

Sunday, August 7, 2011: Romans 10:5-15

by [Shawnthea Monroe](#) in the [July 26, 2011](#) issue

The worst haircut I ever received was a \$7 special at a local salon. I was in my thirties and my hair was thick and curly, the kind of hair that could hide a multitude of styling sins—but not after the \$7 special. It was short in back and uneven in front, with tufts sticking out in random places. I looked like I had mange.

No one at church said a word until Linda, a dear woman in the choir, came up to me after worship. Lifting a misshapen curl from my face, she said kindly, "You need to see Nan." Nan was Linda's hairdresser, a magician with sheers who fixed my bad haircut and then styled my hair for the next eight years. Before I met Nan, I didn't know what a difference a good stylist could make. I became a convert, a true believer, and I recommended Nan to many other people. To this day, I'm grateful to Linda for her hairdressing evangelism.

Every church is full of evangelists, and by that I mean people who spread good news. Listen to the conversations in the fellowship hall, where we churchpeople freely share opinions about movies, restaurants, cars and resorts. We talk about diets that have transformed our bodies, books that have touched our hearts and therapists who've saved our relationships. We recommend doctors, plumbers and hair stylists. When I first moved to Cleveland, the Welcome Wagon lady, in true missionary form, came to my door and dropped off colorful tracts extolling the virtues of everything from lawn care companies to department stores.

Yet most people don't think of themselves as evangelists. For some the word conjures up negative images of tents, Bibles and revivals. Evangelists are well-meaning yet annoying people who go door-to-door distributing pamphlets about the benefits of salvation and asking about "your personal relationship with Christ." Popular culture portrays evangelists as conservative Christians with a narrow worldview imposing their beliefs on others—sometimes to comic effect, as in the Tony-winning musical *The Book of Mormon*. Given the prevailing stereotypes, who'd want to be called an evangelist?

Furthermore, most of us who inhabit the mainline church have cut our teeth on a doctrine of tolerance, that postmodern point of view that makes the value of all things relative. In a highly diverse and complex society, tolerance is an essential value. But when it comes to faith, tolerance—or the fear of appearing intolerant—can stifle the evangelistic impulse.

Christians are called to be evangelists. In fact Jesus put it at the top of our "to do" list: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations . . ." (Matt. 28:19). True, he doesn't use the word *evangelist*, but it seems clear that he expects us to do more than update our Facebook status. This is where Paul comes in.

In the tenth chapter of Romans, Paul explains the necessity of Christian evangelism. God's gift of Jesus Christ can be received only through faith, the act of taking the word of God to heart. But you cannot take the word to heart if you haven't heard it. As Paul writes, "And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'" For Christians, silence on the subject of Jesus is simply not an option. That's the bad news. The good news is that evangelism isn't as onerous a task as we make it out to be. The key is to remember two things.

First of all, the only story you're required to share is your own. In fact, that's the only story you *can* share. You don't have to evaluate or criticize other stories of faith, just tell yours with passion and integrity. It's like the church retreat where the facilitator asked us to name a favorite teacher. While everyone named a different teacher, each story was a testament to one thing: the power of excellent teaching.

The second thing to remember is that Christian evangelism is rooted in real-life experience—not sophisticated theological language or abstract theories. An evangelist is anyone who is willing to give a specific answer to the question, "How has Jesus Christ changed your life?"

When Linda saw my disastrous haircut, she didn't tell me about the benefits of finding the right stylist or hand me a leaflet featuring haircuts; she sent me to Nan. While it may be easier to spot someone who's having a bad hair day than someone whose soul is in turmoil, there are people all around us who are hungering for a word they can take to heart. We must be ready and willing to speak the word: "You need to see Jesus."