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[www.stjohnsbaptistchurch.org](http://www.stjohnsbaptistchurch.org)

## **The Electric Touch**

**I Corinthians 16: 10 Acts 9: 17-19**

As we begin this sermon, I want you to do something for me.

I want you to reach out to the person nearest to you, take their hand and squeeze it gently for a moment. . . . now let it go. . . .

You have just demonstrated the most effective means of Christian evangelism, one person reaching out to another person with the touch of love.

Virtually everyone in this place is here because somebody touched their life with a hand of love.

In fact, many of us were first taken to a house of faith by the physical hand of someone who cared for us, who took a personal interest in our life.

Someone's nurture and encouragement of you, planted a seed of faith that has shaped your existence.

Indeed, trace the history of any church, study the narrative of any great spiritual movement -- you will find that it boils down to a series of personal stories, where one person touched another person who touched another person who touched another person in a long continuum of faith and influence.

Saint Timothy is an interesting character, an underrated but seminal Christian leader.

He was the product of a pagan Gentile father and a Jewish mother who defied the conventions of her own religion to marry outside her faith. Then she became a Christian.

Young Timothy must have wondered about his identity: was he Gentile? Jewish? Christian?

Along came Paul, who was Jewish, Christian, and a product of Gentile culture, who proceeded to put an electric touch of faith on Timothy's life.

He encouraged him as a father would a son, helping develop Timothy's faith so intimately and effectively that the young man matured into a great Christian leader. Paul actually referred to Timothy as an apostle of Christ, a term Paul used with reference to virtually no one, (save occasionally himself).

Timothy became Paul's hands and feet. We talk about Paul sending letters. No: Timothy delivered them. When Paul wanted to know what was happening to a small church in Thessalonica, Timothy delivered Paul's letter to them so he could assess the young church's situation firsthand.

When Paul wanted to know what was going on in Corinth, he sent Timothy with a letter, though Timothy knew he was going into a situation fraught with tension.

When Paul worked in a tense atmosphere in Ephesus, Timothy was by his side.

When Paul needed a letter sent to Philippi, Timothy filled the bill.

Paul's touch electrified Timothy, and he proceeded to travel throughout the known world touching lives. And who could determine now how many lives were touched in second-hand fashion by his ministry?

Take the story back another step. Timothy couldn't have received Paul's touch unless Paul had received a touch. Even a great man like Paul didn't birth his own faith.

As confused as Timothy may have been about his future, the future was far murkier for a young man named Saul, lying in a strange room blind, contemplating life as a former persecutor of the Christian church, now feeling called by God to be Christ's champion. As Paul dithered in his darkness he had an image in his inner eye of a man named Ananias coming to lay hands upon him.

The trouble was, *Ananias* did not see himself in that role. He had doubts about whether he could serve as God's instrument of blessing, and had even more doubts about whether Saul should be blessed.

But in obedience to God, Ananias went to that blind man and said, "Brother Saul,"

touching him with an electric touch that flowed through his body so that scales dropped from his eyes, and he rose to become someone who touched Timothy's life and a thousand other lives, and began to plant seeds of faith in hearts around the world.

Think about what our Lord says to each generation of believers.

"I give you the keys to the kingdom and what you unlock on earth, I unlock in heaven, and what you leave locked on earth, I leave locked in heaven."

These are powerful, frightening, awesome words to ponder.

We have been given the power to unlock the spiritual potential of somebody else's life.

We have the power to help open their being unto God by the sharing of Good News.

That's all the Evangel is: Good news. We hear the word "evangelism," and conjure up images of a packed stadium and hundreds of people streaming down aisles toward a celebrated preacher. The Bible offers no parallel to such a scene.

Evangelism in the Scripture is intimate and personal.

Even at Pentecost, where three thousand people became Christians and began to form the church, the story began with the disciples "giving with great power their witness of the resurrection."

The Christian church began with a few simple men sharing Good News of how Christ changed their lives.

In fact, the word "evangelism," is related to and derived from our word for "angel."

The "evangelium," "the good news," was delivered by an "euangelos" – a "good messenger," a "good angel." When you deliver good news you are being a "good angel," you are being an "evangelist."

Nobody receives an engagement ring and hides it; no, that "finger" is displayed proudly.

Nobody experiences the birth of a child or grandchild and hides that information. Rather, we share it!

I know a couple of teenaged guys in the balcony who received a "new old car" for Christmas.

Within twenty minutes the rest of the youth group had received the news on their "facebook."

They were being evangelists! We are evangelists about a good Mexican restaurant or a good independent movie. Are we evangelists about that which is most precious, the Gospel and the community of faith?

Do we truly share God's Good News!

Every single one of us benefits even now from the electric touch of people of faith we never knew.

For example, this church enjoys the fact that we come from every conceivable religious denomination.

We are frank beneficiaries of what has been known as the ecumenical movement,

which encouraged cooperation across denominational lines. This ecumenical movement

can partially be credited to the encouragement of a man named John Raleigh Mott. If you have ever heard of the World Council of Churches, you have encountered the legacy of John Raleigh Mott.

If you have encountered churches banding together for the purpose of promoting world peace, you have encountered an initiative of John Raleigh Mott.

If you have ever played basketball or taken an aerobics class at the YMCA,

you have felt the electric touch of John Raleigh Mott, who helped start the YMCA,

because he wanted to create a place where people could develop physical and spiritual health.

John Raleigh Mott was one of the most influential Christians of the twentieth century.

How was his electric touch unlocked? Through a chance encounter with a visiting English cricket player whose faithful witness intersected John Raleigh Mott's life on the campus of Cornell University and gave him a key with which he could help unlock an untold number of lives even today, though John Raleigh Mott died over a half-century ago.

The older I become, the more my mind drifts to fairy tales, for at their core they speak enduring truths.

As I pondered this subject of the electric touch, I thought of the tale of the Magic Swan.

Do you remember it? The youngest of three brothers, always persecuted and pummeled by his older siblings, is befriended by an old woman who tells him that he must leave home in search of a new life. She tells the boy that under a tree he will find a beautiful swan tethered. “Go unfasten the swan and take it with you. This swan will be so beautiful that everyone will want to touch it, and when they do say, ‘Swan, hold fast!’ and the person will be stuck to the swan”. So the lad did as the woman told him, and sure enough, he hadn’t gone far before some workers saw him leading this swan and a young man came out to ask if he could pluck a feather. The boy said sure, but as soon as the worker touched the bird, the boy yelled, “Swan, hold fast!” and the worker was stuck. The worker’s cries attracted a young milkmaid who came to his aid and as soon as she touched the worker, the boy cried, “Swan, hold fast,” and she became stuck, too. Soon the boy had attracted a huge menagerie of people, a chimney sweep, a clown, a mayor and the mayor’s shrew of a wife, a great chain of diverse people fastened together in a vast chorus line. They entered the capital city and were spied by a princess who had never before smiled in her life, but she broke into a great laugh that so delighted her father the king that the boy and princess were soon married.

That’s the story of the Christian church; that’s the story of Christianity, a great comical line of diverse people held together by a series of electric touches. The Gospel of Mark was written by John Mark who became a confidante of Peter, who was a good friend of Barnabas, John Mark’s cousin. Timothy came to be touched by Paul only because his mother Eunice and grandmother Lois first became confidants of Paul and brought the two men together. Christian tradition says that the apostle John established Christianity in Ephesus, to be succeeded as bishop by none other than Timothy, whose life and faith touched John the Elder, whose life and faith touched Polycarp, whose life and faith touched Iranaeus, who became Christianity’s first great theologian, whose life and faith touched a great host throughout his career. Biblical evangelism was never primarily the evangelism of strangers. The story of the development of the Gospel reads like a Dickens’ novel or a small southern newspaper. The Christian story is a series of intimate personal touches that creates a great string of narratives of faith.

Whose life have you electrified with the touch of the Gospel?  
If the Gospel of Matthew is to be believed, the last thing our Lord said to us was, “Go make disciples.” Our Lord didn’t say to us, ‘Go build something.’ He didn’t say, ‘Go raise money.’ He didn’t say, ‘Develop some fine theology.’ He said, “Go make disciples.”  
Electrifying lives, nurturing people in faith, bringing people to the banquet table of faith, that is not ancillary to our Christianity. This is meant to be the heart of our faith!  
Concerning this most important role and vital function of our Christian testimony, how much of our witness is truly concerned with transforming lives with Christ’s electric touch?

I was in the hospital room on Friday of a woman who perhaps was facing complicated procedures, and her daughter said to her, “Don’t worry, Mom, wherever they take you, I’ll be right there.” The comfort that came across that woman’s tense face was so clear. The power of the touch was so evident in her life. That’s important to keep in mind, for many of us feel that if we try to share our faith, if we try to exercise our electric touch, we will surely fail. But our Lord reminds us, “I will be with you, even unto the end of the age.” I think that’s why our Lord first recruited fishermen as his salesmen, because fishermen knew quite well that you fail more often than you succeed in casting your nets – but you still keep fishing.

Evangelism is not usually a single touch: it may be a constellation of words, deeds, behavior, and loves that over time touches a life and causes the scales to drop from someone's eyes.

But we need not worry about our failures – for we will fail – as long as we keep in mind that our God is with us – even unto the end of the age.

In your fingertips is the power to unlock somebody's life.

Use that power for God's glory.

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