

# Church of the Good Shepherd and St. John the Evangelist

18 Pentecost  
September 18, 2005  
Fr. Bill McGinty

## “Evanyeliiov”

There is a heartland of excitement running through the Diocese of Bethlehem these days. You can feel it at meetings, Bible studies and Clergy days. It affects electronic mail between clergy and the messages that go back and forth across the Internet carried by Ecunet. Secret meetings are taking place and plans are being made. Very soon many of you will not just know about these plans, but you will be a part of them.

Frequently, Episcopalians these days are using words such as invitation, witness, the parish community, sharing fellowship, the mission and the Emerging Church. What they are really talking about is Evangelism. Evangelism is the number one key priority in the diocese right now. Evangelism is the topic that is on everyone’s lips and in everyone’s thoughts. Ever since we all received our free copy of the book “Reclaiming the Great Commission,” Episcopalians in this diocese have been talking ‘Evangelism’.

So what is Evangelism? What does it mean and what does it call us to do? The word Evangelism comes from the Greek word ‘Evanyeliiov’ which means “to proclaim.” The four writers of the Gospels were Evangelists, precisely because they proclaimed the Gospel teachings of Jesus in and through their writing, but there is a sense in which each of us is an Evangelist through our baptism and because of the Great Commission.

The Great Commission is those lines spoken by Jesus to his Apostles in Matthew 28:18, when he is bidding farewell to them for the very last time.

“All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

For decades Anglicans and Episcopalians have steered away from Evangelism and left proclaiming the Gospel to missionaries in foreign lands. Yet, we are called as the Body of Christ and by virtue of our baptism to proclaim Christ through our worship and community of fellowship, but also we are called by our mission to bring Christ to others by the witness of our lives.

Reminding ourselves of the Great Commission re-ignites that early Christian spirit of adventure and excitement about the Gospel. We know that there is a need and a hunger among people today for something deeper. People are looking to religion, theology and even philosophy because all around them is shallowness and spin doctors who have no answers. Increasingly, families know that the values and spirituality of their grandparents was much deeper than they first realized. It lasted them a lifetime and wove a web of love that endured depression and war, unemployment and conflict, holding families together.

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and

## St. John the Evangelist

In a society littered with the train wrecks of divorces and lawsuits, teenage problems and life issues, more and more people are looking to a life of deeper meaning and purpose.

Evangelism is our response to this need and it begins with our certainty of what we are about and why we are here. We are not here because we have a beautiful church or because we wish to worship God on a Sunday morning. We are here because of the person of Jesus Christ. We are here because we believe that he is the complete Revelation of our God. We are here because we know he is Israel's Messiah and his message and teaching can and will transform our lives. Because we know him, we have the need to tell of him, that is Evangelism.

I listened to an interesting argument in the parish several weeks ago about Creationism and Evolution. It's an old argument that you can remember from Spencer Tracy and "Inherit the Wind". It made me think of Tiedhard De Cardin the great French Jesuit Theologian and Anthropologist. DeChardin believed in Christian Evolution and he believed man was evolving on several plains at the same time. He was evolving physically, technologically into greater and greater complexity, but he was also evolving spiritually in an ever ascending journey towards his final destiny-God.

This idea that man is on a journey is not new, yet it very accurately records man's questing nature, his search for answers, his need for something more and something beyond. Christians believe that that ultimate, that beyond, is God. Jesus' intervention in man's history is the bridge man needed on his journey to continue to a higher level of being, a level of the Spirit. Sometimes we get a taste of that life.

You are out together at the Christmas Midnight Service. Your favorite hymn is being sung, you look around to see your kids singing it with gusto. Things feel right. – or: At Thanksgiving all the family comes home and one of the kids prays a prayer of Thanksgiving around the table before the meal. You catch your partner's eye and you know 'this is as good as it gets'.

Evangelism takes many forms, but sometimes on our spiritual journey through life we find that we are the ones being evangelized. I cannot tell you the number of times God seemed to have placed the right person in the right place at the right time in my life and many priests will tell you the same. For some reason unknown to me, they seem to think or feel that God was telling them to give me a helping hand and move me on my journey, just a little, even though in doing so, I moved away from them and sometimes we never met again.

Can you reflect back on your life? To the elementary school teacher that helped you; the school friend who was loyal and stayed with you; the Aunt that was like a mother; the brother who looked out for you, the college tutor who guided you when you needed guidance; rediscovering your Dad at just the right time in your life; the coach who gave you good advise, the boyfriend you didn't marry, but helped you grow when you needed to grow; the nurse who prayed with you; the angel child who consoled you.

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It is not just lawyers who don't believe in coincidences. We Christians don't believe in them either.

God will speak to us and he will continue to evangelize us and he will lead us deeper and deeper into the mystery of this journey that we are on.

Each of us is also called to evangelize. It's almost like a "pass it along." We are instruments of God's grace. We receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit, but we cannot keep them to ourselves. It's a "use it or lose it situation." God calls each one of us to live the Gospel and in doing we become "living witnesses to Christ."

Let me give you an example. When we are instructing young people for matrimony these days, we tell them the churches teaching is that you, both of you, are the ministers of this sacrament. When you step out the door of this church, you are the sacrament of matrimony. Your love is a witness to all the Gospel teaches about love. Your endurance is a witness to all Jesus teaches about suffering. Living out your vows in this community makes you, not just teachers of your own children, but evangelists in the true sense, proclaimers of the Gospel.

On Thursday night last week I was at a meeting with the Bishop deep in the Pocono Mountains. It was the night of the big storm and meeting in woodlands with some ten others to talk about Evangelism was decidedly 'creepy.' But there on Thursday night we put in place a plan for Evangelism that will touch every parish in the Diocese. It will begin with the choosing of two parishioners from each parish to be trained as trainers in Lent. They in turn will give courses in every region during the five weeks of Easter, culminating in Evangelism one day convention.

As I listened to these plans and heard the details I checked in my notes all the areas where Evangelism already touches our parish here in Milford. A Greeter's ministry for every parish; reaching out to the local community; inviting others to share your worship space; bringing the Gospel to the sick or the imprisoned; having a dynamic leader of J2A or any other youth group; looking after shut-ins and reaching out to the "have nots" of society. We were way passed stage one, but I know that despite that, we have a long way to grow and develop.

A little old lady had sat down next to me. When she learned I was from Milford she said: "Oh, isn't that the place where everything is happening?" I wasn't sure how to reply or whether she meant 'good' things or 'bad' things, so I just said: "Yes, we have a lot of antique shops."

In the reading for today, Jonah has also been on a life journey. He was sent by God to convert the people of Nineveh from sin and bring them back to repentance. Jonah didn't want to go, God forced him. You remember the story of the great fish. On his journey, Jonah too learns that God is a God of mercy and love. Bringing Nineveh back to God was Jonah's job. He was bad tempered and cranky, but God used him to "put the fear of God" into the people of the city. It worked, and in that sense Jonah was an Evangelist.

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In the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading, no one could deny that Paul was the greatest Evangelists of all. At this late stage in his life, he has journeyed to many lands proclaiming the Gospel. Now he realizes that if God asks for his life, he will gladly give it up, to proclaim the truth of Jesus Christ one last time.

In the Gospel Jesus' parable of the workers in the Vineyard and the landowner tells us all a single truth. No matter how far along we are on our life's journey it is never too late to turn and invite God and his Son's teaching into your life.

Let us resolve on this 18<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Pentecost that we will be an evangelizing community of Christians. That we will proclaim the Gospel, not from soap boxes or platforms, but from the example of our lives, the love and togetherness of our families and the generosity we have for the stranger and all who enter our doors.

This we promise in Jesus' name.

Amen+

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