

John Sampson
"The 'E' Word"
Text: Luke 5:1 - 11
Preached at KVCC
February 10, 2019

Will you pray with me?

God, may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all of our hearts, be acceptable to you, our rock, and our redeemer.

Amen.

So, today I want to use the "E" word.

Evangelism.

Now don't get nervous! It's gonna be OK.

And I say that because recently I was speaking with someone and they told me how they didn't like that word.

And who can blame them?

When I say the word evangelism what's the image that pops up in your mind?

Is it of overly tanned men and women wearing wigs appearing on tv telling you that God wants you to send them a check?

Does the word evangelism make you think of a history of colonialism where the church and the military were fused in a common purpose of subjugating all kinds of people around the world?

Is it maybe that evangelism is just a stale old word that doesn't seem to have much relevance in our world today?

And, frankly, the story we just heard doesn't really seem to help make a case for evangelism, does it?

Here is Jesus telling his followers that they will be fishers of people, and that their ministry will be so effective that there will be too many fish catch, too many people who wish to follow Jesus and his disciples.

That's all fine and good, unless you're one of the fish.

For the fish I'm not sure it's such a great deal.

They'll be caught, and their heads will be chopped off, and they'll be thrown in the soup.

In this odd metaphor for evangelism the fish, the new members being invited into the community of believers, are being caught to serve the needs of the fishers, and not the needs of the fish.

No wonder the person I spoke to said he didn't like the word evangelism.

This word evangelism is weighed down with centuries worth of history, it's covered with the dust of so many traditions and so much abuse, that it is hard to see that it might have been something beautiful at one point.

But let's go there, and wipe away the patina that has discolored this word and come back to its shiny beginning, because in the beginning it did shine.

Evangelism comes from the Greek word euangelion, which means good news. This is the word that is also the basis for the old English godspell, where we get our more modern version, gospel.

Yes, at the basis of our word evangelism we have this idea that there is good news to share. That there is something about the message of Jesus, and the example of his life and death, that is good. That there is something about coming into the community of followers of the one we call the Christ that is good.

In this season of Epiphany we've been telling the story of how the magi came and worshipped Jesus because they saw in him the image of God, and that this image lives in us too. I think this is good news, especially in a time when there is so much separation and division in our nation, where some people are privileged over others.

Someone was telling me recently that they like coming to our church because it is the one time during the week they can just sit, and no one is demanding something from them. I think having a place to exhale deeply is something good.

I know many people have told me how the music of the choir has such an impact on their hearts, how the songs you share make such a difference to many in this room. I think this is something good.

Think for a minute about why you come to this church. What is the good that you find here? What is it about engaging with the stories and rituals of our tradition that that you find to be good?

Evangelism, euangelion, is simply the sharing of the good of this experience. And I believe that it asks nothing in return. The first reading we heard by Mark Galli isn't speaking exactly about evangelism, but I think it allows us to go deeper into what it's experience could be. Galli says that we shouldn't try to manipulate people into faith. Rather, we simply live into our truth and let God's spirit do it's work.

If there is something that we find good about our faith, about our seeking, about our doubts, and our questions share it, about this place we should be giving witness to it because it is part of the truth of our lives. But we can share the goodness of our truth without making others conform to our image, without forcing others to believe something, without guilting other into acting this way or that, without deadening the lives of spirit that God has given them.

I love to coming to this church to worship. I love the vitality and energy of our congregation. These are truths. And if I share them with someone else I pray that God's spirit will allow the other person to receive my words according to their need. If what I says interests them and they want to talk more, or come to this place, or join us in supporting our neighbors in need great. If they don't, and my words didn't create a spark in them, that is OK too.

“Let the Spirit do the work of transformation.”

Last Sunday we had the kick-off meeting of our Social Media Committee. There were six of us in the meeting, and I felt like I was brought to school. Some of the younger members and friends were talking about different social media platforms and we could use to get out our message to wider audiences, and audiences that may not be hearing what we have to share. Although this was a conversation about Facebook and Instagram, about Google searches and Youtube videos it was also very much a conversation about evangelism, about the ways we proclaim something good, something meaningful that we experience in our lives.

This good news is the content we're looking to create and share with our neighbors. We do it already, but we could be doing it better. And I want to share a way to do that right here and right now.

Many of us in this room are on Facebook. It has issues, as we all know, but it is still one of the most powerful and popular platforms around. I'm on it. And I use it to see what's going on with my friends, or at least my acquaintances. I get to see people's dogs doing cute tricks; I post about my cat. I see vacation pictures of my friends Mike and Dave as they are literally travelling all around the world. They make me jealous. I can see people's political ventings, and get ads about great art exhibits I'm going to want to go and see.

What I am seeing on Facebook, mostly, is the good of people's lives.

Some of it is profound, most of it is ordinary, but it is good enough that people want to share it with others, and it is good enough that I want to see it.

What our Social Media Committee is exploring is the ways we can add the good news of our spiritual lives to our already existing digital conversations.

If you are on a social media site, have you ever posted something about your spiritual life?

Have you ever shared on one of the various platforms an experience that really touched your soul?

Our story about the fishermen and the fish, even though it's problematic, I think tells us a truth, which is that there are many people who are thirsty to hear the way that your spiritual journey is alive and real for you. And where the earlier followers of Jesus might have told this story of Jesus and the fishermen to each other face-to-face, we can tell our spiritual stories virtually and digitally.

And so I'm going to do it right now. And if you feel like you'd like to join me do so.

I'm going to check in on Facebook.

[Check In]

And I'm going to share some good news: Feeling blessed to be leading worship today.

Now I will post.

[Post]

Easy. I've told a truth. I've told about the goodness of leading this community. I shared it with hundreds of people. And now I let God's spirit do what it will.

This is evangelism.

This is the "E" word.

Amen.