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I wonder who remembers Mikey from the 1972 television commercial for Life cereal. His two older brothers noticed a box of cereal on the table and began nudging each other to try it. Upon learning that the cereal's supposed to be good for them, they were reluctant to taste it. "I'm not gonna try it—you try it." They decided to ask their younger brother to sample the cereal. "Let's get Mikey. He hates everything." After a brief pause, Mikey sampled the cereal and began eating it with enthusiasm, and then his brothers exclaimed, "He likes it! Hey, Mikey!"

I wonder if this ad was so popular because we've all been reluctant to try something. Besides our hesitation of tasting a food that's supposed to be good for us, how many of us have been afraid to make a change in life, to try something new, or to use a skill God has given us? Whether talking in front of others, serving as an elder or teaching at church, or serving in some other kind of leadership role, many of us may feel reluctant, may hesitate. I imagine many of the leaders here in our own congregation may have felt hesitant to say *yes* when

invited to serve, but possibly with a bit of nudging, I'm grateful they decided to accept the invitation.

In addition to our elected leaders, Jesus has extended an invitation to each one of us to be a disciple, which includes extending the invitation to others as well. Jesus didn't invite us to join a personal club, but to bring hope to the world, as did five-year-old Lindsay when she told her friend about Jesus.

The children were sitting on the front steps of the house, and their parents tiptoed up to the window to see and hear better.

Lindsay told her friend that if she believed in Jesus and prayed, he would forgive her sins and she would go to heaven. The little girl was convinced, and she prayed.

When she was done praying, she looked up at Lyndsay and asked, "Will my mommy be in heaven too?"

Lindsay thought for a moment and replied, "Yeah, if she believes in Jesus. But if you don't want her there, don't tell her about Jesus!"¹

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When last Sunday I suggested that you invite one person to come and see what's happening here in our church, I wonder how many thought, *I could never do that. What if someone asks me a religious question? What if I don't know the answer? I avoid talking about religion. My friends might think I'm weird if I mention God. What would my neighbors think if I began inviting them to church?*

Oftentimes we have images of obnoxious or loud people telling others to repent before the end of the world, or we know people who have tried to coerce their narrow-minded views of religion on us, and so we avoid the topic altogether.

Rather than using these means of evangelism, writer Leonard Sweet suggests that the idea of “nudging” is a better model of sharing our faith. He writes,

I define evangelism as a “nudge” ... Evangelism is awakening each other to the God who is already there...God only asks that we do what we do best, which is nudge; God takes it from there. The nudging act—the human contact, the meeting of eyes, the sharing of space, the

entanglement of words, the sense of bodily interaction—is to the soul what blood is to the body.²

You see, it's not the fancy words or theological concepts, the eloquent prayers or biblical knowledge, but your human presence reflecting God's love that makes faith come alive. It's your presence with a friend in distress, a kind word to someone having a bad day, a listening ear for a troubled soul, a light of hope on a gloomy day. These acts of kindness might offer a nudge to help others see God more clearly.

Besides, that's how Jesus got started in his ministry—with a nudge from his mom. Jesus, his mother Mary, and the disciples were attending a wedding in the town of Cana, a location that remains mysterious even today.

The gospel writer John tells us that the host of the wedding party ran out of wine. Mary jumped into action when she learned of the problem—she nudged her son Jesus to do something about it. He finally agreed and asked the servants to bring the stone jars used for purification—often filled with

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water to use for washing hands. I can just imagine the conversation between the servants:

“What did Jesus ask us to do?”

“To get the purification jars and fill them with water. His mom suggested that Jesus do something since the wine ran out.”

“But his mom wanted more wine, not water for the washing of hands.”

“I know. Seems like a strange plan.”

After filling the jugs with water, the conversation may have continued as the servants nudged one another to take the jugs of water to the wine stewards:

“You do it.”

“No, you do it. Take the water to the wine steward. I’m not going to get into trouble for delivering water that this guy Jesus thinks is the solution to our wine problem.”

“Jesus seemed so insistent that I take this water to the wine steward to taste, but I’m not sure why. Ah...excuse me wine steward. Considering our wine problem, our guest Jesus suggested you taste this.”

“Where did you get this? It tastes wonderful! Usually the host serves the best wine first and brings out the poor-quality wine when the guests have become drunk, but the groom has saved the best wine for now!”

The writer John views this event as Jesus’ first miracle. You and I and the servants may wonder how such an event could occur, and it’s tempting to try and analyze and explain the dynamics of the process. I often remind myself when hearing this story that a mixture of grape vines growing in the soil transform water into juice all the time—a miracle that we often don’t often recognize as remarkable, and yet, the process is truly amazing.

In addition to the transformation of water into wine in John’s story, I find the results of the subtle nudging as part of the miracle. Mary nudged Jesus to do something since the wine had run out, and then Jesus nudged the servants to fill large jars with water, who then nudged the wine steward to taste what they thought was water. There seems to be a hint of reluctance scattered throughout the story, echoed thousands of years later in the words of the

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boys in that Life cereal commercial who were hesitant to taste a bowl of cereal that might be good for them. “You do it. No, you do it.” The story reminds me of all the times I was cautious about trying something I didn’t understand, of the times I have been afraid to take a risk of offering God’s grace to someone I didn’t know.

If we hesitate to invite others to taste the water turned into wine, we might miss the amazing presence of Jesus. If we resist the nudge of trying something new or risky, the world may be less wonderful than it could be.

Thank goodness African-American Rosa Parks sensed God’s nudge to keep her seat on a bus in Alabama in 1955. The driver ordered her to give up her seat to a white passenger, but she refused, and her action nudged others to join a bus boycott, which launched the Civil Rights movement. A new minister in town, Martin Luther King, Jr., became part of the movement to advocate for the equality

between whites and blacks. He felt nudged and inspired to dream of a time when black and white children could play together and live in the same neighborhood regardless of their skin color, of a time when people could be together and celebrate their differences rather than being pushed apart.

This week a reporter from *The Elkhart Truth* called and asked me to reflect on King’s dream, about whether I thought the dream had been fulfilled. I reflected that although we as a nation have made great strides in recognizing that all are created equal, I think we have not yet fulfilled King’s dream. We have work to be done even in our own community so that children of all colors feel safe and welcome. I hope that we will continue to nudge one another to live lives of kindness and peace, welcoming everyone to our Table where God has transformed not only wine, but also broken bread into signs of hope for the world.

¹ Hodgkin, Michael. *1001 Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking: Fresh, Timely, and Compelling Illustrations for*

Preachers, Teachers, and Speakers (Kindle Locations 2347-2353). Zondervan. Kindle Edition, #331.

² Leonard Sweet, *Nudge: Awakening Each Other to the God Who’s Already There*, p. 28-9.