

***Jojo Was a Who, Who Thought He Was a Loner***

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Luke 2:8-10

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What does it take to get the word out? What does it take to stave off a disaster?

Well, listen.

On the fifteenth of May, in the Jungle of Nool, in the heat of the day, in the cool of the pool, Horton the elephant heard a small noise. A tiny thing, a Who of Whoville, on a tiny speck of dust, was calling “help!” while floating gently by. This little Who, you see, didn’t want his village on its tiny speck of dust to drown in Horton’s pool in the Jungle of Nool.

Well, Horton was a good elephant, and so he saves the tiny Whos on their little piece of dust by placing them ever so gently on a bit of clover. And that might have been the end of the story, except that the rest of the animals in the jungle, who didn’t have big ears like Horton, and who couldn’t hear the Whos of Whoville—the rest of the animals in the jungle began to mock Horton for thinking a whole city of Whos, including a mayor and a City Hall, tennis courts and newspapers, schools and even tiny pools all lived on a piece of dust floating through the jungle of Nool.

It gets worse. When Horton insists on hearing Whos, the animals decide to boil that speck of dust in a hot steaming kettle of Beezle-Nut oil. So, Horton tells the mayor of Whoville, “You’ve got to prove that you really are there! So call a big meeting. Get everyone out. Make every Who holler! Make every Who shout!”

So, the Whos shout, holler, play bugles and rattle tin kettles! They beat on brass pans, on garbage pail tops and old cranberry cans! But it wasn’t enough. No jungle animal can hear the Whos, and so as the oil boils, Whoville sits at the edge of disaster. Until the mayor finds little Jo-jo, quietly bouncing a yo-yo.

The mayor grabs Jo-jo and begs him to speak, so the lad clears his throat and shouts, “Yopp!” And that single word, that last little yell was all that was needed. For now, all the jungle animals finally, even if barely, clearly hear the Whos in Whoville. And so, from that day on, from the sun in the summer and from the rain when it was fallish, all the animals of Nool protected the Whos of Whoville, no matter how smallish.

What does it take to get the word out? What does it take to stave off disaster? These are really critical questions for us too.

You see, I gave a talk last week at the Current Events Club, downtown. They asked me to speak about the current crisis in religion. And I said that, if things didn’t change at Lawrence

Park Community Church, we would probably die within twenty years or so. How's that for a disaster of Whoville proportions?

Okay, so I was being a bit melodramatic. As far as I can tell, there is no boiling pot of beezel-nut oil in our future. Still, we're facing some big, big issues at Lawrence Park Community Church.

I listed them in my talk for the Current Events Club. I said things like there is a growing distrust, in our times, for institutions like banks, government and churches; but also, distrust for authority figures like police and lawyers and ministers. I said living in a post-truth society—remember, “post-truth” is *Oxford Dictionary's* word of the year for 2016—living in a post-truth society doesn't bode well for churches dedicated to searching for truth and applying it to life together. I spoke about practical issues churches face too; about how things like traffic tie-ups and Sunday morning sports and two-career families pressed for time at home all gets in the way of making time for church, at least compared to the fifties and sixties. Mind you, I spoke about such things and more for forty minutes, compared to just for forty seconds here.

One item, however, that I only briefly mentioned in my talk, deserves a bit more attention, here, today, in church. It's this. Mainline church members don't do evangelism. That is, they rarely go out on a limb to make a bit of noise about the churches they love and go to.

Perhaps it's no wonder. There's an old saying that in polite company, it's not proper to talk about religion or politics, so it's better to stick to neutral subjects like the weather to avoid confrontation.

But religion? Please no, please keep your mouths shut. It's an attitude bred in our bones, unfortunately, for Lawrence Park Community Church's long-term health.

You see, unless we all, as members of Lawrence Park, pick up our bugles and pianos, tin kettles, brass pans, garbage pail tops and old cranberry cans in order to get the word out about what a great place this is, nobody new is going to come, even though we probably won't be boiled in bezel nut oil either.

I'm not talking about telling people that they have to come to church to get saved. We don't believe that anyway. But I am talking about doing what the shepherds did in our Bible story today, which is telling others about what you have seen and experienced. Luke says that after they saw the babe, the shepherds, “spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed.”

They spread the word about Bethlehem because it was itself a pretty amazing scene. But so is Lawrence Park. So, what if we spread the word to our friends at work, our family members, our neighbours, our store clerks, our waitresses at the club and our plumbers at home—why not spread the word about the really good things happening here? We don't have to threaten people. We don't have to badger them. We don't have to hand out literature on

street corners. But if you went to a hockey game and can share that with friends, or if you went to the cottage and your secretary heard about it, or if you chose to shop at Loblaws instead of Copas, you'd tell people about *that*, like salt out of a salt-shaker. So, add a word about church, too. Just let it drop. You tell all these people, after all, what else is going on in your lives. Why not mention church too?

Like Whoville, ours is a hopping place. We make friends. We laugh. We sing. We listen to great music. We do good things in the community and around the world. We educate each other about what really matters in life. We drink coffee, juice and wine, depending on the occasion. We have art shows. We discuss the great questions of our time. We teach children Bible stories. These are all talking points. So talk!

You may object and say, "Hey, what do I have to do that for? We have staff and ministers and web pages for that—you know, electronic bugles and pianos, brass pans and garbage pail tops and social media cans." True. Staff, social media, brochures, and webpages—it all helps, a bit. But it takes the whole village to sell a church, to point people to webpages, to share events on Facebook, and to whisper them to a ton of neighbours. In the end, as in Whoville, it takes your personal word, your voice, the esteem you have in other people's eyes to convince them to drop by. I'm not asking you to convert people, but to invite people to visit a pretty amazing community here.

Unlike the long talk I gave to the Current Events Club, what I'm telling you this morning isn't all that complicated. But it is true. Because, you see, you can have a beautiful sanctuary, and you can have a great tradition of music. You can have childcare and Sunday School and choirs and youth groups and Tai Chi and even an okay minister. You can do strategic initiatives planning that involves the whole congregation, like we're going to do on January 29, in this sanctuary. You can do everything that is supposed to be done within the four walls of a church perfectly, but if we keep it under our hats, nobody is going to know about it, nobody will ever be curious about us.

So, what's it going to be? Will we quietly bounce our yo-yo's, so nobody hears us? Or, will every Who holler and every Who shout? And will you too?

What's it going to be? The next twenty years will tell.