

The "E" Word: Evangelism
St. Stephen's Church Belvedere
The Rev. Dcn. Alberta Buller

Third Sunday after Epiphany January 22, 2017

Isaiah 9:1-4

Psalms 27:1, 4-9

1 Corinthians 1:10-18

Matthew 4:12-23

Good morning.

It's an honor for me to be back here at my home church; St. Stephen's. Thank you Fr. Ellsworth for inviting me to serve and preach today.

The first time I came to St. Stephen's was in 2006. My friend, Ruth Grant invited me to attend services here. One visit and this became my new church home.

After my ordination to the Diaconate last June, Bishop Marc assigned me to St. Francis of Assisi in Novato. I was warmly invited to serve there by the Reverend Vanessa Stickler Glass.

And speaking of invitation. It was a prominent part of our Gospel today. Jesus's invitation was, "Follow me". This Gospel begins Jesus's ministry. He knows he's going to need help getting the word out.

Jesus calls these 4 men to follow him. To be disciples or students, ready to learn. To be apostles and evangelists, ready to spread the Word. He calls them from right where they are and says, "Follow me."

You know, when you visit many Cathedrals and Churches, And you look up at the stained glass images of the Disciples, They are featured in some prominent way. Sometimes they have halos around their heads. Maybe they're just a step below God or just underneath Jesus. Looking at them in this way, makes them appear to be unearthly, even extraordinary. But they were anything but this. They were ordinary. They weren't the smartest, wealthiest and most skilled guys around. They had their flaws and made mistakes often.

At times, Jesus must wanted to bang his head against a wall. But they maintained a ministry after Jesus's ascension that changed the world and continues to change it to this day. They are the foundation for the church and are responsible for the New Testament.

Today there are more than 2.2 billion Christians in the world. We continue that legacy and those who will come after us will continue that work, and it all began with a simple invitation: **“Follow me”**.

From this humble invitation, Evangelism began. From this humble invitation **“The Jesus Movement”** began. Our Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry has asked us, ordinary people, To be Evangelists. To be a part of The Jesus Movement. Think about it. We are all here today because someone told us about Jesus. Someone told us about God.

But, Evangelism. Now **that’s** a word that can make a nearly cradle Episcopalian like me, want to run and hide. The word is soooo Jimmy Swaggert. It’s sooo Tammy Faye and Jim Bakker.

But when I served with Presiding Bishop Curry in Houston, he gave a sermon about the Jesus movement. It’s on YouTube and it’s a great one:

<https://youtu.be/xIwUv54c900>

He had us all imagine this: It’s Saturday morning. The coffee’s brewing. You’ve got breakfast cooking. Maybe the neighbor’s lawnmower is going or where I live it’s more likely a leaf blower. Anyway, you’ve got a free day. No work. Just time to relax and be with your family. And then you look out the window. There’s a group of people, nicely dressed with briefcases and pamphlets across the street. They’re ringing the neighbors’ doorbell. No one comes to the door, even though you can see there are two cars parked in their driveway.

Oh, no. They’ve turned around. They’re crossing the street. Quick. Turn off the TV Everyone stay quiet. Don’t answer the door. Don’t breathe. Don’t move.

Sometimes when we think of evangelists and telling others about Jesus, Jehovah’s Witnesses going door to door comes to mind. So how do we do this? How do we answer Presiding Bishop Curry’s call to be a part of The Jesus Movement?

Just like those first disciples, Andrew, Peter, James and John, we are asked us to take on the work of discipleship. We too are asked to be Apostles. We are called to be Christ’s eyes, his hands, his feet in the world. We have promised in our Bapismal Covenant to: Continue in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship.

We have promised to: Proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ. When you hear me say those words, are you thinking: How can I do this? How can one person make a difference in our world today? Well, Someone once said: **“Be careful how you live. You may be the only Bible some person ever reads.”**
(Pause)

I'm going to quote and paraphrase parts of a story that appeared in Time Magazine in 1992. <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,974903,00.html>
<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/05/nyregion/05rabbi.html>

It's about a Grand Dragon of the KKK and a Jewish cantor. "Back in the 1980's there was a man named Larry Trapp-T.R.A.P.P., living in Lincoln, Nebraska. His last name was doubly ironic because he was a man trapped in his own hatred and also trapped by illness in his own body.

Larry Trapp was suffering from a fatal disease. He was confined to a wheel chair, and although nearly blind, he was also the Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan in Nebraska. By threat and acts of hate, he'd forced many, Jewish people and non-whites from the area. He truly was a man trapped in darkness.

Larry Trapp became obsessed with driving Michael Weisser out of town. Weisser is Jewish; and he was then the cantor of the town's Synagogue. Trapp barraged Cantor Weisser with hate mail both at his home and at the Synagogue. He made incessant, threatening phone calls, he organized demonstrations, he did everything he could to make life a living hell for Cantor Michael Weisser and his family. And, Cantor Weisser was intimidated. He was scared.

He had a wife and children, and he didn't know if he could protect them. But Cantor Weisser was also a man who was unwilling to let another person's hate prevent him from showing love. So, he started calling Larry Trapp's home. And when the tables were turned, Mr. Trapp would never answer the phone. Cantor Weisser always got the answering machine. So, he always left a message. Each time he'd say, "This is Michael Weisser. I'd like to talk to you. I want to know why you're doing this to me."

Finally, one day, Larry Trapp had had enough and he answered the phone, screaming and cursing and threatening Cantor Weisser. He yelled: "WHAT DO YOU WANT? YOU'RE HARASSING ME!"

And the Cantor said to him, "I've heard you have a hard time getting around and can't drive, and I was wondering if you might need a ride to the grocery store or something. How can I help you?" Larry Trapp and Cantor Weisser kept talking by phone.

One day, Cantor Weisser and his wife invited Larry Trapp to their home for dinner. They became friends. When it became apparent he was not well enough to care for himself and had nowhere else to go, the Weisser family invited Larry to move in with them. Somewhere along the way Larry Trapp left the KKK. He spent his last time on earth spreading a message of love in the KKK's world of hate; Larry

Trapp became somewhat of an apostle to the Klansmen and also to other hate groups. He did his best to get them to see the great light of love and forgiveness that he had seen and experienced.

Three months before his death from kidney disease in September 1992, Larry Trapp converted to the Jewish faith under Cantor Weisser's guidance. He converted to Jew Day Ism (Pause) in the very Synagogue that he'd once plotted to blow up. He died in Michael Weisser's arms a few months later. Cantor Weisser said that Mr. Trapp died a good Jew. I think this is a story about a modern day Jewish man who became a fisher of men. The net he cast about was one that spread love and forgiveness. The net he cast gathered in a man who had been buried deep down in the mire and muck of his own hatred and bigotry.

Cantor Weisser offered an invitation: "How can I help?" and brought this man up into the light.

From our Gospel today: "The people who have walked in darkness have seen a great light.; those who lived in a land of deep darkness-on them light has shined."

We too can cast our own nets wherever we are, no matter the circumstances.

Racism and hate are bubbling up more and more to the surface. And it's happening close to home.

The Jewish Community Center in San Rafael had a bomb threat just last week.

Days after the Presidential election, a man drove around Fairfax and San Anselmo calling elementary school children of color the "N" word as they walked home from school. An ugly word I was called as a child.

It's a good time to open our prayer books and read the promises we make in our Baptismal Covenant. It's a good time to live into those promises. It's a good time to be Evangelists.

St. Francis is often quoted as saying: "Preach the Gospel at all times. Use words when necessary." But there's another quote attributed to him that I like even more: "It is no use walking anywhere to preach unless our walking is our preaching."

Now, that's what I call, evangelism. Let us all spread the light of Christ and illuminate the growing darkness in the world.

We have been called, from right where we are. Ordinary people. Just as we are. Jesus has sent the invitation to you. How will you R.S.V.P.? How many will you

be bringing with you? In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.