

*Speak, O speak, O Holy Spirit,  
and set our hearts on fire for thee.*

Good morning, Saint John's.

My name is the Rev. Marcus Halley. I have the wonderful honor of not only serving as the Rector of the Episcopal church immediately north of here - Saint Paul's - but also of serving you as your ECMN Missioner for Evangelism. Thank to your Rector for her kind invitation to share with you all this morning.

For many, Evangelism is either a new word, a scary word, or both, so let me begin by telling you what it means by first telling you what it is not. Evangelism is *not* standing on the street corner, screaming loudly through a bullhorn, at random passersby, warning them to prepare for the apocalypse. That's a caricature. It is also not forcing our beliefs on others or demeaning others who do not share our beliefs. That's colonialism.

Evangelism is living a life deeply connected to and shaped by the love of Jesus Christ. This kind of life does not happen by accident nor by happenstance. It takes discipline and intention, awareness and openness, practice and commitment. It is seeking, naming, and celebrating the loving presence of Jesus Christ in the stories of all people - *and then inviting everyone to more.*

What is this more that we are talking about? It is the abundant life promised by Jesus Christ, the life that is possible when we live "no longer for ourselves, but for him who died and rose again for us." It is what happens we turn away from our own self-interest and our own will and orient our lives toward the will of God's. It's turning from sin to redemption and it is choosing to turn over and over and over and over again.

This morning, I want to talk about how our lives are shaped by God and what difference that makes. Being formed by God into the image of Jesus Christ is literally what it means to be a Christian. Christians are not people who live static, unchanging lives.

On the contrary, to be Christian is to be changed, transformed, transfigured, reborn, and renewed. Saint Paul the Apostle writes in 1 Corinthians (3:18) that "all of us... are being transformed into the [image of Christ] from one degree of glory to another." You and I, right now, in this moment, are being changed. How?

Because we have come to prayer.

That's what this is. That's why we are *really* here. Sure, the community's great, the songs are wonderful, and the sermons are normally great (except today), but underneath all of that, the Sunday gathering of Christians is about prayer - communing with God. The relentlessness of Sunday is meant to transform us on our journey from Baptism to Eternity. Christians are changed because we are a people of prayer, a people who, in the words of Rowan Williams, "expect to hear from God."

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Admittedly, there are a lot of misconceptions about prayer out there, and frankly, in here as well. Prayer is one of those things most Christians know they ought to do, but many seldom do, and most have very little understanding of what it is in the first place. We see this expressed when people cite today's Gospel as evidence that prayer doesn't work. Jesus says, "Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you." So we ask, we search, and we knock only to receive nothing, to find nothing, and to have doors closed in our faces.

This really matters when our prayers are desperate, when we pray for a sick loved one and they still die, or we pray for a troubled relationship and it still ends. It's hard to keep praying when these are the results, when what Jesus seems to promise us in scripture seems to be a pile of nonsense.

It's also hard to keep praying when so many in our wider society use prayer so cheaply, responding to human-made tragedies with an endless appeal to "thoughts and prayers." When "thoughts and prayers" are offered over and over and the problems don't seem to change or, in fact, only get worse, the ministry of prayer is cheapened to the point of utter meaninglessness.

If this is what prayer is, it's no wonder people walk away from religion. It's no wonder so many think God is dead.

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Jesus' entire discourse on prayer teaches us something different, though. He tells us "When you pray, pray for the coming of God's kingdom, pray for sustenance and food for the world, pray for reconciliation and, oh by the way, be reconcilers yourselves." In

short, the way Jesus teaches us to pray is a participation in the *Missio Dei* - the Mission of God. For Jesus prayer is mission.

What is the Mission of God? I am so glad you asked. The Book of Common Prayer says that "the mission of the Church is restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ." Hopefully, the Mission of the Church and the Mission of the God of the Church are one-and-the-same. If so, then God's mission, God's activity in our world is this - reconciliation and restoration, to repair what sin has broken.

Prayer, at least as Jesus frames it in our Gospel, is about participating in this mission. It is asking, searching, and knocking to discover what God is up to in the world and what our role is in engaging with God's mission. When Jesus says, "everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened" he is talking about discerning the will of God, being connected with our neighbors, and understanding our collective responsibility to those around us.

In a book that has become my leadership Bible, *Lessons in Leadership*, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks suggests that "collective responsibility" is one of the themes of our Genesis reading. He suggests that Abraham's exchange with God cannot be understood apart from Noah's exchange with God a few chapters earlier. If you will recall, when God tells Noah that he is going to flood the earth, Noah says nothing. "He is a man of virtue in an age of vice," Rabbi Sacks writes, "but he makes no impact on his contemporaries. He saves his family (and the animals) but no one else (Sacks, *Lessons in Leadership*, p. 20)." At least according to Torah, your own goodness is not good enough if you have no impact on those around you.

In contrast to Noah, Abraham assumes collective responsibility. "He prays on... behalf [of the inhabitants of Sodom] because he understands the idea of human solidarity." Abraham knows, in the words of John Donne, that:

No man is an island,  
Entire of itself...  
Any man's death diminishes me,  
For I am involved in mankind.

Prayer, then is not simply about me, myself, and I. Prayer is about the collective. It expressed our concern for those around us. It is becoming aware of the pain and trauma around us, at our border, in our prisons, under our bridges, in our schools, and

in our homes. Prayer is asking, seeking, and knocking to discover and remember what the will of God is in this moment, for these people, and then, still discerning God's will, asking for strength and grace to respond faithfully.

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Let me review before I close.

1. Evangelism is simply living a life deeply connected to and shaped by the love of Christ.
2. One of the ways we are shaped by Christ's love is through an intentional engagement with prayer in Christian community - "continuing in the Apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in the prayers."
3. Prayer is not simply and solely about us and our needs. Prayer is a direct participation in God's mission of reconciliation.

If all that is true, then Evangelism is being shaped by and bearing witness to God's reconciling work in the world. It is proclaiming, by word and example, that there is yet a God who is busily destroying what sin has built in order that the reign of justice, compassion, mercy, joy, and peace might be felt by everyone.

Evangelism is living our lives in God's peace and rejecting the world's anxiety.

It is continuing to show generosity to the stranger even when the prevailing narrative is scarcity and not enough.

It is rejecting all violence, all vengeance, and all retribution because God's kingdom is one where the lion shall lie down with the lamb.

Evangelism is living in such a way that the world may "see and know that things which were cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and that all things are being brought to their perfection by him through whom all things were made."

That's it! That's all Evangelism is. It is living our lives constantly aware that God's Future is advancing upon us, right here in this moment.

So, I feed and support the poor and vulnerable because I've got one foot in God's Kingdom and in God's Kingdom there is food enough for everyone and then some.

Prayer Shaped Evangelists  
Sunday, July 28, 2019 - Proper 12, Year C  
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The Rev. Marcus Halley

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I show kindness and hospitality for the migrant and the stranger because I've got one foot in God's Kingdom and in God's Kingdom there is a place for everyone, no matter where they come from.

I intentionally build relationships with folks who look different, pray different, sound different, and vote different from me because I've got one foot in God's Kingdom and in God's Kingdom, you and I, we are all siblings, children of the same God.

I do what I do in the name of Jesus Christ because I have one foot in this world and one foot in the Kingdom of God and the dissonance is unbearable.

That's Evangelism.

That's a life deeply connected to and shaped by the love of Jesus Christ.

That's the kind of life that can turn this world upside down.

And if you have been baptized, that is the life into which you have been initiated, and for which the world is waiting with eager longing to be revealed in us.

Amen.