eliminate, rid, or banish. Ok, the thesaurus for words that mean the same. Still no luck.



What does Jesse Cole say?

"Eliminating friction is about putting yourself in the other person's shoes and looking at every possible pain point, every possible frustration, every possible policy that slows things down, heats up tempers and punishes others."

What does that mean to Epworth? Are our signs prominent and legible?

We are probably never going to be like Lutheran Church of Hope, with one of those directional signposts that have 10 or 12 arrows pointing in all directions at the Sunday School rooms, the restrooms, the kitchen, and all of the other often-asked for stuff.

But shouldn't we try to be like that?

Not that interacting with the visitors isn't useful and fun, but if new people ask for the restrooms that are handicap accessible and we have to direct them to the elevator, then to the basement and down a hallway and around a couple of corners, they won't see themselves as being cared about and for.

Don't get me started on the stairs!

Still, we are better than many churches that have been added to over the years. Do you want to go upstairs and then more stairs up and then finally down a flight of stairs to get to the classroom? Leg workout for real. Stuff to think about as this congregation matures and expands.

The second E. Entertain always. Not necessarily a greeter in a clown outfit. Many people are freaked out by that.

Coulrophobia (the fear of clowns), is the big word for that and I probably just mispronounced it big time.

Maybe a greeter in an elf hat that wiggles and plays a silly song. I wonder if we could find a hat like that? Always a hit with the littles.

Then maybe it could be us, willing to be thought of as foolish, on purpose, and fun-loving. Or maybe church is too serious for all that.

The third E is Experiment constantly. It is a given that any new idea in a church is going to be greeted with the phrases, repeat after me "We've never done it that way" or "We tried that and it flopped."

Ok, stop repeating after me. That was 40 years ago you, Bob, are the only one who is still here from that time; all of the others are now saints. I hope that we never get bogged down by our pasts and the failures of those saints. Bless them all. After all, the community suppers and the quilting group were once new ideas and they worked out well.

Innovate or die. Ominous words, but true for all endeavors. Ford would be out of business if they still built Model Ts and nothing else. Smartly, Apple wouldn't be the giant it is if it hadn't progressed beyond the MacIntosh. How effective would this message be without the projector and screen?

At least you can read what I'm saying, even if you can't hear what I'm saying, and those that can't hear me are most likely the blessed ones.

Fern and Lloyd Micheals had a new idea for Epworth when mustered out of the service at the end of World War II: a Sunday School class for young marrieds with kids. They went sightseeing together, camped together and they became a church family. The Stephens, the Willsons, the Parrots and others that my faltering memory had lost. Church family. All from a small experiment. And that Sunday School class is still going, in the lounge, at 9:15 on Sunday mornings. Feel free to join us.



The fourth E is Engage deeply. The thing that church family does most often and best. We are concerned about each and with each other, reaching out in times of trouble or sorrow and always cheering at the blessings, praising God always.

Churches start most meetings and all worship services with joys and concerns, followed by prayers. We lift our hearts up to God, knowing that our Redeemer and Savior is always listening. Our complete trust is in God's pledge to answer our prayers. What if we engaged as deeply as God? What would it look like? How could we be that involved?

Remembering our church family members who, because of illness or maturity, cannot be among us on Sunday morning. They appreciate visits and phone calls. As do those who cannot make it for other reasons: softball games, soccer games, gymnastics, dance recitals, and dozens of other activities for our grandchildren.

Feeding the indigent, the downtrodden and marginalized. Listening to their stories of sorrow, pain and abuse. All the while, quietly, acknowledging that those prayers are heard and acted upon by God. Their stories, and ours, are truly prayers, primary prayers. This is where prayer and praise begin.

Wrapping those same people in a lovingly crafted quilt; one overflowing with prayers. Sending those prayerfully, lovingly, handmade quilts off to help people that we won't ever meet. That engages us, as a whole entity, with God's desire for all people to help one another and to love one another, enough, to help each other.

Now for the part that you think that you've been waiting for, the fifth E. But there will be a recap after this part. Empower action. When, not if, someone proposes a new outreach, please don't those two phrases from earlier. "We've never done it that way before." and "We tried that once and it flopped." These sentences are defeatist and show that the past rules over the now and the future.

I would like those phrases to be replaced by, "Let's try something new." Or "Let's try something old, but in a new way," and "Sounds interesting, do you want to run with that? No? Ok, who's willing to take on this outreach?"

I have heard way too often that the church is the slowest-changing organization ever made. We often seem to have a negative attitude for the wonderful thing that we are trying to give away: the gift of prevenient grace; the gift that you didn't know that you had, until you encounter Jesus.

It is important to see that all members of the church are included in the operation of the building and services, not just those of us with gray hair.

Ask those new faces to help serve dinners, lunches and those mostly forgotten UMW teas. Look to see who could be on committees, those whose talents are not being recognized. Baking cookies for fellowship time or Tuesday dinners.

And yes, I know that a lot our work at church happens when regular folks are off making the world function. You know, they have regular jobs and families and responsibilities. Then for you new folks, ask about serving. Do you enjoy yard work? Betcha someone needs that help to keep the creeping Charlie under control.

Gardening? You could spruce up the flower beds around some sister or brother's house or the church, just let Gary know that you're doing that here at Epworth.

What if housework is your thing? Some of us more mature folks find that difficult to do. Ask around quietly cause except for me, most of us won't admit to less than adequate housekeeping.

There are lots of opportunities to help the church and your church family. Be open to things that are not your forte.



I didn't think that I was leadership material, I still don't, but you have put up with me for over 25 years at Epworth. I've led various groups and studies, learning as I went. Now I look forward to the next project that God has ready for me.

Now keys recap today's lessons: The 5Es.

- 1- Eliminate friction: make life easy for everyone
- 2- Entertain always: be open to being a goof
- 3- Experiment constantly: look for ways to change how things are
- 4- Engage deeply: be ready and willing to go down a new path
- 5- Empower action: set people and yourself free to chase their, or your, dreams

Open up to our differences and celebrate our family, wacky and unique as each of us.

