

**Green Eggs and Ham**3<sup>rd</sup> Series "The Gospel According to Dr. Seuss"

Matthew 28:16-20

05 16 2010 Sam Jones Memorial United Methodist Church

**Introduction**

*That Sam-I-am! That Sam-I-am!  
I do not like that Sam-I-am!  
Do you like green eggs and ham?  
I do not like them, Sam-I-am.  
I do not like green eggs and ham.*

In 1960, Ted Geisel published **Green Eggs and Ham** under the pseudonym of "Dr. Seuss." This year the popular beginner's book celebrates its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. After two children and countless readings, our copy is worn out. At one point, I could recite the book from memory.

The plot is simple enough. The two main characters are Sam-I-Am and his unnamed, long suffering associate. Sam really, REALLY likes a rather odd dish of green eggs and ham. And he is bound, bent, and determined to convince his friend to try it. Despite repeated offers, however, the other character continues to refuse.

**I. Sam-I-Am**

**Sam-I-Am** is an intriguing figure. First, there's his name. Dr. Seuss was known for his simple, repetitive rhymes, but "Sam-I-Am" is a bit much. I mean, I've never felt the need to introduce myself as "Bill-Be-Me!"

Sam is the main character in the book—some might even say the hero of the story—but he sure is annoying! He is a man on a single-minded mission: the promotion of the ingestion and digestion of green eggs and ham.

Sam COULD have chosen a more marketable product. Who wants to eat **GREEN** eggs and ham? Children instinctively avoid any green food except for Jell-O and popsicles! Some things you just know not to like without ever tasting them. For example, I'm proud to say that I've NEVER eaten liver, beets, possum, squirrel, or chitterlings.

Despite the unappetizing appearance of the dish, Sam-I-Am is enthusiastic, persistent, zealous, and even fanatical. He is like a hyperactive telemarketer or a caffeine-crazed timeshare salesman. He presents the plate in every conceivable way, including:

*On a boat, with a goat, in the rain, on a train,  
In a box, with a fox, in a house, with a mouse,  
Here or there or anywhere!  
You do not like them. So you say.  
Try them! Try them! And you may.  
Try them and you may, I say.*

## II. The Critter

The target of Sam's attention is a fuzzy-haired, sour-faced creature whose name we never learn. For the sake of this sermon, I have nicknamed the beleaguered character "**Critter**."

In the opening pages of the book, Critter is peacefully reading the newspaper. Suddenly, Sam-I-Am verbally assaults him with a sale's pitch. Anyone whose dinner has ever been interrupted by a phone call about siding, gutters, credit cards, or phone service understands.

From the start, Critter makes it clear that he does not like Sam-I-Am OR green eggs and ham. Like a good consumer, he loudly and repeatedly says "NO!" Yet Sam persists. They debate. Sam perseveres. Critter flees. Sam follows. And the poor creature finds that he cannot escape the unrelenting appeal to sample off-colored eggs and ham.

You can't help but feel sorry for the poor, harried Critter. There is also something quite human about the character that we understand: he doesn't want to try something new. Even a taste would be too much. He has made up his mind and will not be confused by the facts. Like a child rejecting lima beans, Critter stubbornly refuses in the face of overwhelming persuasion.

## III. Our Mission

If a reader had to choose between the two characters, then our sympathies would probably rest with the harassed Critter. Sam-I-Am is just too pushy and single-minded. Something about his fanaticism for green eggs and hams puts us off.

In the world beyond Dr. Seuss's imagination, however, **Christians** could learn a lot from Sam-I-Am's passion and zeal. Thankfully, we do not have to peddle green eggs and ham. Instead, we have been entrusted with God's most precious gift of salvation to share with others.

Our Gospel lesson today comes from Matthew 28. Jesus' final words to the disciples have come to be known as **The Great Commission**. Christ said: "*Therefore go and make disciples of all the nations . . .*"

Our Church's Mission Statement is inspired by Christ's command: "*Making disciples of Jesus Christ through Education, Fellowship, Worship, and Service.*"

We're talking about "the E word:" **Evangelism**. This literally means to share good news. We make it harder than it actually is. It is natural to want to share good news with others. We must stifle ourselves not to share good news. Examples: good test grade, tasty recipe, new restaurant, good movie, etc.

However, our faith is the one area of our lives that we hesitate to share with others. We don't want to be perceived as being pushy or fanatical. When I served as a youth minister in seminary, one of the teenagers told me that a fanatic was someone who loved Jesus more than you! It made me mad at the time, but there may be some truth to the statement!

## IV. Our Methods

New Testament: some are gifted to be evangelists but all are called to the ministry of evangelism. We each have unique mission fields to which God has sent us.

A one-size-fits-all approach does not work. Different people and circumstances call for different methods. Fishers of men use various approaches depending upon the setting.

When I was a teenager, I handed out tracts door-to-door and in the malls. In my mind, this was the only way I knew to share my faith. In the subsequent years, I have discovered that there is a rich diversity of ways to tell others about Christ.

Occasionally it may be appropriate to tell people that their lives are going to hell. More often it is more effective to tell them how to get to heaven. Oftentimes it begins with a simple invitation to church.

In his book, How To Be A Magnetic Church, Herb Miller writes, “Lutheran church historian Martin Marty says that one word defines the difference between churches that grow and those that don’t: **invite**.” (p. 31) He then goes on to say half-humorous and full serious that one study indicated the average Episcopalian invites someone to church every twenty-eight years!

We laugh but with some dis-ease. When was the last time we invited someone to church? How are we helping to introduce others to Jesus Christ?

Study after study reveals that 70 to 90 percent of people become involved in a church because of an invitation by a family member, friend, or acquaintance. One defined proclaiming the gospel as gossip evangelism.

Please notice I’ve used the word invite and not insist. In almost any conversation, it is easy and nonthreatening to say, “Are you actively involved in a local church?” Don’t ask if they’re a member--we have members on roll we haven’t seen in years! If they’re not involved, then simply say, “I’d like to invite you to visit our congregation.”

One Gallop survey indicated that 60% of Americans say that they’ve never been invited to church. And of that number, 75% stated they would go if asked!

When we moved to Summerville, Georgia, a church member named Shirley Fisher owned a convenience store. She told us about the business and then simply said: “We sure would like your business.” As a result of that simple invitation, we bought hundreds of dollars worth of gas and other purchases at the store.

Fishers of men and women, boys and girls must constantly be scouting for new places to fish. A pro bass fisherman in a church talked of how you fish in a tournament. Hit one spot and then on to the next. Fish where think fish might be! Go where the people are.

Jesus said to go and make disciples of all nations—but we can start with our family, friends, and acquaintances. Relational evangelism of the **FRAN Network**: Friends, Relatives, Acquaintances, and Neighbors.

**PUMP Sunday**: During the past year, our sixth graders have participated in a year long confirmation experience. They have explored their faith and what it means to be a Christian. This morning they have publicly professed their faith in Jesus Christ as they joined the church.

They did not arrive here on their own. It takes a village to raise a child. This morning represents the culmination of a lifetime of experience. Their families and church family have raised them in the faith. Individuals have played an important part in their spiritual journey. For

example, this is the ninth year that “Miss Rosie” has worked with the sixth grade PUMP groups. They have been nurtured within this faith community.

When you see the faces of the young people who professed their faith today, you see the fruit of evangelism. Lives that have been changed through the saving grace of Jesus Christ. And we are God’s evangelists charged with the high privilege and responsibility of sharing the faith.

## **V. Our Motivation**

Christians shy away from evangelism because they feel uneasy sharing their faith with others. Perhaps we have seen people use inappropriate methods at improper moments. We don’t want to be considered a fanatic or pushy. Sam-I-Am. So some say “No way” and others only see one way of doing evangelism.

Yet maybe we misread Sam’s intentions and motivation. His persistence is born out of a love and concern for his friend. He has experienced something so good that he wants others to try it. Evangelism is motivated out of a love and concern for others.

Christians are called to have . . . beautiful feet! *Isaiah 52: 7: “How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’”*

Evangelism is our responsibility. The **results** belong to God. The majority of evangelistic effort involves planting rather than reaping. Some plant, others water, still others harvest. No one can say whether it will take root and grow. You might not ever see the results of your efforts. Results: reject, reflect, or accept.

Sam-I-Am finally wears the Critter down. He resignedly, reluctantly takes a small taste of green eggs and ham. He says:

*Sam! If you will let me be,  
I will try them. You will see.  
Say! I LIKE green eggs and ham!  
I do! I like them Sam-I-am!  
I do so like green eggs and ham!  
Thank you! Thank you, Sam-I-am!*

## **Conclusion**

While preparing for this sermon, I came across an unusual web site that is entitled *Book-a-Minute Bedtime Stories*. It is a humorous site designed tongue-in-cheek for parents who are too busy to read their children stories at night. So the authors “ultra-condense” classic children’s tales. Here is “Green Eggs and Ham” in short version:

### **Some Creature:**

I won't eat green eggs and ham anywhere, anytime, under any circumstances.

### **Sam I Am:**

Try it.

**Some Creature:**

Yum.

**THE END**

Sam-I-Am is who we are called to be. Christ has placed the gospel into our hands to share with others. Our enthusiasm and zeal is fueled by a love for God and others. It is news so good that we can't help but tell others. Psalm 34: 8: "*Taste and see that the Lord is good.*"

Tell me: do YOU like green eggs and ham? If so, then pass the plate to others.