

New St. James Presbyterian Church, London, Ontario
Sunday, January 19, 2020
Rev. Mark McLennan
“Who Wants to be an Evangelist?”

Who wants to be an Evangelist?

Seriously... raise your hand...if you want to be an EVANGELIST.

It seems evangelism has become a scary word for us.

In general, it is a word with which we do not want to be associated.

It is not unusual at all in congregations these days for that word not to show up anywhere in their mission statement or organizational chart of ministries or committees.

I wonder what you associate with the word.

John 3: 16 guy Street corner guys here in London

Back in the day - Billy Graham, Oral Roberts, Jim and Tammy Bakker, Jimmy Swaggart, Rev. Ike.

Today – Joel Osteen, Bishop T. D. Jakes, Creflo Dollar, John Hagee, Charles Stanley, Benny Hinn.

Personal Experience - Alberta – Terry Winter.

PCC - Evangelists - Bob Little, Max Putnam.

Evangelist. Re-arrange the Letters: **EVIL'S AGENT**

Maybe you have had an experience on an airplane, or at work, or at school

You met someone who was going to pray for you, wanted to talk to you about Jesus, and they sounded like they felt just a little superior, a little closer to Jesus than you were, that they were “**in**” and you were “**out**”.

So, if these are our images of what it means to be an evangelist, it's no wonder nobody's raising their hands when I ask who wants to be one.

But ...

- what if being an evangelist is not about being self-righteous or being pushy or being a religious know-it-all
- or standing on street corners or quoting Bible verses

- or having pat answers or being particularly articulate about Christian doctrine?

Let's consider together the scriptures for this Second Sunday after the Epiphany.

This season when we celebrate the Good News of God's love for all people, revealed, made manifest in Jesus Christ.

That's what Epiphany means, you know, a revealing, a manifestation, a showing.

These passages have a theme running through them.

- it is the sharing of those revelations, the sharing of Good News.
- Aka **Evangelism**.

Yes, that is what the word **evangelist** means literally -- **to be a bearer of Good News**.

How it got to be associated with those who are self-righteous and condemning--well, that's a topic for another day.

But what if, as these passages suggest, **evangelism** begins simply with paying attention and giving voice to manifestations of God's love in our own lives?

John the Baptist has experienced Jesus as the one who takes away sin.

Andrew says we have found the anointed one...the chosen one.

If you read on in John's gospel, Phillip says we have found the one about whom Moses and the prophets wrote.

Paying attention to the way God shows up in your life is where evangelism starts.

My guess is that at one time or another, you too have had an experience of the divine presence in your life.

An epiphany.

Because I am a minister, people share their epiphany moments with me, and I wish they shared them with others too.

- In seminary, towards the end, there was the suggestion that I might not graduate and be ordained - I experienced the love and support – from Susan, friends, and fellow students
- Bedside of a dying man – his family told me that when I read Scripture, he relaxed, his spirit was more settled.
- At the Terry Fox Monument in Thunder Bay – a spiritual place

- It has happened for me during a play, a concert, a reading, even at a social gathering, I have felt God's presence

Maybe like John the Baptist, in a moment of epiphany, you too have come to know Jesus as the one who **takes away**,

- takes away guilt or shame or burdens too heavy to carry, too deep to undo,
- takes away despair or cynicism.

Maybe like the Andrew and Phillip you have come to know Jesus through religious teachings and to know yourself to be called in Christ, as God continues to love and transform the world.

You have a sense--it has been revealed to you -- **that your life has a mission and a purpose tied up in the Good News.**

Maybe like the psalmist, you have endured unspeakable grief and times of unbelief and have felt a strength, a power beyond your own, sustain you and lift you up. The truth is there are as many variations of epiphanies as there are people.

And those moments shape us and to the extent that they have made us more loving and compassionate and accepting, our LIVES BEAR GOOD NEWS without saying a word, and we already are evangelists.

There is that wonderful proclamation of Saint Francis. Perhaps you've heard it. *Preach the Gospel. When necessary use words.*

Doesn't that ring true? When God's love claims us, our very lives preach Good News.

Sometimes it is indeed necessary to use words.

Being an **evangelist** is also about giving voice to your story in those necessary times.

Giving voice to your story.

The Rev. Pam Driesell,

Now listen!

That does not mean that you have to take a course on how to explain the Christian faith in ten minutes or reduce your story to an elevator talk.

Nor does it mean you have to memorize Bible verses.

The words to share are simply the words that tell your honest story--nothing more, nothing less

--the words of the evangelist are not threats but testimony, the telling of your encounter with God's love.

The words of the evangelist are not answers but authenticity.

The words of the evangelist are not doctrine but discipleship.

Notice how John the Baptist says, "Hey, I didn't know who Jesus was, but here's what I have learned."

That's what discipleship is all about: **learning**.

That's what the word means. To be a student.

And evangelism is sharing what we learn.

The words of the evangelists are not quotes, but questions, heart-to-heart questions.

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Which brings us to the other starting point of evangelism

- evangelism begins with a genuine attentiveness to the other.

Remember the story.

There is Jesus walking along and two people start following him.

He didn't turn around and give them a list of faith statements. He didn't give them catch phrases to use.

The passage tells us he turned around and he **beheld** them.

He **beheld** them. He pays full attention to them. He sees them. He contemplates them.

And the same thing happens later when Andrew brings Simon to Jesus.

First Jesus **BEHOLDS** him...perceives him...looks at him with his mind's eye and his heart's eye.

Evangelism begins with beholding another person.

And then after Jesus beholds the two, he asks a probing question.

What are you seeking?

What do you want?

Evangelism often begins with genuine interest in the longings and heart-felt desires of the other person.

What are you looking for?

What are you seeking?

These are questions that invite people to share their lives beyond the surface, to look deeper together at life's complexities.

They are an invitation to mutual discovery and sharing of stories.

The Good News is shared in personal encounters.

Jesus invites the two to come and see--and keep reading--later Phillip invites Nathaniel to do the same thing: **Come and See**.

Evangelism is invitation, not intimidation.

So, I wonder about your story.

How did you get here today? Why are you listening? What are you seeking?

Who in your life has paid attention to you and seen you and asked you the questions that go below the surface of our lives?

Who has taken the time in their busy life and turned around and beheld you?

Who in your life has asked the questions beyond: What do you do? Where do you live? Where did you go to school? Where did you grow up?

Who SAW YOU and asked what are you seeking? What's on your mind?

What's troubling you? What do you really want?

Who invited you to **COME and SEE**?

Who invited you into a community of faith where God is at work and people are asking and learning and serving and growing and worshipping together?

Whoever those people are--can you see their faces now in your mind's eye? --they are the **EVANGELISTS** of the world.

They are the bearers of Good News, and the world needs more of them.

Those who love because they have been loved.

Those who welcome because they have been welcomed.

Those who take the time to turn around and see another because they have been seen.

Those who invite because they have received an invitation.

If that's what it means to be an **evangelist**, I wonder how many of you already are evangelists?

If that's what it means to be an **evangelist**, let me ask you again.

Who wants to be an **evangelist**?

Raise your hand.

Raise it high!

IN THE NAME OF THE CREATOR, CHRIST OUR SAVIOUR, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT... AMEN