



## Speaking Plainly September 27, 2023 Rachel Yates

Last week, I spent time on a trolley in Logan, Utah, offering support for my daughter's business. We were stationed at the Cache Valley Fairgrounds, where I found my primary source of caffeine in a vending machine near the livestock arena. There, I read with great amusement the paper sign someone had taped to the Coke machine:

For a Coke – press Fanta  
For a bottle of water – press Monster  
For a Sprite – press Fanta  
...this machine is a LIAR!



Despite all its bold, lighted product placement and professional look, the machine was not as advertised. Instead, we learned to trust the authentic, personal note to guide us. That leads me to what we learned at yesterday's Presbytery Gathering.

There, we transitioned to our seventh and last Mark of Vitality. I've been waiting for this one: Intentional, Authentic Evangelism. This will carry us up to Advent, when we recall the first modeling of sharing the Good News by the shepherds.

I suspect many of us hear the word "evangelism" and cringe. During my time in Louisville, Kentucky with the Presbyterian Mission Agency, I grew accustomed to seeing street-corner preachers, who generously offered hellfire and damnation for every passerby. I'm now living in a part of the country where door-to-door missionaries inquire whether I've been saved and leave behind a tract or a blue book. Maybe you first think of televangelists who speak to thousands of people over their televisions. None of those images capture what we mean by intentional, authentic evangelism. Our guest speaker, Rev. Dr. Ray Jones equated the gospel to a wonderful recipe. We don't read recipes because they're historically profound or poetic; we read them to live them. So, too, sharing the gospel allows it to be lived in a way that invites a radical reorientation of our lives.

I imagine a handwritten note taped to a fancy Coke machine. It cuts through the hype and outward façade to speak in a straightforward, genuine manner. It shares from the heart and doesn't require someone to come with an insider's knowledge of how things work. It might even be willing to be critical of what's inside, but it still offers the promise of a cold, refreshing drink. When you speak authentically and from the heart, people trust and listen.

Like a personal note, authentic evangelism can be a simple sharing of your experience about why you follow Christ and how the church helps you in that. You don't have to quote Scripture, unless it's been meaningful for you. You are not responsible for conversion. Speak plainly about what is important to you and leave the rest to the Holy Spirit.

What is the number one reason people visit a church? It's not the website (though it does help to include your worship service times in a prominent spot!). It's not your reader board or light-up sign, glowing like a Coke machine in morning dawn. It's not the work of the pastor. The number one reason people visit a church is because they were invited personally by someone they know. It's up to you this season to craft your message by digging deep into why you love Jesus. What wonderful homework! May you be refreshed as well in the process!