

WHO MAKES MOUTHS?

But Moses pleaded with the LORD, "O Lord, I'm just not a good speaker. I never have been, and I'm not now, even after you have spoken to me. I'm clumsy with words."

"Who makes mouths?" the LORD asked him. "Who makes people so they can speak or not speak, hear or not hear, see or not see? Is it not I, the LORD? ¹²Now go, and do as I have told you. I will help you speak well, and I will tell you what to say." Exodus 4: 10-12



It usually comes as some surprise to folks that I am not a long time Christian. Somehow we believe directors of ministries were born under a pew. The second shock is that I have never been in charge of a ministry in my life. My last job was selling toilet paper and paper towels for a local janitorial company. (A job of great prestige, wouldn't you agree?)

Since I began as director of Love INC, I have learned a couple of things about how God works. He likes to use all of our talents, in new and unexpected ways. He will reach into our hearts and use that planted passion to glorify His name. So what is my passion? Well, hang on for a little bit and I'll tell you.

One of my strengths as the director of Love INC is that I know what non-Christians say about Christians. I confess, I used to say some of it myself.

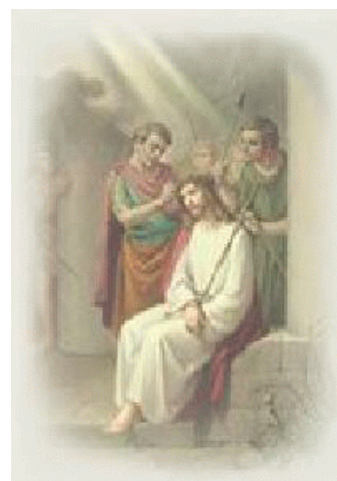
But more shocking to me is that now I also know what you folks say about yourselves. At Sunday school a little while back, an elder of the church said something that started me thinking about this.

It isn't the first time I've heard the sentiment and I have heard it from several different people. "I am getting on to the end of my life and I feel that I haven't done enough for Jesus."

There are varying refrains that go with this. Some folks feel that they should have witnessed to more people. Some feel that they haven't worked hard enough to exemplify God's word. Several don't know what they would say if someone asked them about their faith.

Every time I hear someone say this, I protest, "But you don't know what you do!" They shake their heads; it's not enough to satisfy their heartfelt desire to prove themselves to God.

So I thought I would tell you about what I saw on my road to becoming a Christian.



I went to church as a child, in fact several. Once when I was eight and wanted to stay home and play, my brother called me a heathen. I was highly insulted. To the contrary, I was far

from a heathen. Like most children I had a natural love for God and an innate trust in Jesus. My parents took us to several different churches looking for a good fit. Finally in my early teens, we settled on the local church with an active youth program. I committed to taking a two year confirmation class prior to becoming a member of the church.



Sadly, the confirmation class did not confirm my faith; it drove me away from Christianity. I asked questions and received no answers. Within that two-year span, with the impeccable logic of a teenager, I became convinced that if THAT minister couldn't answer my questions, then there probably no valid answers and that I needed to look elsewhere.

Believe me, there are a lot of places to look. I don't think I missed many. I looked in New Age, self-help. I looked in Buddhism and checked out the Unitarians. There are so many different paths, some of them half-way helpful. None of them were satisfying after a time.

As a number of events collided in my late thirties, I began to surrender my life to God's will, as I understood it. My old life crumbled, like a house constructed of sand. I began to build a new house, a new life.

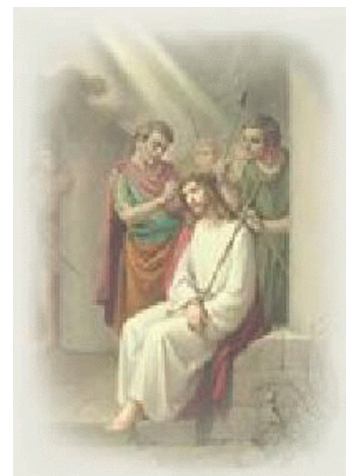
A few years ago, my husband who was a recovering alcoholic expressed a desire to go church. I politely ignored him and hoped that this desire would pass, but he insisted. If that weren't bad enough, my little boy, Lincoln, began to nag too. I had no burning need to go back to church; I like sleeping in late on Sunday morning and sincerely hoped that he would get tired of nagging me about this subject and just give up the notion altogether. I was in vague agreement with Charlie that church attendance would be good for our family and especially for our son, but I really didn't want to make the time commitment to attending a church.

One day while trying to evade another 'push' from my husband to attend church, my then eight year old son looked up at me with complete trust and a sincere interest in my answer and asked, "But mom, why don't you want to go to church? That's where God is."

Great. So reluctantly and with little grace, I joined my family on a search for a church. We would go to a church for a while, become dissatisfied with something there and quit going.

This method soon became impossible because Lincoln would get attached to every church we would go to visit. He would fall in love with the Sunday school, the bell, the parking lot; it was always something. Therefore, Charlie and I came up with a plan. I would go and spy out churches. I would go into a service just as it would start, then leave as soon as it was over. I wouldn't sign the pew pad. I wouldn't stay for coffee. I would evaluate and leave.

I had been hunting for a church on and off for about four or five months with some regularity and no success when I noticed a



church about 10 blocks from our house. My mother was raised Presbyterian and the church was close, so with these rather tenuous reasons as a catalyst, I decided this is the church we would scout out next.

One summer Sunday, I came in late and sat down about six pews from the back. I sat close to the windows and politely avoided meeting anyone's eyes. The service started and the opening hymn was being sung, when out of the corner of my eye, I saw someone moving to my left. I thought at first that someone wanted to step over me to get into the pew.

A gentleman (Bill Connor) in a brightly colored and outdated, orange choir robe was painstakingly making his way up the aisle to get to the front of the church. This slow moving gentleman was not a young man and I could tell that the trip was difficult for him. The expression on his face remained unchanged but he took each step with exquisite care. As he came finally to the steps of the choir loft, I was holding my breath. Was he going to make it? Please don't let him fall! I thought. I heaved a sigh of relief when he reached his destination.

When I got back home that morning, I made my report to Charlie. "I liked the sermon, the church seems friendly, but the pastor was away on vacation, so I'll go back again."

I came back and sat in the same place, and saw the same gentleman inching his way up the aisle. I wondered what made this man go to so much trouble to make the trip up the aisle every Sunday. I wondered why he just didn't get in a wheelchair and go to the front. I wondered what special kind of stubbornness motivated someone to go through this every Sunday.



The pastor was in that day, but I don't remember any specifics of the sermon; I only remember the patient and determined man with his goal of getting to the choir loft.

I went back home that day and said to my family, "I think I found us a church."

So now you know; I wasn't a Christian when I walked through the doors of a church. Now, I didn't have a handy sign that said "Hi, I'm a Heathen". If you had asked me, I would have told you that I was a Christian, because like a lot of people, I thought Christianity was a tradition; not a personal commitment. I wouldn't have told you that I thought the resurrection was bunk, that the Devil was a myth and that I thought sin was just an outdated notion that should be called ignorance.

No, I wasn't a Christian when I started to attend regularly. No one could see into my head, luckily for me and they didn't know, but God knew. He knew that I needed healing for wounds I didn't know I had, I needed forgiveness for mistakes I had made that I couldn't forgive myself for. Most of all he knew I needed to see what Jesus' love looked like when it was out walking around.

He began a patient parade in front of me every Sunday. Jesus started the parade with the man in the orange robe, but it wasn't a short parade and there were plenty of folks for me to

see. I listened to the humming of hymns as people left the church; I envied the peace on faces as they greeted each other in the foyer. The witness of Jesus' love came through the worn Bibles carried every Sunday. The evidence of the Christian faith appeared to me in cheerful conversations, despite obvious physical discomfort. I saw menial tasks performed with no fanfare, little thanks and great good humor. I heard calm and matter-of-fact acknowledgements of Jesus as a friend and Savior.

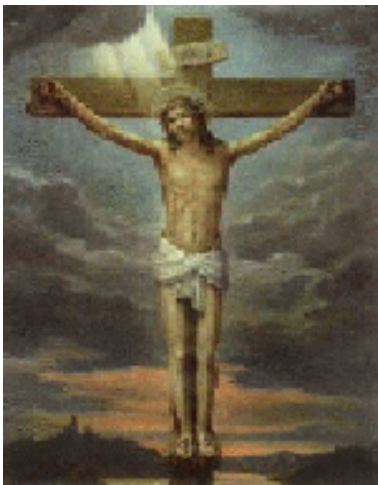
I can give names now to each person that witnessed to me and yet not one did any of the obvious things. No one asked me if I had been saved, no one pressured me or challenged me. I was simply accepted. Through the storm of my long held pride and habitual reasoning, I began to hear a voice inside me. It was not the voice of God, or Jesus. It was my voice, my true self awakened.

“I want what they have.”

“I need what they have.”

Then finally, the missing piece: “I believe I can have what they have, through Jesus.”

There is more to my personal story, but today I want Christians to hear what I am telling them.



All those folks who thought they were too old to bring me to Jesus softened up a very hard heart.

All of those folks who thought they didn't have the words, never spoke one direct word about their faith, they walked it!

I was brought into the family of faith by seeing what belonging to a family of faith did for people.

I look back now and I can see God's hand in that entire story I just told you. At the time, I had no consciousness of that.

Some souls are brought to the cross suffering severe pain and trials; some are drawn by a well-placed testimony. Some were brought as children and had the good sense never to stray very far. Then there are those like me, too sophisticated to be “sold” Christianity. Our hearts are hard and we cannot always hear. Now with the wisdom of hindsight, I believe that one of the reasons that I was saved in this manner is so that I can tell you what the walk of Christians means to those who are unsaved, unchurched and lost. The patient, cheerful walk of faithful Christians saved my eternal soul.

Here is the good news. I was blessed enough to have a husband and son more stubborn than I. They dragged my reluctant body along with my stubborn mind to a place where I could hear the Word of God and see how faith transformed people's lives.

The bad news is that if I were to have waited in the outside world for those same folks, well let's just say I would probably still be waiting.

So, no longer a lost soul, I want us all to think about some things. One of the first things that I was told as a new Christian was that within five years most Christians didn't have more than 10% non-Christians as friends. Well, I can tell you that I thought that was just plain stupid. Where were all those people in my date book going to go? I had been a heathen for over thirty years, what I was being told was simply not possible

Well, those folks WERE WRONG. It took about two years, not five. And I would say that the percentage is 95% and not 90. And I don't know exactly where everybody went, but my date book is now packed with Christian friends, activities and interests. So what am I whining about?



Well, my Lord tells me that I need to be a light to the world; He expects me to witness to the world. But my world is now populated with Christians. Who am I supposed to be witnessing to? I believe it's called preaching to the choir.

The scripture that I started this talk with sums up pretty well what most Christians say and do. "I'm clumsy with words Lord," said Moses. And I know that I have said things similar to that.

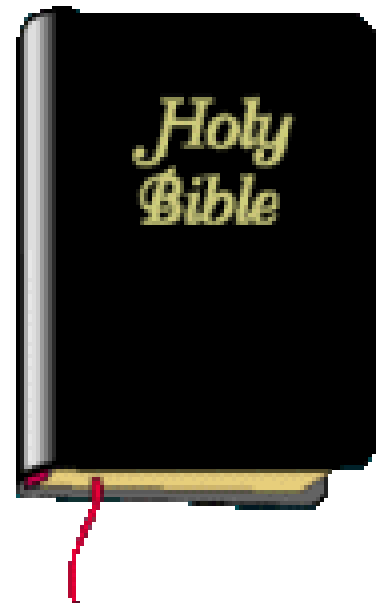
"I can't go out and help people, what if they reject me God? What if what I say is the wrong thing and I drive them away from you? What will I say? What will I do?"

Moses could have used some of the other excuses we use. He should have said "Maybe later, when I'm retired, or after the kids are out of sports or when I feel better or after this Bible study." Or how about, "Well, I've never had any problems like those folks Lord; I'll never be able to relate to them. Why don't you send a social worker, someone who has the right skill set?"

All that Moses could think about was a very small portion of the task; he was a poor speaker. The problem is that God wanted to send Moses. He wanted to send Moses, because He knew that Moses could accomplish a much greater task than public speaking. Moses was going to lead a tired and hopeless people to freedom.

We have a myriad of excuses and ideas and reasoning's on why not us, just like Moses. But God wanted to send Moses and Moses' excuses didn't work. And I would be remiss not to point out that when God wants to send us, our excuses don't work either.

Christians everywhere believe that lie I mentioned earlier, the self-conscious excuse that Moses spouted off to God. "O Lord,



I'm just not a good speaker. I never have been, and I'm not now, even after you have spoken to me. I'm clumsy with words."

There is no doubt in my mind that the world is in pretty bad shape. I hear some pretty sad stories every day at the offices of Love INC. There are folks who are truly in bad shape. They have drug problems, health problems and relationship problems. They can't find work, or they have no home, no family, and no resource. However, the biggest thing they are missing is hope.

God sent Moses to the Israelites and I believe that God sends you for your neighbors; the single mom struggling with the job of two people with a paycheck that just stretches so far. He sends you to rake the leaves, read the mail. He sends you to have a cheerful conversation over the fence. He sends you to offer to watch a school age child for 45 minutes after school so that child doesn't go home to an empty house full of temptations.



Just in case I haven't presented a convincing enough case, let me add the other side of this: what it will do for you.

Helping others makes that most essential of all bridges that we must cross in our Christian walk; it takes us from self-consciousness to God-consciousness.

When we, like Moses moan over our lack of power, our stumbling words, our inability to sing, to speak to do, we are focusing on ourselves, worshipping our own strength and our own abilities.

In a sense, we suffer from a kind of reverse pride. We hide from new experiences by saying, "I'm afraid" or "What if they reject me" and "I've never done this before." And the fact is that the Bible spends considerable time from Genesis to Revelations telling us that there is no single thing I do that I couldn't do better and more completely if I relied on God totally instead of relying on my own strength.

We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. We need to act as if that were true instead of being defeated by the neighbor next door, a sink full of dirty dishes, or a conversation that may never happen. How do we hope to sit at a table with Jesus when we won't feed his sheep?

This is not about good works but about The Good Work that salvation has done in us. We are changing from glory to glory, washed in new mercy every day and yet we won't tell anybody, share our lives with strangers. In fact, I think most of us would be more comfortable talking someone into buying a particular brand of laundry detergent than we would be sharing how Christ has changed our lives.

I really enjoy the little conversation that God has with Moses.

"Who makes mouths?" the LORD asked him. "Who makes people so they can speak or not speak, hear or not hear, see or not see? Is it not I, the LORD? ¹²Now go, and do as I have told you. I will help you speak well, and I will tell you what to say."

God will supply the antidote for my weakness; He will give me the words and the strength to go forward when I am hesitant. He will point me to the places I need to go; to the people I need to speak to, to the blessings I need to give.

We don't need to wait for the second coming for us to do what we know is the right thing. We can do it today when we buy our Sunday dinner, when we walk over the next clear day and tell our neighbor what a beautiful child they have and talk long enough to find out what's really going on with them.

That's my final point. Our God is an all-sufficient God. He has provided all the resources we need for the work He has for us to do. We serve an awesome God. He will give us the money, the time, the place and yes even the words if we ask him to supply our needs.

I urge you to be more God conscious than self-conscious. We have a job to do and He will help us do it.

Do you remember at the very beginning when I said that God uses my passion? My passion is you. Congregations that gather together on Sunday mornings are an awesome source of power and love for God's glory. I know that the love you have for Jesus in your heart is a gift that folks who were just like me desperately need.

What I am about to say is not a figure of speech for me. ...

Where would I be without folks like you, like the people in my congregation?

God's greatest resources join to worship every Sunday morning and then go home. I think that's a shame, a crying shame. Because better than most, I remember exactly what life was like before Jesus. I wasn't a horrible mess; I was an ordinary, everyday type of mess. I put one foot in front of the other, plowing past the confusing parts of my life with determination and not just a little grimness. I wasn't sure what I was doing and sure didn't know why, but I hung in there because I had no other choice.

I now enjoy a powerful life because of the witness of Christians. These last five years have been an adventure I would never have had if I hadn't been able to witness what loving Jesus does to people. Where I had no companionship, I have an abundance of friends, where I had no purpose; I now have a mission in life. Where there was vague sense of having done something wrong all the time, I now have the assurance of the forgiveness of a loving God in my life.



A trick I use to bring home the words and truth of a scripture when I study is to put my name in the verses. Therefore, with a couple of liberties, I would like to close once again with the words from the opening scripture. Open it up when you get home and see if you can hear what God is saying to you.

Mary (or Charlie, or Joan, or Andrew) *pleaded with the LORD, "O Lord, I'm just not a good speaker (or neighbor, volunteer, or teacher). I never have been, and I'm not now, even after you have spoken to me. I'm clumsy with words. (Or money or starting a conversation or witnessing for you)"*

"Who makes mouths?" the LORD has asked me. (Or Susan, or Richard or Mildred)" Who makes you so you can speak or not speak, hear or not hear, see or not see? Is it not I, the LORD? ¹²Now go, and do as I have told you. I will help you speak well, and I will tell you what to say."

Heroic deeds or powerful words deliver some people. However, my own experience has taught me, it is the simple, direct relationship based on love that has the best chance of reaching the lost.

Jesus saved me with the faithful, mute testimony of the things that the loving and loved children of God do. He opened my eyes and spoke to my heart not through grand things but the little things. He brought me home when I was lost, not through a soul-shattered testimony or a big screen presentation or with even a thunderbolt conversion.

He led me home with a gentle hand. He placed his faithful in my path and softened my hardened heart. And just to make sure that I didn't miss the route home, he had me follow the slow moving man in the ugly, orange robe.

And all of God's children say amen!

Mary

