

Sermon for January 15, 2017
John 1:29-42

When I mention the word evangelism; what happens? Do your palms begin to sweat? Does your heart beat faster? Do you look around for a way out? It's a normal reaction to the fear we're feeling when we hear the word evangelism. For some of us it comes from being on the receiving end of someone else's evangelism. You know, the ones who keep asking you if you've accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior, or the ones who ask you if you know where you're going when you die. Too often these well-meaning people act as coercive or even threatening. And Lord knows we don't want to be known as one of "those" people.

Then for others it may be the conviction that religion isn't something polite people talk about or that our faith is private. Whatever the reason, most of us not only have little experience with evangelism, but we're downright afraid of it. It reminds me of the joke: What do you get when you combine a Lutheran with a Mormon? Someone who knocks on doors praying that no one is home! And when we're afraid, it cripples our ability to reach out with the good news. This is where John's story of Jesus' baptism is the perfect reading to invite us to not only to admit our dis-ease with evangelism, but also begin to overcome it.

John's account of Jesus' baptism is different from the accounts told in Matthew, Mark and Luke. In those accounts, as we heard last week in Matthew, Jesus comes to John the Baptist to be baptized. They record the opening of the heavens, the descent of the dove and the message of the voice from heaven. But John gives us a second-hand account from the testimony of John the Baptist. But, quite interestingly, he doesn't actually baptize Jesus in this gospel; instead he only shares what he sees.

And that may be the larger point of this story from John—that when it comes to our relationship with Jesus, our primary job is to see and share. It's not to threaten, not to coerce, not to intimidate, or to plead. It's simply to see and share. John the Baptist does this here. He sees the dove descend upon Jesus and tells others what he sees. That's it. Later in the story,

Andrew does the same. He tells his brother what he and John's other disciples saw—that the person they believe is the Messiah—and he invites Peter to come along and see for himself.

That's what this season of Epiphany is all about. This is the season when we celebrate the Good News of God's love for all people, revealed and made manifest in Jesus Christ. That's what Epiphany means—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. At its heart, evangelism is noticing what God is doing in our lives, sharing that with others, and inviting them to come and see for themselves. Could it be that simple?

I think so and here's why. Not only is it what John the Baptist does, and it's not only what Andrew does. It's also what Jesus does. When Jesus notices some of John's disciples following him, he asks them what they are looking for. They, in turn, ask where he is staying. He doesn't give an answer. He doesn't question them further. All he does in response is make them an invitation: "Come and see."

Notice, share, and invite. These are the three elements of evangelism, sharing the good news of what God has done and is still doing through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for us and all the world. The challenge comes because most of us have little experience in any of these activities. So, I would like to propose that we begin today to remedy that.

Most of us are nervous about sharing our faith, either for the reasons I've already given or simply because we've never done it. That means that practice is probably the only solution to this problem. So what I'd like you to do today is to turn to someone near you and either tell them why you like coming to this church or where you see God active in your life. Hopefully by practicing telling others about our faith in this safe place; it will make it easier to invite others to join us here. It helps to know why we'd want to invite others here.

These might be small things, but look how they play out in the Gospels and the huge results they have. They reach far beyond what those involved could ever have imagined. John the Baptist simply shares the wonder of what he saw, and Jesus gains his first disciples, people

who will carry his message to the ends of the earth. Jesus invites them to come and see, and they leave their homes and families to embark upon God's great adventure. Andrew tells his brother he really ought to meet Jesus, and the rock upon whom Jesus will build his church falls into faith.

From the beginning of creation until now, God delights in taking little things—things the world decides are nothing—and doing something wonderful through them. So also with our initial attempts to share faith, our tentative ventures into telling others what we've seen and felt. They may feel like very small efforts, yet the God who brought light from darkness and raises the dead to life wants to—and will—do marvelous things through them! Come and see!